

Helping People and Keeping them Safe

Release Date: September 5, 2020

WASHINGTON – Disasters don't wait for a convenient time to strike a community. 2020 has brought us floods, tornadoes, earthquakes and hurricanes, all while the world deals with the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), pandemic. COVID-19 changed the landscape of disaster response, and FEMA has focused on finding ways to meet unique challenges in this new environment. The [Individual Assistance](#) program is one example of how FEMA leveraged virtual delivery to provide help to survivors.

“Our goal is to safely and successfully help disaster survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor. “Through our partnerships with state, local, tribal and territorial governments, we have been able to deliver FEMA assistance remotely, protecting the health of survivors and FEMA staff.”

FEMA typically conducts onsite or geospatial housing inspections to verify losses to determine an applicant's eligibility for assistance. Since onsite inspections might not be safe in a COVID-19 environment, FEMA began conducting remote inspections.

For remote inspections, FEMA inspectors contact applicants by phone to answer questions about the type and extent of damage sustained. Remote inspections provide a new way to evaluate damage; and the remote process actually expedites the delivery of recovery assistance to survivors.

20,919 homes have been successfully remotely inspected since the policy began in March. But realizing a virtual system alone may not meet the needs of survivors, FEMA also set up Documentation Drop-off Centers where survivors can apply for assistance, ask questions, have their documents scanned into their case file and returned to them on-site. The centers operate under strict COVID-19 protocols. Masks or face coverings are required for service and survivors remain in their cars while a FEMA specialist answers questions and handles paperwork.

In some cases, FEMA has used stadiums or park venues as Document Drop-off Centers which allow large numbers of applicants to receive assistance, safely.



FEMA pioneered the Document Drop-off Centers in Puerto Rico and Michigan. Since June, over 3,500 people have visited the centers. Document Drop-off Centers were also used in Michigan and are opening up in Louisiana for Hurricane Laura survivors.

The first Louisiana location opened in Lake Charles on Sept. 4. No appointments are necessary. The hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week.

“While we still have a long way to go in helping those impacted by Hurricane Laura, we’ve seen tremendous coordination and response from our local, state and federal partners,” said Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards. “We encourage everyone to stay informed about resources and support being offered and utilize those services. We appreciate FEMA’s partnership in providing a wide range of assistance to our citizens.”

So far, FEMA has registered 104,390 Louisiana residents and put more than \$29 million in the hands of hurricane survivors. FEMA has 676 team members on the ground helping Louisiana residents as they begin their recovery.

In Michigan, FEMA teams are conducting call-outs directly to survivors to help them one-on-one through the application process, with more than 2,400 completed to-date.

Additionally, rather than usual door-to-door field operations, Disaster Survivor Assistance teams contacted hundreds of community leaders and stakeholders—including faith-based organizations.

“We appreciate FEMA’s partnership in making sure Michiganders impacted by the dam breaks and flooding are able to get needed assistance in a manner that protects personal health and safety,” said Capt. Kevin Sweeney, deputy state director of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and commander of the Michigan State Police, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division. “FEMA is leading the way with this new virtual format, providing easy access to our residents who are seeking help.”

In addition to housing assistance, FEMA also offers eligible survivors assistance with other needs, like childcare, transportation, medical and dental, funeral expenses, moving and storage, and Group Flood Insurance Policy Assistance.



Disaster survivors can apply for assistance from FEMA online at disasterassistance.gov. [Disasterassistance.gov](https://disasterassistance.gov) is the fastest way to apply to FEMA. Survivors can also call 800-621-3362 (TTY 800-462-7585) or apply via the FEMA app.



FEMA