Title: Agency Update – Hurricane Laura

Host: Mark Peterson; Guest: David Bibo

Mark Peterson ([00:04](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4.83)):

[Inaudible] Peterson. And this is the FEMA podcast. [inaudible] Hurricane Laura made landfall last week in Louisiana and areas of Eastern Texas as a powerful category, four storm causing widespread damage and destruction throughout the area. FEMA officials has been on the ground coordinating with state local and federal partners throughout the preparation. And now the response to the storm and president Trump approved a major disaster declaration for effected areas of Louisiana, which will speed assistance to disaster survivors. This declaration was in addition to the emergency declaration. President Trump already provided to Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas for emergency protective actions on this agency update. We want to take a quick moment and meet up with David vivo, the associate administrator for response and recovery, and talk about what disaster survivors can expect from FEMA as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the agency has been planning for storms. Just like hurricane Laura since Martin. All right, David. So as we are in the midst of the response to hurricane Laura and we think specifically about the way that we're delivering assistance to disaster survivors and those that are affected by this storm, how are we seeing the changes you've made as a result of the COVID pandemic play out I'm on the ground today?

David Bibo ([01:31](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=91.46)):

Okay. Let's talk about what normally happens in a disaster operation after the very initial response usually a governor will request from the president a major disaster declaration that authorizes individual assistance. That's FEMA is authority and program to support families and individuals who've been affected by disaster. Their home has been damaged for instance. And so normally the governor requests that assistance, and if there are certain indicators met, the president authorizes it and FEMA goes to work to deliver the program. We start to spread the word about calling the FEMA one 800 number or visiting disaster assistance.gov or downloading the FEMA app to register for assistance and pre COVID times. We would take that registration, do some validation checks, and then we would send an inspector to your home to validate that there was a level of damage and that you were eligible and then we would award you some dollars now, depending upon the number of individuals that register and the extent of the disaster that process can take several days, maybe sometimes more than a week or even longer in the largest of, of disasters in COVID.

David Bibo ([02:45](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=165.89)):

We know that we need to, again, protect our employees as well as protect disaster survivors from unnecessary interaction in person. And so what we've done is we've implemented a remote inspections where the registration process looks largely the same, but instead of sending an inspector to your home, we go ahead and have an inspector call you and take a set of information, maybe gather some photographs of, of damage in, in a number of cases do an evaluation of that damage and then go through the same process that they normally would in terms of awarding a certain dollar amount based on eligibility. And what we're seeing early in hurricane Laura, is that the remote inspection process, because we don't have to deploy inspectors because the scheduling is a bit less complicated. And, and the, our ability to move quickly is increased.

David Bibo ([03:37](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=217.18)):

We're actually seeing that inspections are getting done faster, that dollars are being awarded faster, which really can make a big difference when you've been affected by a disaster. Now, we also know that not everybody is going to be able to upload documentation using the internet. Maybe we're going to have areas where there are communications outages. And so we are ready to create a document drop-off centers. If you've heard of a disaster recovery center where normally you'd have people coming into a senior center or some other community location to interact with a FEMA, a staff member, or with the SBA in this case it looks a bit more spread out. You might see drive-through document drop, drop off centers, where you can get done the same things you would get done via the internet. But for folks who may not have access to the internet, or may only have paper documents, we can still get all of that documentation in order and get assistance to those survivors.

Mark Peterson ([04:37](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=277.53)):

You know, David w we have been in the coven environment since March, and it's been difficult for Americans but I'm sure it's been a challenge to FEMA to think through how our response and recovery will be in the covert environment as we approached hurricane season. So can you talk a little bit about what the necessary changes you've made in the way that we operate because of this pandemic have been, and and maybe what you're seeing now,

David Bibo ([05:06](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=306.33)):

We know as FEMA started to take a, a significant role in the covert response earlier this year we looked ahead to hurricane season and thought about what we as an agency would need to do to adjust our operations, what our state and local government partners would need to do to adjust their operations. And probably most importantly, what we would need to do to protect our personnel to be able to deliver the FEMA mission, especially the life saving life, sustaining components of the FEMA mission without interruption and without fail covert or no COVID. And so we did a lot of thinking, and there are really three areas that we focused and we captured most of these in a guide that we issued in may to the broader emergency management community about thinking about COVID and disaster operations. It's really three areas of focus.

David Bibo ([05:58](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=358.49)):

The first is for us, how do we make sure that that we can protect our personnel? And, you know, the guidance is fairly consistent and is consistent with what CDC has been telling us to make sure that we do we have our personnel wearing masks going out of their way to maintain social distancing, to protect not only themselves, but to protect the people that we serve. We know that when we are deploying into a disaster effected community, those folks have been through the toughest day of their lives. And it's really incumbent on us to protect them from any COVID spread they could take place. And of course, trying to think differently about our operations. That's kind of the second area. So when we think about what FEMA actually does on a day to day basis to deliver the mission, there are things that we can do remotely.

David Bibo ([06:49](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=409.55)):

And there are things that we can't do remotely. I can't hand you a bottle of water if you're a disaster survivor through zoom but I can through a telephone call, walk through the damage that you have experienced in your home and assess whether or not you may be eligible for FEMA assistance. And so we have to be able to do all of those things in the coven environment. And hurricane Laura is demonstrating that we're able to put some of those operational concepts into practice. We're deploying a food and water to Louisiana parishes that have been affected by hurricane LoRa points of distribution had been established so that a disaster survivors can come and access those resources. And at the same time with the president's authorization of the major disaster declaration, we've been able to deliver FEMA individual assistance programs. Those are the ones that help individual disaster survivors by doing phone-based inspections of damage, rather than deploying an inspector to a survivor's home.

David Bibo ([07:54](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=474.32)):

And not only does that protect us from COVID, but what we're finding with very preliminary results is that we're actually able to do it faster. And we know that in disaster operations speed really can make a difference. When you can get some financial resources into the pockets of somebody who's experienced a big loss a day or two quicker that really makes a big difference. So the third piece of the puzzle here and something that we focused on in the guide we issued in may to the emergency management community, was getting them thinking about how they could use the tools we provide here at FEMA to support disaster survivors. And with this year's hurricane season, we've actually authorized a pre landfall emergency declarations earlier than we usually do. And with a higher level of assistance, we usually do. So what does that actually mean?

David Bibo ([08:44](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=524.45)):

It means that we have given States financial resources to put disaster survivors or people in the path of a storm into non congregate shelters. So instead of a high school gymnasium, they can go into a hotel room and we're seeing that make a big difference in the hurricane Laura area of impact, where rather than having 10 or 13,000 disaster survivors crowded into areas where COVID could potentially spread, we're actually able to put them into hotel rooms where they can socially distance from other people and frankly, where they have a little bit more comfort than they otherwise would in a congregate shelter. And we will always be ready along with our partners at the American red cross and in state and local governments to support needs in congregate shelters, but where we don't have to take that risk, it's become a really important tool for us and for the emergency management community.

Mark Peterson ([09:40](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=580.01)):

So I have to believe that all of the planning, all of the changes that we have made through COVID are going to lead to some kind of changes in the future when we are maybe moved past the pandemic itself. So what kind of efficiencies maybe are you seeing in the way that FEMA is, is, and we'll deliver our disaster assistance programs in the future?

David Bibo ([10:02](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=602.93)):

So these changes that we have made as a result of COVID have given us a lot to think about, about what the future of delivering disaster assistance looks like. On the one hand, we've been able to move faster, and even as we move faster, we have also had to make sure that we guard against waste fraud and abuse by making sure that the documentation is in place by making sure those who represent they've had damage have actually had damage. And that's, that's what we will be focused on going forward is evaluating. If we are able to manage all of the risks that are in place for the long run it could be that remote inspections are the future for the way that FEMA delivers its mission. And that has implications not only for individual assistance, but it also has implications in the long run for public assistance. And we've actually already seen this year as COVID has been a challenge for us to work through. We've already seen a great deal of public assistance delivered through remote means so that we know we can do it. The question is, are we able to prove that we're better at doing it? When we do it remotely, then we are when we do it in person. And that remains an open question that we've got to think through and figure out for the future.

Mark Peterson ([11:22](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/MtCZyxYxtfF-fEaDBG-_r80AIVFJogHp3x0tMu86hAgqaMciWjtYK4kETZyDnuqlolknEfQGLzW83_HBBHw0Miumh18?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=682.19)):

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