

Florida Rebuilding with Resilience after Hurricane Irma

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ATLANTA – Nearly five years after Hurricane Irma travelled the length of Florida, communities are making themselves more resilient as they restore public facilities with the help of FEMA grants.

Crossing the Atlantic, Hurricane Irma’s winds reached 185 mph, making it one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes on record. On Sept. 10, 2017, the eye of the hurricane made landfall in Cudjoe Key in Monroe County as a Category 4 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 130 mph. It made a second landfall that afternoon on the southwest coast near Marco Island as a Category 3 hurricane with winds of 115 mph.

A major disaster declaration was issued the same day. Through the recovery process, the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) in partnership with FEMA has worked with communities to make public facilities more resilient.

As of July, FEMA has provided \$2.45 billion for 7,943 rebuilding projects under its Public Assistance (PA) program, including \$35 million for 299 projects that increased the resilience of public facilities.

The PA program reimburses eligible applicants for the costs of emergency response and recovery. As part of the restoration, funds may be included to increase resilience and reduce future damage. FEMA reimburses at least 75 percent of the cost of each project, the remainder coming from non-federal sources.

Throughout the state, reconstruction from Hurricane Irma is occurring in urban and rural communities.

Here are some highlights:



- The Collier County Housing Authority increased the resistance to wind at the Horizon Village complex while repairing hurricane-damaged roofing.
- The South Florida Water Management District installed additional riprap and Geotech fabric along a channel in Palm Beach County that was damaged by hurricane flood waters.
- The collapsed Riverside Park Grand Pavilion in Indian River County was rebuilt with pressure-treated beams resistant to saltwater exposure.
- The Florida Keys Electric Cooperative in Monroe County, which had significant damage from hurricane winds and storm surge, installed concrete foundations for transmission line poles to stabilize the structures and protect against erosion from storms.
- Cathedral Parish School in St. John’s County installed flood barriers at six entrances to the school gymnasium and elevated and weatherproofed control boxes for a security gate.

In addition to funding for rebuilding storm-damaged facilities, there is \$565 million available to the State of Florida from FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for projects that could reduce damage from future events. FDEM evaluates proposals from communities statewide and sets priorities for how the money may be spent. To date, \$304 million for specific projects has been approved and more proposals are being processed.

“Florida is demonstrating in the strongest way how to increase safety and reduce costs from future events by including mitigation in storm recovery efforts,” said Gracia B. Szczech, Regional Administrator for FEMA’s Region 4. “The State is committed to funding resilient projects.”

Among the HMGP projects completed:

- In Collier County, the City of Naples installed seven diesel backup pumps and made improvements to wastewater lift stations.
- In Desoto County, the City of Arcadia improved wind protection at city hall and the police department with the installation of accordion shutters and roll-down shutters for all exterior openings.
- In Lake County, the City of Minneola installed a 400-kilowatt emergency generator to keep the city hall building operational in the event of an outage.
- Marion County protected the utility department building, which serves as an emergency command post, by installing storm shutters and protecting vents,



louvers and exhaust fans.

- In Polk County, the City of Winter Haven installed emergency generators at four utility lift stations to ensure operation in the event of a power outage.
- The Sarasota County Public Hospital Board installed additional switching gear for an emergency generator, increasing capacity to provide 100 percent of power requirements for emergency services.
- Seminole County installed two 500-kilowatt mobile emergency generators for use at two special needs shelters and the Seminole County Services Building.

After Hurricane Irma, FEMA and FDEM established a process to expedite approval of Public Assistance grants. FDEM completes eligibility, technical feasibility, and cost effectiveness reviews. To shorten the review time, FDEM also participates in the environmental review of projects.

“Thanks to our strong partnership with FEMA, the Division has been able to quickly and efficiently distribute funding to impacted communities as they continue their long-term recovery from Hurricane Irma,” said **FDEM Director Kevin Guthrie**. “To date, Hurricane Irma was the costliest hurricane to impact Florida, and the funding for critical rebuilding and mitigation projects empowers our communities to become more resilient and lessen the impacts of future disasters.”

The federal response to Hurricane Irma in Florida included more than \$1 billion assistance to 774,691 individuals and households for the costs of temporary housing, basic home repairs and other disaster-related needs. The National Flood Insurance Program paid \$982.5 million to 28,751 policy holders. The U.S. Small Business Administration provided \$1.43 billion in low-interest disaster loans to 37,083 businesses and homeowners.

