

FEMA Announces New Director of Operations for New Mexico Joint Recovery Office, Reaches Half a Billion Dollars in Claims Paid

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SANTA FE, N.M. – FEMA has named Jay Mitchell as the Director of Operations, leading the day-to-day operations for both the Claims Office and Stafford Act wildfire disaster recovery operations based in Santa Fe. Mitchell is expected to begin in May and will be supported in his transition by leadership at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Mitchell is a former director of New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. He brings over 30 years of military and civilian experience where he has overseen teams in support of emergency management operations. He joins the Claims Office which has been actively engaged in operational improvements for the last several months that have significantly increased the speed of payments.

At the end of 2023, the Claims Office had paid 472 claims totaling \$253 million. As of April 17, 2,439 claims have been paid, totaling over \$500 million, an increase of more than 400% and 97% respectively.

“We have implemented significant process improvements since January of this year and those are producing results for the people of New Mexico. While we are proud to reach half a billion dollars in payments, we know it is still not fast enough and the entire FEMA team will not rest until everyone receives the compensation they are owed.” said Ben Krakauer, Senior Advisor to the FEMA Administrator. “Jay Mitchell will continue to build upon these improvements to meet the needs of those impacted and ensure all eligible claims are paid.”

Since January 2024, the Claims Office has seen a significant increase in claims submitted. As claims submissions increase, the Claims Office is improving



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processes and developing tools to make it easier to receive compensation, including for smoke and ash damage, evacuee host reimbursement, and mental health and other medical expenses. This has also resulted in a significant increase in claims paid.

The Office has developed Standard Rate Calculators to make it easier to quickly calculate losses, allowing for faster payment, and reducing the burden on claimants. The Office is also using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to eliminate the need to conduct in-person site inspections on most claims, significantly reducing processing times.

“The Claims Office mission remains the same: to compensate those affected by the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire to the greatest extent allowed by law,” said Tony Robinson, FEMA Region VI Regional Administrator. “Jay Mitchell is joining a team of dedicated public servants working to help New Mexicans recover from the wildfire through both our claims office and disaster recovery operations.”

All questions and concerns can be addressed by calling your claim Navigator or the Claims Office Helpline at 505-995-7133.

The Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office is committed to meeting the needs of people impacted by the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire and subsequent flooding by providing full compensation available under the law as expeditiously as possible.

Anyone impacted by the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire and subsequent flooding is encouraged to visit any one of our three Claims Offices. Visit fema.gov/disaster/current/hermits-peak/contact-us for locations and hours.

For information and updates regarding the Claims Office, please visit the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office website at fema.gov/hermits-peak. For information in Spanish, visit fema.gov/es/hermits-peak. You can also follow our Facebook page and turn notifications on to stay up to date about the claims process, upcoming deadlines and other program announcements at facebook.com/HermitsPeakCalfCanyonClaimsOffice.

