



FEMA

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Questions & Answers

The Disaster Reserve Workforce Division (DRWD) and Program

1. There is talk in and around the field offices about the new office for Disaster Assistance Employees. Could you give me specifics?

Yes. On March 31, 2008, FEMA established the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division within the Office of Management to make sure that Reservists in all regions are equitably trained, appropriately credentialed, and consistently well-supported to serve our ultimate customers - the American public.

Under the leadership of Senior Executive Donna M. Dannels, DRWD Director, the new program is moving forward with

- a. Three branches of support: Readiness, Deployment and Program Management;
- b. A DRWD dedicated e-mail inbox so that Reservists can “talk” with the new office;
- c. A DRWD Web portal that is accessible from a personal computer so that Reservists can receive regularly updated information;
- d. A bi-monthly DRWD newsletter accessible via the Web portal;
- e. the pursuit of policies to allow sick leave, administrative leave and holiday pay during deployments
- f. A legislative proposal that includes a benefit package (note: the access to the employee health system proposal is part of a bill that received verbal approval by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on July 31. This bill still has to go through for full House of Representatives consideration, and then must be passed by the Senate and signed by the President if it is to become law.)

2. With the new workforce program in place, will Disaster Assistance Employees still be called Disaster Assistance Employees?

The term Disaster Assistance Employee is so commonly used that we will continue to refer to someone as a Disaster Assistance Employee equally with the term Disaster Reservist. We do prefer Disaster Reservist since a reserve is a resource that is held aside for a particular purpose, use, or reason for future need.

3. There is a rumor that access to health care benefits will essentially mean that Disaster Assistance Employees must give up the ability to say no when called to deploy. Is this true?

While that is a rumor, there is a mutual commitment between the Agency and the Disaster Reserve Workforce. FEMA is committed to investing in the policies, the systems, the training and the benefits that will better prepare the Disaster Reserve to be ready before a disaster is declared. Just as you will ask more

from us in providing training and benefits that you, as disaster professionals, expect from us, the Agency will ask more from Reservists in committing themselves to the conditions of employment and to be ready for the call when the disaster happens. Should a health care proposal ultimately be enacted, access to the Federal Health Care system will depend upon a DAE meeting basic conditions of employment.

Know that Congress, the Administration and the public need an all-hazard Disaster Reserve Workforce (DRW) and the Agency is pressing forward with not only ways to do a better job of training reservists before a disaster strikes, but equally pressing forward on improved benefits for DAEs.

4. Will the new program advocate for Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs), or will it serve just to dispense information that Headquarters wants the workforce to know?

The new program is already doing both. It has been said many times that “DAEs are the backbone of the agency’s field operations.” It is also known that their status as intermittent employees has made it more challenging to put in place the resources to support, train, maintain and recruit. The new program is not only a reflection of the sitting administration’s desire to invest in the workforce, but it is the first program that provides a single point of accountability to ensure success.

A major contributor for strengthening the workforce will be a DRWD stakeholders’ advisory group. This group will have representation from cadre management, program management, program support elements, regions and the disaster workforce itself. The advisory group will represent the needs of management and the workforce alike. It will function as an advocacy unit proactively identifying both problems and opportunities in recruiting, developing and maintaining the Disaster Reserve. The advisory group will be in place long term, and with its varied representation and collective experience will be able to make recommendations to DRWD leadership on a wide-range of issues and concerns. We are in the early stages of developing the advisory group charter and are looking at effectiveness relative to the size of the group.

5. What is the status of DAE benefits being pursued through the Disaster Reserve Workforce office?

With senior leadership’s early support, a legislative package that includes a number of proposals is being advanced. Do know that these proposals are subject to revisions and restrictions within that process. This is a long-term process.*

Recently the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee reported out a bill which would, among other things, provide a health benefit for DAEs. Plans for further consideration by the House are unclear at this time.

Policy changes that would permit sick leave and administrative leave do not require legislation, but are, again, part of a process. These changes involve the Human Capital Division, the National Finance Center and the Office of Policy and Management.

Updates on any and all benefits will be relayed through all communication channels, including the DRWD web portal which is accessible from a home computer: <https://portal.fema.gov>.

*To learn more about the steps involved in the legislative process, go to <http://online.fema.net/announcements> Executive Brown Bag slide presentation, "How an Idea in FEMA becomes a Law." This information is also available via the Reservists’ web portal at <https://portal.fema.gov>

6. What is the status of the 2-year CORE position per region to support the Regional Cadre Managers?

The announcements for the 2-year CORE positions, which will be key to the reserve program transformation, are posted. The positions were announced on USA Jobs as “Program Specialist, full time – temporary. Each region will make the selection for this position.

7. Does the new Reserve Workforce office have a recruitment strategy to secure new Disaster Assistance Employees? I’ve been asked by friends how to apply and I don’t know what to tell them?

No – there is no active national recruitment for Disaster Assistance Employee/Reservist positions at this time. However, the new office fully intends to develop a national recruitment strategy. In the interim, we recommend to an individual that he/she:

Send a resume with a cover letter noting your interest in applying for an intermittent Disaster Assistant Employee/Reservist position to the Regional office in which you live. Please realize you may not receive a response if a region is not hiring. Regional contact information is posted at: <http://www.fema.gov/about/contact/regions.shtm>.

When a national recruitment strategy is in place, individuals may also look for job postings at www.fema.gov by clicking “jobs,” (left side of the page under Quick Links). Scroll down to “Type of Employment.” Select “Intermittent Regional Cadre.” Click “search.”

8. I arrived on a deployment after six months being off and found we have a new payroll system (WebTA), and a new policy regarding airline specific receipts in effect! Is there a way to get important information before we deploy?

Yes. A DRWD web portal is in place, accessible from a home computer, to relay vital information to deployed and non-deployed DAEs alike. Information about the site, and how to access it, was included in a letter, sent June 17, to each Reservist from DRWD Director Donna Dannels. The DRWD web site is <https://portal.fema.gov>. This site is ever evolving as additional links are added that will best communicate vital Deployment, Readiness and Program information.

If you have not received your personal web portal access information, let the new workforce office know through the email inbox that was established so that Reservists could “talk” to DRWD. This box is monitored daily, and every effort is made to ensure responses are timely. That mailbox address is FEMA-DRWD-Program@dhs.gov.

The new workforce office also is producing a bi-monthly newsletter - “DRWD On Call” – to help keep Reservists informed. The newsletter is posted on the DRWD web portal site.

How to keep DAEs who are not deployed informed of the “latest and greatest” information is a major concern - and the DRWD communication element is in place and continues to work on the challenge. Another obvious communication channel under consideration is an email distribution list. At this time the new office does not have sufficient staff to initiate and maintain this list.

9. I keep hearing that Tasks Books will be mandatory in Joint Field Offices – and I have seen some in use already. Is the new office involved in this program?

Yes. DRWD has ultimate accountability for the consistent implementation of both the Task Books and a partner Credentialing Plan. The Task Books will be part of the Credentialing Plans and will be implemented together as an objective tool of training, performance review and advancement for all disaster workforce employees – be they DAE, CORE, or PFT employees.

The formal implementation will be communicated first through DRWD following Beta testing within External Affairs, Security and Disaster Field Training Cadres.

10. When can I expect to contact the new office and obtain information that applies to all DAEs nationwide, regardless of respective region?

Consistent national workforce policy is a top priority within the new office, and achieving this standard is a work in progress that will unfold over time. DRWD is working with the Human Capital Division to establish policies that will put all agency stakeholders on the same page when it comes to recruiting, compensating, deploying and terminating DAEs. While requirements are driven by the cadres, programs and the regional offices, DRWD's goal is to be a one-stop shop for guidance across the board.

11. Will the new office conduct an employee satisfaction survey of the Disaster Reserve Workforce to help identify where we, as an Agency, need to make improvements in and for the field workforce?

Surveys are a valuable source of information and are being incorporated into future DRWD budget and implementation planning. There are no specific plans for reserve-only surveys at this time.

The Agency, however, is conducting two surveys that include DAEs:

1. A Gallup survey polling employees for actionable items that can be used to improve Agency mission and to develop the workforce. You will be able to access this survey on the DRWD web portal at <https://portal.fema.gov>. Watch for details on this site.
2. A survey to find out what employees will most want to know during the 2009 administration transition. Access to this survey will be posted on the DRWD web portal until August 22, 2008.

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