

Dear MAT Member:

In response to hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) often deploys Mitigation Assessment Teams (MATs) to conduct field investigations at disaster sites. MATs are composed of both government and private sector nationally recognized experts in various building science and hazard-related fields. The Technical Support and Engineering (TS/E) Contractor manages the MAT program, under contract to FEMA. Private sector consultants, who serve on MATs, work as subconsultants to TS/E Contractor.

The mission of the MAT program is to study post-disaster building performance and to document failures and successes in an effort to promote damage reduction. To accomplish this mission, the MAT program uses the combined resources of a Federal, State, Local and Private Sector Partnership. To learn more about the MAT's purpose and goals, refer to FEMA's MAT web page at www.fema.gov/mit/mat.

The ability to quickly form and deploy MATs is essential to the success of the MAT program. Therefore, to increase the efficiency of the MAT process, particularly the procurement of expert services and the deployment of MATs to the field, FEMA has developed this standardized MAT Pre-deployment Package to address some commonly asked questions. This package is intended for subcontractors, subconsultants, MAT roster members, and other potential members of MATs such as Federal employees "mission-assigned" to the MAT by FEMA.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Who is part of the MAT?

FEMA MATs usually include the following types of members:

representatives of FEMA Headquarters and of FEMA Regional Offices

State and local officials

public- and private-sector experts in technical disciplines such as structural and civil engineering, architecture, building construction, natural hazard research, building code and land use measures development and enforcement, and technical writing

When will I know whether FEMA is going to form and deploy a MAT?

When a disaster of national significance occurs, FEMA's Project Officer instructs TS/E Contractor to begin forming a MAT. The TS/E Contractor then queries the existing MAT database, a list of experts who are interested and eligible MAT members. If you are chosen, the TS/E Contractor will contact you to determine your availability for participating as a member of the MAT. Next, the TS/E Contractor will submit your name and resume to FEMA for approval. A MAT is then formed, and the entire team is put on hold. About 2 to 3 days after the disaster has occurred (e.g., after landfall of a hurricane), FEMA deploys a Preliminary Field Assessment Team (PFAT) to determine whether the deployment of a full MAT is appropriate. The PFAT quickly assesses the damage in affected areas and determines whether the MAT should be deployed. FEMA then informs the TS/E Contractor whether a MAT will be deployed. If a team is to be deployed, the schedule is revised as necessary to account for any changes to the composition of the team. The TS/E Contractor then begins organizing the logistics of deploying the team. The TS/E Contractor will call all of the MAT members, authorizing them to travel to a specified destination at a designated time. The MAT meets the next day for a debriefing and to make a field schedule.

When should I book my airline ticket? Who pays for it? How am I reimbursed for hotel, meals, etc.?

In most cases, not all members of the MAT are being reimbursed for travel expenses. Always coordinate with the TS/E Contractor to determine whether your travel expenses are reimbursable. Once you are authorized to travel, you are responsible for making your own airline reservations and paying for your tickets. You will be reimbursed for your travel expenses in accordance with Federal government travel regulations and the terms of the TS/E Contract. Standard government per diem varies by state and city. Typically, the per diem for meals is approximately \$35 per day. The hotel per diem will vary greatly by location. Check the web site www.dtic.mil/perdiem/pdrform.html for more information. MAT members who subcontract through the TS/E Contractor should submit their travel expenses on their regular invoices to the TS/E Contractor for reimbursement.

What rate will FEMA pay subcontractors?

For those who will be subcontractors to the TS/E Contractor, a rate is negotiated with the TS/E Contractor prior to field deployment. Estimating the exact rate is difficult. Rates are approximately equal to those paid by the government for private work.

Do I need a rental car?

Unless otherwise directed by the TS/E Contractor, the TS/E Contractor arranges for transportation in the field. If you are traveling on a reimbursable basis, do not rent a car unless specifically authorized by the TS/E Contractor.

What type of equipment should I take?

You are responsible for providing any necessary equipment such as a mobile phone, pager, laptop computer, printer, GPS, and digital camera. The TS/E Contractor will take the photographs to be included in the MAT report. If you want your photographs included in the report, you must coordinate with the TS/E Contractor. Slides or prints from a conventional film camera are preferred over photographs from a digital camera because they produce a higher-quality image. (see MAT Personal Checklist)

What clothing should I bring?

Bring proper field attire for the climate in which the MAT will be working. Jeans and t-shirts are appropriate. It is a good idea to bring enough clothes for at least 1 week. If necessary, you can usually visit a laundromat. OSHA-approved Steeltoe / steelshank boots are recommended. In preparing for deployment, the cost of obtaining personal items (including personal safety equipment) is the sole responsibility of the MAT members. No costs associated with obtaining items for deployment shall be reimbursed without the expressed prior authorization of the TS/E Contractor. (see MAT Personal Checklist)

What safety issues should I be concerned with?

The TS/E Contractor will provide hard hats for the team. People with allergies may have problems and should consult their doctor before traveling with the MAT. Make sure that you bring adequate amounts of any prescription medications. It is recommended that you bring bug spray. Check the Center for Disease Control and Prevention web site for immunization information. Sometimes MATs travel to areas that are U.S. possession and territories the Caribbean such as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, where tropical diseases may be present.

Is the fieldwork physically demanding?

MAT fieldwork can be quite physically demanding for several reasons. Since hurricane often make landfall in tropical and subtropical environs, fieldwork often occurs in areas of extreme exposure to the sun along with high temperatures and humidity. Additionally there are situations where the MAT must be housed in facilities that have temporarily lost their ability to produce air-conditioning. Vehicular access into damaged areas is often restricted by damage to transportation infrastructure and debris which often results in having to walk considerable distances over debris covered, uneven, and unstable terrain. These factors, in combination with long work hours, often result in MAT deployments being physical demanding.

Are accommodations made for MAT members with disabilities?

FEMA and the TS/E Contractor will make all reasonable accommodations for MAT members with disabilities. The ability to make such accommodations during field operations is often severely restricted because of the chaotic nature of disaster sites which is not within the control of FEMA nor the TS/E Contractor. MAT members, who are disabled and require special accommodations, should bring such requirements to the attention of FEMA and the TS/E Contractor as soon as possible. FEMA and the TS/E Contractor will evaluate these special needs and will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that the person in question can safely and productively participate in the MAT.

Once I am selected to be a MAT member, what can I do to prepare?

If possible, familiarize yourself with the local building and land use codes in use in the area where the MAT will be working. For floods, look to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) regulations and practices, in addition to building codes and standards.

What can I do to better understand FEMA's mitigation programs?

FEMA's web site contains a wealth of information on FEMA's mitigation programs (see www.fema.gov/mit). This includes the MAT web site at www.fema.gov/mit/MAT. Another way to gain further knowledge about FEMA's mitigation programs, is to obtain training on natural hazard mitigation. One such training is available for college faculty and Federal government employees at FEMA's annual Multihazard Building Design Summer Institute (MBDSI) offered at FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) each summer. In addition EMI, offered other resident and home study courses on mitigation and emergency management. (See www.fema.gov/emi)

What are other sources of information?

The MAT web site www.fema.gov/mit/MAT is an excellent source of information. In addition, you can review other MAT reports. The G&O web site (www.g-and-o.com/services/NHE_services/nhe_MAT.htm) will also have information that is useful to potential MAT members.

What is expected of me in the field? What will we be looking at in the field?

In most cases, you will not be collecting detailed damage data, but you will be making general observations about structural damages in order to develop recommendations. Usually, you will be provided with a list of items to investigate in the field developed by the team.

Who is in charge of field operations?

FEMA's MAT Team Manager has the overall responsibility for the MAT, including field operations. However, the TS/E Contractor is in charge of all the logistics associated with the MAT, including the production of reports and other MAT products and assigning work to subcontractors.

How long are the workdays in the field? Will I be working weekends? How long will the field work last?

MAT members work long hours in the field for a period of approximately 1 to 3 weeks. Typically, MATs will work through weekends and holidays. This work requires dedication. Since the availability of housing is often limited in disaster areas, the MAT is often required to find housing well away from the disaster site which then requires considerable travel time just to travel to and from the disaster site each day. It is important to realize that it may be difficult to communicate with your office or family while working on a MAT. Mobile phone service is often interrupted. For this reason, MAT members should not expect to have the time or facilities to conduct work, other than that directly associated with the MAT, while deployed in the field.

What methods are used to conduct field assessments?

Field assessments are conducted by air, ground transportation, and by foot. Aerial assessments are often conducted using an UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter or light plane. Ground transportation may be by car, van, 4 wheel drive vehicle, or Humvee.

Who do I see if there are logistical problems?

The TS/E Contractor Team Manager will address any logistical problems that arise in the field.

What is expected of me after we leave the field?

After the fieldwork is completed and on the last day in the field, a meeting is held to begin work on the draft MAT report. Under the direction of FEMA's Project Officer and the TS/E Contractor's Team Manager, an outline is developed, writing assignments are made, and a schedule is developed for the draft MAT report. Observations, findings, and preliminary conclusions are generated for the report after the team has left the field. The report writing/revision process lasts for another 3 to 4 months.

Personal MAT Deployment Checklist

Clothes

A 7-day supply of clothes (dress for the climate where the MAT is deployed)

Medications

A minimum 10 day supply of all prescription drugs and necessary medications

Safety and Protective Equipment

OSHA-approved steeltoe/steelshank boots

Protective Eye Wear

Sun Glasses

Breathing Mask (in sensitive to dust or other fine particulate)

Personal Care Items

10 day supply of toiletries

Suntan lotion

Backup eye glasses (in case eye glasses are broken or lost)

Working Materials

Mobile phone (service may be intermittent)

Pager (service may be intermittent)

Laptop computer

Portable printer with supply of paper

3/5" floppy diskettes for digital cameras and laptops

GPS unit

Digital camera

35mm camera

35mm slide film

Note Pad to for recording observation and description of photographs

Audio tape recorder and blank tapes