

FEMA Revamps Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors

Today, FEMA announced three immediate steps the agency is taking to reduce access barriers experienced by underserved populations to its programs that provide individual assistance to disaster survivors. The agency will now accept additional documentation to verify occupancy and ownership, and enhance access to disaster assistance for underserved communities.

“Heading into the peak of hurricane season with 12 named Atlantic storms to date, and as wildfires strengthen out west, FEMA continues to put equity at the forefront of how we support survivors before, during and after disasters,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell.

“DHS is making changes to policies that are critical to ensuring that access is equitably provided to all survivors who are in need of disaster relief and assistance,” said Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “Equity is a cornerstone of our mission and we will continue to identify opportunities to support disadvantaged communities.”

FEMA will now accept a broader range of homeownership and occupancy documentation to assist historically underserved populations. These changes to FEMA’s Individual Assistance program will help reduce barriers and increase access to support historically underserved communities before disasters strike.

To better support survivors, FEMA is:

1. Expanding forms of documentation to prove ownership/occupancy for homeowners and renters

To confirm occupancy, FEMA will now accept motor vehicle registrations, documentation including letters from local schools (public or private), federal or state benefit providers, social service organizations (such as community assistance programs and non-profits), or court documents. Survivors can also use a signed statement from a commercial or mobile home park owner, self-certification for mobile homes and travel trailers as a last resort.

For homeowners, FEMA will now accept a public official’s letter or receipts for major repairs or improvements to verify ownership. Survivors with heirship properties, mobile homes or travel trailers, who do not have the traditional documentation of ownership verification, may self-certify ownership as a last resort.

This expansion includes reducing administrative burdens for survivors. If survivors have successfully verified occupancy to FEMA from a previous disaster within a two-year period, they do not need to do it again. Homeowners



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with the same address from a previous disaster only need to verify ownership one time. FEMA has also expanded the date of eligible documents from three months to one year before the disaster.

Finally, to encourage real-time feedback to applicants, FEMA has trained staff to verify documentation on site while conducting home inspections. This decreases the burden on survivors to appeal a FEMA decision in writing by verifying documents at the time of inspection.

2. Expanding financial assistance for disaster-caused disability

FEMA is amending its current policy to provide assistance to survivors who incurred a disaster-related disability and now require special components, such as ramps or grab bars, to make their damaged home safe and functional for them, regardless of whether those components were in the survivor's home before the disaster.

3. Providing expanded housing assistance and other needs assistance funding

FEMA will now provide a limited amount of financial assistance for renters and homeowners with disaster-caused real property damage that did not render the home uninhabitable through Other Needs Assistance grants. This will help people who typically are not eligible to receive assistance from FEMA to prevent additional losses and address potential health and safety concerns.

FEMA will now provide financial assistance to repair homes impacted by disaster-caused mold growth.

"This is a culture shift for the agency and we're only just beginning," said Administrator Criswell. "These changes reduce the barriers to entry for our Individual Assistance program and will help us to provide disaster assistance equitably to all people, especially and specifically for underserved populations."

These policy changes will apply to disasters declared on or after Aug. 23, 2021. FEMA is required by law to verify an applicant's occupancy for housing assistance and some types of other need assistance. FEMA is also required by law to verify an applicant's ownership of their home to provide financial assistance for home repairs or replacement.

Additional information may be found [here](#).

Contact Us

If you have any questions, please contact FEMA's Office of External Affairs:

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Also, follow Administrator Deanne Criswell on Twitter [@FEMA_Deanne](#).

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Helping people before, during, and after disasters.