

June 30, 2008

On Saturday, June 28th, President Bush declared a federal emergency for California counties affected by the recent string of wildfires. This means federal aid can be used to supplement state and local response efforts in areas affected by fires beginning June 20.

The president has not yet declared a federal disaster, a necessary step to free up federal funds for affected residents and businesses.

Emergency Declaration

The emergency declaration allows federal funds to help state and local governments.

- FEMA will direct other federal agencies and provide 75 percent federal funding for emergency measures taken to save lives and protect property and public health.
- The initial FEMA-administered aid is limited to \$5 million. If this limit is exceeded, the president must report on the nature and extent of continuing emergency assistance requirements to Congress before approving further federal aid.

FEMA will also provide direct federal assistance when state and local governments certify they lack the capability to perform or contract for the requested work.

- Food, water and other consumable commodities.
- Other emergency protective measures, including installation of generators, installation of large plastic sheet roofing and shoring or demolition of unsafe structures.

Disaster Declaration

President Bush has not yet declared the affected counties a federal disaster zone. That means federal funds for individuals and businesses are not yet available.

If a federal disaster is declared, it would open up funding from a variety of federal programs on a case-by-case basis.

The Individuals and Households Program (IHP) provides assistance for disaster-affected individuals and families.

- FEMA provides rental payments for temporary housing for those whose homes are uninhabitable. Initial assistance may be provided for up to three months for homeowners and at least one month for renters.
- FEMA may also fund grants for home repairs and replacement of essential household items not covered by insurance to make damaged dwellings safe and functional. FEMA also administers grants to replace personal property and help meet medical, dental, funeral, transportation and other disaster-related needs not covered by insurance or other federal, state and charitable aid programs.
- The U.S. Small Business Administration may provide low-interest loans to cover residential losses not fully compensated by insurance. Loans of up to \$200,000 for a primary residence and \$1.5 million for business property may become available.
- The Small Business Administration may also provide loans up to \$1.5 million for small businesses that have suffered disaster-related cash flow problems and need funds for working capital to recover. These loans can be offered in combination with property loss loans, but cannot exceed a total of \$1.5 million.
- The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture can provide loans up to \$500,000 for farmers, ranchers and aquaculture operators to cover production and property losses.

The Public Assistance Program provides assistance for state and local governments.

- FEMA may provide payment of up to 75 percent of the eligible costs for repairing or replacing damaged public facilities such as roads, bridges, utilities, buildings, schools, recreational areas and similar publicly owned property.
- FEMA also may offer payment of up to 75 percent of the eligible costs for removing debris from public areas and for emergency measures taken to save lives and protect property and public health.

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program offers additional assistance programs.

- FEMA may offer payment of up to 75 percent of the approved costs for hazard mitigation projects undertaken by state and local governments to prevent or reduce long-term risk to life and property from natural or technological disasters.

For Questions or Assistance:

- The FEMA Regional Office: 800-621-3362
- Rep. Farr District Offices: Salinas (831) 424-2229; Santa Cruz (831) 429-1976; 1-800-340-3277.