

Official Event Summary for a Declaration Request

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to understand the use and purpose of event summaries and their role in supporting the Presidential disaster declaration process. In addition to the federal scope, this document reviews how state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments can utilize event summaries in requests for emergency and major disaster declarations.

The Stafford Act and Declaration Decision Support

FEMA, in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), holds a critical role in the Presidential disaster declaration process, coordinating a comprehensive review and analysis to provide recommendations to the President. This assessment relies on various factors, including event summary information.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 – “Stafford Act”) describes a number of specific hazards or events that may overwhelm SLTT capabilities and lead to a request for an emergency or major disaster declaration. For each of these types of hazards or events, FEMA relies on a network of expert primary and supporting federal agencies with deep expertise in their respective areas. These agencies provide a science-based analysis, typically called an event summary or event report, that outlines the event’s evolution, including impacted areas and period of impact to or in the affected area(s), as well as its eventual progression.

Primary and Supplemental Sources of Expert Data

Depending on the type of hazard or event, FEMA and other members of the emergency management community obtain official event information from the applicable federal agencies. Table 1 displays the expert authority or authorities for the respective event type.

Table 1: Event Type and Expert Authority

Event Type	Expert Authority
General Weather, Severe Storm, Tornado, Straight-Line Winds, Flood	U.S. Department of Commerce; National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); National Weather Service (NWS); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Water Control Management



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Event Type	Expert Authority
Hurricane, Tropical Storm, Tropical Depression	NOAA/NWS; National Hurricane Center
Winter Storm, Snowstorm	Primary: NOAA/NWS Supplemental: NOAA; National Centers for Environmental Information, for snowfall records
Tidal Wave, Tsunami	NOAA/NWS; National Tsunami Warning Center and Pacific Tsunami Warning Center
Landslide, Mudslide	U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI); U.S. Geological Survey (USGS); Landslide Hazards Program; Landslide Monitoring Stations
Earthquake	DOI/USGS; Earthquake Hazards Program
Volcanic Eruption	DOI/USGS; Volcano Hazards Program, Volcano Observatories
Fire	National Interagency Fire Center (multi-agency resource); U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Explosion	U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
Drought	NOAA/NWS; Climate Prediction Center; United States Department of Agriculture
Other: Nuclear or Radiological Release	U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Other: Epidemic, Pandemic, or Public Health Threat	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Other: Terrorism and Civil Disturbance	DHS
Other: Environmental Hazards, Toxic Spills, Water Contamination, and Accidents	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Other: Space Weather, Ocean Issues	Primary: NOAA, Space Weather Prediction Center (for current conditions and forecasts) Supplemental: U.S. Department of Energy (for impacts of space weather events)

NOAA/NWS Declaration Decision Support

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Weather Service (NWS) are used as a common source of official event information for many of the event types listed in Table 1. NOAA and NWS provide support to the emergency management community at all levels of government. Collaboration is important in enhancing emergency management across

jurisdictions. NWS offers impact-based decision support services (IDSS) to core partners like FEMA through a service agreement. Table 2, below, lists partner service levels and provides examples of services each level may provide.

Table 2: Partner service levels and examples of services (Note: not a complete list)

General Partner/Public Services	Core Partner Services	Deep Relationships Core Partner Services
	General partner services and added focus on episodic impact-based decision support services (IDSS)	Core services plus added focus on recurring IDSS, deployment/embedding
Routine production (e.g. model outputs, forecasts (FCSTS), watches, warnings, advisories, streamflow FCSTS, probability FCSTS, inundation maps)	National Weather Service (NWS) initiated calls	Specialized, recurring FCSTS/briefings/graphics
Websites	Webinars, briefings, and email alerts	Multiple pre-event/scenario planning; water resources planning; yearly exercises (e.g. tabletops)
Social Media	NWSChat and iNWS	Recovery activities
NWS dissemination services	Spot FCSTS, plume modeling, specialized inflow/streamflow FCSTS, contingency FCSTS, ice analysis	After-action event reviews
Outreach, preparedness education	Annual talks/trainings/exercises	Local Emergency Planning Committee exercises/briefings
	Specialized briefings, emails, and graphics for episodic support	Collaboration on gauge/observation network placement
	Occasional on-site deployments	Access to hydrologic model results
		On-site deployments; embedding
IDSS		

EVENT SUMMARIES AND INCIDENT PERIODS

A key service that NWS provides to FEMA is developing a weather event summary. This summary provides timely, accurate, and science-based information about the origins and breadth of a weather event, which helps convey the event's duration and impact. It also is an important resource for assessing the incident period for an event.

The incident period is the time interval during which the disaster-causing event occurs. This is crucial to the timeframe for which FEMA examines the damage and provides resources to the community.

It is FEMA's responsibility to determine the incident period, and they do so using information from the event summary, ensuring a precise and well-informed approach to the declaration process. Notably, the NWS and other validating federal agencies do not specify incident periods for Presidential emergency or major disaster declarations; instead, they provide critical information about the extent of event damage, the timing of impacts, and the affected geographical areas.

Official event summaries are not required as part of an emergency or major disaster declaration request except for any enclosure requirements based on the assistance requested (ex. snow assistance), or in instances that require distinguishing between a single incident or multiple incidents. However, when submitting a request for an emergency or major disaster declaration, the request should encompass crucial elements to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the event. Although not mandatory, providing these details is advisable as they support the narrative that the SLTT authorities outline in the FEMA request form.

REQUESTING SNOW ASSISTANCE

Snow-related activities, including snow removal, de-icing, salting, snow dumping, and sanding of roads and other eligible facilities, are eligible emergency protective measures under a major disaster declaration when a winter storm results in record or near-record snowfall. Requests for snow assistance must include the following:

- Identification of core and contiguous counties for which a snowstorm declaration is requested,
- Duration of snowfall as identified or confirmed by the NWS,
- Daily snowfall total from NWS stations or NWS-verified sources for each requested county or tribal land, and
- Historical records snowfall data from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) for each requested county or tribal land. FEMA evaluates tribal lands either as part of a requested county or separately.

FEMA authorizes snow assistance by county based on a finding that the county received record or near-record snowfall or meets the contiguous county criteria using data collected by NOAA NCEI. Snow assistance is available for a limited time period as selected by the impacted state, Tribal Nation, or territory. For further details, please refer to Appendix H of the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide.

DETERMINING IF AN EVENT IS A SINGLE EVENT OR COMPRISES MULTIPLE INCIDENTS

Generally, a major disaster declaration for a storm event is limited to a single storm or a series of storms that are deemed to be part of the same storm system that impacts the same geographical areas (i.e., if the impacts from the separate storms are indistinguishable and are separated by three days or less). Successive storm systems separated by more than 72 hours are considered separate storm systems. Utilizing NWS supplied data, FEMA evaluates these systems separately to determine whether they independently meet the statutory and regulatory requirements for a disaster declaration. Furthermore, the damage and impact from each distinct and separate storm system must be of the severity and magnitude that would warrant separate disaster declarations.

CLOSING OR AMENDING AN INCIDENT PERIOD

In the event an incident period is listed as “continuing” after an emergency or major disaster declaration, FEMA has the delegated authority to close it. The Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) is responsible for monitoring and evaluating weather conditions to determine when to recommend closing the incident period. The FCO coordinates with the governor’s authorized representative (GAR) or Tribal Chief Executive’s authorized representative (TAR) to determine the most appropriate date for closure of an incident period. When closing an incident period, FEMA uses official reports from the NWS, U.S. Geological Survey, and other validating agencies to determine the date the weather-related incident that caused the declaration ended.

The governor, Tribal Chief Executive, GAR, or TAR may also request that FEMA reopen an incident period. FEMA, in consultation with the NWS (or other federal agency, as appropriate), bases the determination to reopen an incident period on whether the new incident is connected to the original declaration (i.e., one that is part of the same storm system) or if it is a standalone event.