

FEMA Resilience through Individual Assistance Strategic Workforce Augmentation Teams
By Constance Beeler, FEMA R7 Individual Assistance Branch

The purpose of the Strategic Workforce Augmentation Team (SWAT) is to support the National Processing Service Centers (NPSCs) when there is an increase in Registration Intake and Helpline calls which exceeds the Individual Assistance (IA) call centers' capacity to handle those calls in a timely manner. The SWAT was designed to enable non-IA staff to assist with those sudden call volume increases and support the SWAT Mission to ensure that individuals and families who have been affected by disasters have access to the full range of FEMA programs in a timely manner and that the best possible level of service is provided to disaster survivors. The SWAT program enables FEMA employees to "SWAT in place" while at their normal office or telework location and help disaster survivors across the nation.

The Region 7 SWAT has activated several times this year, first for the Texas Winter Storms in February and then for COVID-19 Funeral Assistance. On September 3rd, 2021, Region 7 SWAT was also activated to support the call centers following the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ida. Five states received Individual Assistance declarations for Hurricane Ida: this was in addition to thirteen already ongoing IA declarations for 2021. Collectively FEMA SWAT fielded over 11,000 calls throughout the course of activation for Hurricane Ida. This was a huge accomplishment considering all swatters have "day jobs" or in other words provide support often outside of their core work hours: taking calls before or after their regular shifts, as well as on weekends.

All SWAT agents must complete mandatory training prior to taking calls, such as an 8-hour Registration In-Take course; 8-hour COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Specific Resource training; the 3-day Help-line course; and the 4-hour Contact Center Capability Modernization Program (C3MP): Interaction Desktop Orientation training so that they can take calls from any location. In addition to above training, "swatters" also have access to help tools such as a language line which provides translation support for applicants who do not speak English; and support tools for what to do if agents receive a threatening or suicidal phone call.

Region 7 currently has fifteen WAVE 1 SWAT agents who can be activated and begin taking calls virtually immediately. These SWAT agents are current on trainings and if we were activated tomorrow, they would be ready to provide the support and capacity needed to ensure survivors have immediate access to assistance, even as field operations are still being established. It is reassuring to know that Region 7 can provide this support to assist survivors in other regions and other SWAT agents are trained and ready to augment Region 7 support to disaster survivors in our States should we need it!