

Fact Sheet: Declaration Process/Current FEMA Status

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- There are two primary types of major disaster declarations: Individual Assistance (IA), which provides grants and other aid to households, and Public Assistance (PA), which provides grants to state, county and municipal governments.
- The process for both is generally the same. FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the state, and the local government conduct what are called joint Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs) that collect information on the damage caused to homes, public facilities, roads, utilities, and other infrastructure.
- The information collected in the PDAs is provided to the governor's office, which uses the information to support an application for a declaration, either PA, IA, or both.
- In the case of the Kilauea eruption, FEMA waived the requirement for traditional PDAs and recommended that the president declare a PA disaster, since it appeared certain that the damage would meet the statutory threshold requirements for a PA declaration.
- The PA declaration means that FEMA will pay a minimum of 75 percent of eligible expenses incurred by state and local governments in responding to the disaster, as well as 75 percent of eligible expenses for repairing or replacing damaged or destroyed infrastructure like roads and public utilities.
- It is important to note that there is no statutory threshold for an Individual Assistance declaration. Despite what you may have heard, there is no "magic number" of homes destroyed that triggers an IA declaration.
- The biggest factor when determining the need for either Public or Individual Assistance is whether or not the state and local jurisdictions have the resources available to meet the recovery needs.
- FEMA considers numerous factors in making its recommendation to the president, who ultimately will determine whether an Individual Assistance declaration is granted.
- Other factors include:
 - Concentration of damages.



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- Trauma. FEMA considers the degree of trauma to a state and to communities. Some of the conditions that might cause trauma are:
 1. Large numbers of injuries and deaths;
 2. Large scale disruption of normal community functions and services; and
 3. Emergency needs such as extended or widespread loss of power or water.
- Special populations. FEMA considers whether special populations, such as low-income, the elderly, or the unemployed are affected, and whether they may have a greater need for assistance.
- Voluntary agency assistance. FEMA considers the extent to which voluntary agencies and state or local programs can meet the needs of the disaster survivors.
- Insurance. FEMA considers the amount of insurance coverage because, by law, federal disaster assistance cannot duplicate insurance coverage.
- State and local resource commitments from previous, undeclared events.
- Frequency of disaster events over recent time period.
- When a state requests an IA or PA declaration, the request goes first to the Regional Administrator with responsibility for the state, in this case at the Region IX office in Oakland, California.
- The Regional Administrator then makes a recommendation to FEMA Headquarters in Washington DC, which makes its recommendation to the president. Only the president has the authority to make a major disaster declaration.
- The president declared a Public Assistance major disaster on May 11, but FEMA already had personnel in Hawaii since May 8.
- After the state requested assistance, FEMA dispatched a team of incident management specialists with expertise in planning, logistics, communications, and response.
- FEMA has also been supporting the county's efforts in communications and has coordinated assistance from other federal agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Health and Department of Agriculture.
- FEMA, the State of Hawaii and Hawaii County have completed Preliminary Damage Assessments for a state request for an Individual Assistance declaration.



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