



# Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General

## 2007 Debris Removal Pilot Programs and Initiatives





Homeland  
Security

January 15, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: Nancy Ward  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
*Richard L. Skinner*

FROM: Richard L. Skinner  
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *Management Advisory Report – 2007 Debris Removal  
Pilot Program and Initiatives (OIG-09-16)*

In June 2007, we initiated a review of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) 2007 Debris Removal Pilot Program and Initiatives. In that same month, FEMA announced its Public Assistance (PA) Pilot Program that, among other things, included a debris removal component. We met with officials from your Disaster Assistance Directorate and modified our objective to determine whether the PA pilot program will meet program goals and whether the program can be adequately evaluated at the end of the pilot program period. This memorandum advises you of the results of FEMA's outreach efforts to gain state and local government participation in this voluntary program.

Title VI of Public Law 109-295, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, amended the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act in Subtitle E, Section 689 and directed FEMA to conduct a PA pilot program to:

- (1) Reduce the costs of federal public assistance provided to state and local governments,
- (2) Increase the flexibility in grant administration, and
- (3) Expedite the provision of assistance to states and local governments.

FEMA implemented its innovative pilot program on June 1, 2007, with new procedures that allowed states and local governments to voluntarily participate in the program. Under the PA pilot program, FEMA can: (1) provide grants based on estimates for any large project up to \$500,000; (2) allow an additional 5% federal share of costs for applicants with FEMA-approved debris management plans and at least two pre-qualified debris removal contractors identified prior to a disaster; (3) allow applicants to retain the salvage value of recyclable debris; and (4) reimburse straight or regular-time salaries and benefits of an applicant's permanently employed staff performing debris-related activities. The pilot program ended on December 31, 2008. Additionally, Public Law 109-295 requires the Administrator to submit a report to Congress on the effectiveness of the pilot program no later than March 31, 2009.

FEMA issued a pilot program field guide in August 2007 to supplement earlier program guidance and provided pilot program briefings at state emergency management conferences, regional and state training sessions, and Joint Field Offices (JFO). In addition, FEMA staff responded to numerous questions from applicants regarding the pilot program, and together with state emergency management agencies, made pilot program documents available on their websites. From June 2007 through October 2007, we visited four regional offices, six states with federally-declared disasters occurring after June 2007, and several JFOs. We also held meetings with federal, state, and local government officials to assess FEMA's effectiveness in encouraging voluntary state and local government participation in the program.

FEMA demonstrated a commitment to the pilot program by developing guidance and implementing the program 8 months after the congressional mandate to do so. While FEMA recognized the need to promote this voluntary program and did so through numerous briefings and training sessions and by preparing PA pilot program pamphlets and posting information on its website, its outreach efforts could have been more effective by ensuring that FEMA officials within the FEMA regions and at the JFOs were more knowledgeable of the program and provided a consistent and unified message to state and local governments. During our fieldwork, states and local government officials said they were reluctant to participate in the program because of uncertainties regarding the financial benefits of voluntary participation. Consequently, at the conclusion of our fieldwork, there was insufficient institutional knowledge for us to measure FEMA's success in accomplishing the three goals laid out by Congress for the pilot program. However, we have ongoing and planned work that will address PA pilot program execution and benefits available to states and local governments.

We are currently completing a review of FEMA's Public Assistance Project Management Process. The objectives of that review are to determine the effectiveness of FEMA's process for monitoring PA projects, including the use of project worksheets, and to identify opportunities for improving the current process, including institutionalizing the PA pilot program. In addition, your Disaster Assistance Directorate requested an independent review and opinion on the program as they prepare to evaluate and report to Congress on the results of the program. This review will begin early in FY 2009 and will determine: (1) how well the program was executed; (2) whether the pilot program is adequately and equitably implemented across FEMA regions and fair to applicants; and (3) best practices and improvements for program execution in the future.

We trust that our observations on FEMA's PA pilot program outreach efforts, as well as our ongoing and planned work, will be of assistance as you move forward to expedite the provision of public assistance funding to states and local governments. Should you have any questions, please call me, or your staff may contact Matt Jadacki, Deputy Inspector General, Emergency Management Oversight, at (202) 254-4100.

cc: Assistant Administrator, Disaster Assistance Directorate, FEMA  
Audit Liaison, FEMA (Job Code: DP7W03)  
Audit Liaison, DHS



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