Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Actions to Help Communities Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Build Back Stronger, Cleaner and More Resilient Post-Disaster

Release Date: January 30, 2024

FEMA Unlocks New Provisions for Public Assistance Projects, Advances Administration's Goals to Reach Net-Zero by 2050 while Furthering President Biden's Investing in America Agenda

WASHINGTON -- Expanding on the Biden-Harris Administration's historic investments in the nation's climate resilience, today Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell announced that the agency will expand funding to tackle the climate crisis, improve resilience and cut energy costs through net-zero projects.

For the first time, FEMA will fund net-zero energy projects, including solar, heat pumps and efficient appliances, through its largest grant program -- Public Assistance, which covers the rebuilding of schools, hospitals, fire stations and other community infrastructure investments post-disasters. FEMA is also funding net-zero energy projects for its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and now offers incentives through its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) annual grant program to encourage more communities to use net-zero projects that increase community resilience.

Today's announcement aligns with FEMA's Year of Resilience commitment to building local capacity to withstand tomorrow's hazards and furthers the Administration's goal of reaching net-zero emissions economy-wide by 2050 and ensures that rebuilt community infrastructure projects are built with the future in mind. These activities are enabled by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, the largest investment in clean energy and climate action in the history of the

nation.

“Whenever and wherever a community is impacted by a natural disaster, the Department of Homeland Security is there to help recover and build back stronger,” said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “Now, that work will include incorporating smart, net-zero energy techniques and technology -- like solar panels and heat pumps -- into the rebuilding of critical infrastructure like hospitals and fire stations. The Biden-Harris Investing in America agenda is proof that we can both meet the safety, security and stability needs of local communities, and do so in a responsible, climate-conscious way that increases their resilience.”

“As the increase of extreme weather hazards become more severe due to climate change, we need to adapt the way we are helping communities rebuild post-disaster,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. “Thanks to President Biden’s Investing in America agenda and the Inflation Reduction Act, FEMA will now cover the costs of net-zero energy projects since they are the single most effective measure FEMA can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the climate crisis.”

“After a disaster, communities don’t just want to build back. They want infrastructure that will last and will serve them better in a future that promises more extreme weather events fueled by the climate crisis,” said John Podesta, Senior Advisor to the President for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation. “FEMA is doing just that thanks to President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act.”

This follows the March 2023 announcement that FEMA will fund low-carbon construction materials for the three programs, as part of its work through the Federal Buy Clean Initiative.

Public Assistance, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

FEMA’s Public Assistance program provides supplemental grants to state, tribal, territorial and local governments and certain types of private nonprofits so communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies. HMGP provides funding to state, local, tribal and territorial governments so they can develop hazard mitigation plans and rebuild in a way that reduces or mitigates future disaster losses in their communities. This grant

funding is available after a presidentially declared disaster.

FEMA funding net-zero projects will cut utility costs, increase energy reliability and reduce disaster-related costs for communities. Net-zero infrastructure and buildings are more resilient and can maintain comfort and safety in emergencies such as brown-outs, black-outs and extreme temperatures. Examples of eligible net-zero projects are solar microgrids, heat pumps, certified high-performance appliances and passive heating or cooling. States, tribes and territories can now submit expenses for these activities for FEMA reimbursement.

For any federal disaster declared after Aug. 16, 2022, applicants may now use FEMA financial assistance for unobligated projects under these programs to take advantage of this opportunity through Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding. As of Jan. 30, more than 80 disasters have been declared across all 10 FEMA regions during this time.

Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities

Additionally, the BRIC program that funds climate resilience annually may also take advantage of this opportunity. In the BRIC 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity applicants receive additional points towards their overall score when taking advantage of these climate friendly materials and cleaner energy opportunities. Additionally, states, territories and Tribes can leverage the significant resources in the Building Code Plus-Up in the 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity to increase resilience, reduce the burden of high energy costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through adoption of latest consensus building and energy codes.

Disasters are becoming more frequent and severe. Since 2019, the United States has experienced an average of 20.4 weather and climate disasters per year costing more than $1 billion each. This is an increase from an annual average of 3.3 such disasters in the 1980s. In 2023 alone, there were a record 28 confirmed weather and climate disaster events costing over $1 billion each in the United States.

The built environment contributes to nearly 40% of greenhouse gas emissions. In 2023 alone, FEMA spent over $10 billion on rebuilding and hazard mitigation construction. The federal government is the single largest purchaser of

construction materials in the United States.

Acknowledging this, FEMA has joined together with 12 other federal agencies, making up 90% of federal procurement, in a Federal Buy Clean Initiative to tackle the climate crisis. In addition to reducing activities that fuel climate-induced hazards, FEMA funding net-zero projects creates the opportunity to cut utility costs, increase energy reliability and reduce disaster-related costs for communities.

The BRIC program is a part of the Biden-Harris Administration's unprecedented investments in communities to support an equitable transition to a sustainable economy and healthier environment for all. The program also advances the President's Justice40 Initiative that set a goal to deliver 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

Any community interested in introducing low-carbon materials or implementing net-zero energy projects can work directly with their point of contact at their FEMA region or reach out at FEMA-IRA-Implementation@fema.dhs.gov or fema-climate@fema.dhs.gov.

For more information on the Inflation Reduction Act and the agency's efforts to make a more resilient, cleaner nation, visit FEMA.gov.