

Initial Damage Assessments (IDAs)

The purpose of this document is to identify essential elements of information needed to help virtual Joint PDAs go as smoothly as possible. Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, FEMA has made operational adjustments to Individual Assistance (IA) damage assessments virtually, supported as necessary with a limited field presence to assess damage that cannot be validated virtually. FEMA Regions decide whether the assessments will be virtual or hybrid based on several factors, including the status of the public health emergency.

Requesting a Joint PDA

If the incident is of such severity and magnitude that resources needed to recover are expected to exceed state, tribal, or territorial (STT) government capability, the director of STT emergency management agencies may request a joint PDA. The joint PDA request is accomplished through a joint PDA request letter to the appropriate FEMA regional office, which should contain a list of disaster-impacted locations and a basic PDA schedule. STT governments can lessen the time required for FEMA to virtually verify damage by working with local emergency managers to assess whether the IDA information submitted is complete and aligned with established FEMA programmatic eligibility standards.

- **Damage Inventory** – catalogue of damaged residences including insured status, occupancy status, etc. (see additional supporting factors below)
- **Summary of Community Impacts** – disaster-related information that should illustrate overall impacts and underscore how the unique resources of the Federal Government are necessary to support disaster survivors
- **Damage Photographs** – evidence provided along with the summary of community impacts and damage reports to confirm damage assessments

Damage Inventory

Each damaged residence should have a damage report. Damage reports should include essential information that will assist FEMA in validating the damage and completing the assessment. This essential information includes:

- Level of damage (using the [PDA Guide](#), pages 29-32 and Appendix H for more detail)
- Dwelling Type (single, multi-family [include number of affected units], manufactured)
- Owner/Renter status



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- Whether or not the home is insured to cover the disaster-related peril (Appendix I of the [PDA Guide](#) provides a Housing Insurance Matrix)
- Whether the home is a primary (occupied more than six months per year) or secondary residence
- Photographs of the damage to the property
- Tribes should distinguish between homes owned by the tribe or privately by the survivor.

Summary of Community Impacts

When requesting a joint PDA for IA, STT governments should supplement individual damage reports with as much supporting information to the FEMA Regional Recovery Division as possible to ensure a smooth and efficient process. Some of the important supporting information includes:

- What is the source of the damage information being submitted to FEMA? (i.e. STT staff, American Red Cross, other voluntary agencies, other emergency response groups, etc.)
- Location and geographic spread of the damage, urban or rural area, type of terrain, and accessibility to the area.
 - Is there damage to any private roads or bridges that prevented STT staff or local emergency managers from assessing a private property known to have been damaged?
- Immediate known problems such as the following:
 - Areas inaccessible because of debris, high water, or damage to streets, roads, and bridges
 - Serious health hazards
- Widespread loss of essential utilities and shortages of food, water, medical supplies, and facilities.
- Summary of Presidentially declared and non-declared disasters for the current impacted disaster area for which the joint PDA will be requested.
- Summary of activities taken by other federal agencies (OFAs), if any, for coordination.

Supporting Datasets and GIS Layers

Additional datasets or geographic information systems (GIS) layers that support the disaster-impacted area can be beneficial to the virtual assessments process. Some datasets that have been helpful in the past include:

- Parcel/property layers or local tax data
- Insurance information or GIS layers of the disaster-impacted area
- Aerial imagery of the damaged area (pre-disaster and/or post-disaster specific imagery)

Best Practices for Damage Photographs

FEMA will use photographs in conjunction with other data provided by STT governments to validate damage remotely. STT governments are encouraged to share best practices for photographing damage with their local emergency management counterparts.

- Take a reference photo of the home with the address number visible or with GPS coordinates to help distinguish which damage profiles belong with each submitted property.
- Take photographs and closeups of everything that would be clear indicators of the assigned level of damage.
 - Do **not** include photos that are not of damage (unless it's an address reference photo).
 - Do **not** include photos that contain faces.
 - When photographing damage, refer to the [PDA Guide](#) (pages 29-32 and Appendix H) for more detail on what constitutes the definition of each level of damage.
- Take close-up photographs of damages to show details, if applicable (for example, high water lines on walls for flood events, foundation cracks for earthquakes, missing shingles for wind events, etc.).
- Take a photo of the damage that shows the scale and extent of the damage relative to an object of known size (sometimes close-up photos do not allow for perspective)
- Ensure lighting and perspective allow a viewer to clearly see damages.