

# ICYMI -- FEMA Hosts Fourth Annual Civil Rights Summit, Focuses on Advancing Environmental Justice

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**Release Date: novembre 14, 2023**

WASHINGTON -- On Nov. 1-2, 2023, FEMA hosted its fourth annual civil rights summit. The agency assembled a diverse and experienced lineup of speakers from both the federal family and community organizations to discuss advancing environmental justice and civil rights in our work.

“We’re at a turning point in the way we look at and assess natural hazards,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. “We need to end the cycle of response and recovery and start building the resilience our communities need from the jump. And we need to do it equitably and with the different needs of communities across the nation in mind. This is the reason why instilling equity as the foundation of emergency management is the no. 1 goal of our FEMA Strategic Plan.”

In addition to speakers from FEMA, presenters represented nonprofit, federal and academic organizations, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fire Administration, Elizabeth City State, Stanford University, Yale and Rice Universities, Thriving Earth Exchange, Little Growers Inc., OUT for Sustainability, among others. A full list of speakers is available [here](#).

During the summit, presenters shared their wealth of knowledge and information gleaned from their areas of expertise and personal experiences. Speakers from FEMA focused specifically on how the agency is working to make advancing environmental justice and civil rights a priority in the work it does now and into the future.

“Whether it’s through the Justice40 Initiative, the creation of Community Disaster Resilience Zones, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant program or many of our other initiatives, FEMA has been working nonstop to find and help underserved communities at risk of being left behind following a disaster,” said FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik A. Hooks.



Topics of discussion at the summit included environmental justice and housing, as well as the future outlook for environmental justice in emergency management, climate change and health.

“FEMA greatly appreciates the willingness of the presenters, panelists and participants to engage and share their experiences as we continue to strive towards ensuring equity for all communities before, during and after disasters,” said Leslie Saucedo, FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights Director.

According to one of the presenters, Holmes Hummel, PhD, Stanford University, “With more than a thousand attendees, the Office of Equal Rights demonstrated powerful convening capacity and highlighted ways that strategies to advance environmental justice can accelerate investments in preparedness where they are needed most.”

During the summit, non-profit organizations shared information about their work in communities. They also discussed the positive impact federal funding can have in supporting grassroots organizations. Presenter Christina Cummings, Partnership for Southern Equity, VP Operations said, “Federal funds can give non-profit organizations the opportunity to posture themselves for long term sustainability.”

The summit further emphasizes FEMA’s commitment to prioritize environmental justice, advancing President Biden’s top priority of ensuring that at least [40% of grants](#) and assistance reach historically underserved communities. To achieve this goal, FEMA has worked hard to successfully deliver programs to send historic funding to communities large and small who desperately need help building resilience by:

- [Announcing \\$3 billion](#) in climate mitigation grant selections to help communities enhance their own resilience efforts.
- Increasing the number of communities participating in the [direct technical assistance program within Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\)](#) to support to communities and tribal nations that may not have the resources to begin climate resilience planning and project solution design.
- Announcing the [first round of community disaster resilience zones](#) across all 50 states and territories, including the District of Columbia.

For more information about FEMA’s External Civil Rights Division, visit [External Civil Rights Division | FEMA.gov](#). Contact the Office of Equal Rights at 833-285-



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