

Questions & Answers on Evacuees

*****Correction: In Answers 2 and 3 we replaced the reference to the Expanded National Evacuee Policy with the National Enhanced Policy for Evacuees, added explanatory information to Answers 3 and 4, and added a new Question and Answer 8 .*****

This guidance applies to the Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy (September 2, 2005, as modified on September 14, 2005).

Question 1

The guidance says to expedite the case. Expedited services require a minimum verification of identity. Can that be waived in this hardship situation?

Answer 1

State agencies should follow the expedited service rules at 7 CFR 273.2(i) and the verification rules at §273.2(f). If the applicant has no ID, the worker may use a collateral contact. If no collateral contact is available, the worker should accept self-declaration. Verification of identity may only be waived as a last resort, in extraordinary circumstances. Most evacuees should have identity documents with them. Many of those who do not may be living with family or friends who can act as collateral contacts. In some cases where the household has no documentation, the only verification will be the client's statement. We expect the eligibility worker to use good judgment and document the file.

Question 2

The guidance requires workers to check with the evacuee that he is not currently certified. If the evacuee has an opened case in another State, has lost the EBT card and can't readily get a replacement, can the receiving State certify the household?

Answer 2

The overriding concern is getting benefits to the evacuee as quickly as possible. The receiving State may certify the evacuee under the expanded expedited service rules, and notify the home State to close the case. Please note that under the National Enhanced Policy for Evacuees (September 9, 2005, as modified on September 14, 2005) no questions are posed about prior benefit history.

Question 3

How should a non-disaster State treat students evacuated from institutions of higher education in disaster areas (for example, students from Tulane University) that are being placed in school in the non-disaster State? Do they follow the expanded disaster evacuee policy or are they handled under normal rules?

Answer 3

The Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy increases the time frame allowed for postponing verification, but does not change any eligibility requirements. If an evacuee volunteers that he/she is a student working less than 20 hours a week, and not meeting any of the other criteria exempting students from the restrictions on participation, then the student evacuee is ineligible. Similarly, if an evacuee states that he/she is a member of any other ineligible class, such as fleeing felons, undocumented aliens, etc., the evacuee is ineligible. Please note that under the National Enhanced Policy for Evacuees (September 9, 2005, as modified on September 14, 2005) no questions are posed about these issues.

Question 4

The guidance says to assure an evacuee who is certified in his/her home State that he/she can use his/her current EBT card in local stores, and that he/she may continue to use food stamp benefits during his/her certification period. Does this mean if the person is going to be here 2 or 3 months until they can return home they can continue to get their benefits from the other state and use their card here?

Answer 4

Yes, that is exactly what it means. As long as the case is open in the home State, the household can use the EBT card. However, it may be to the household's advantage to close the case in the home State and apply in the new State—the household may be eligible for more benefits in the new State, due to loss of income.

Question 5

Just to make sure we're clear on the time period allowed for expedited service for evacuees from areas damaged by Hurricane Katrina, how long can the household participate without providing postponed verification?

Answer 5

The household may participate for the month of certification and the following complete 3-month period. So a household certified in September may participate through the end of December 2005. After that, the household will have to provide documentation or supply a collateral contact to allow the State agency to verify any information on which verification was postponed. Beginning in January 2006, all households will be certified under normal program rules, regardless of whether they received benefits under the Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy or the National Enhanced Policy for Evacuees.

Question 6

Isn't an evacuee in a shelter ineligible if he/she is receiving congregate meals?

Answer 6

State agencies should not be concerned that a household is temporarily residing in a shelter. We do not know how long they will be staying in shelters, or how many meals will be provided to them while they are there. Experience has shown that households are very quickly moving from shelters to residences in the community.

Question 7

We have seen press reports that FEMA will be issuing debit cards with \$2,000 on them to evacuees from disaster areas. How do we treat these cards; must we count them as resources?

Answer 7

Federal disaster assistance payments are excluded. P. L. 93-288, Section 312(d), the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, as amended by P. L. 100-707, Section 105(i), the Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Amendments of 1988, 11/23/88, states that: "Payments precipitated by an emergency or major disaster as defined in this Act, as amended, are not counted as income or resources for food stamp purposes. This exclusion applies to Federal assistance provided to persons directly affected and to comparable disaster assistance provided by States, local governments, and disaster assistance organizations."

Question 8

Households certified under the Expanded National Evacuee Policy received a prorated benefit amount for September 2005. There is no proration of benefits allowed for households certified under the Enhanced National Evacuee Policy. How should we provide equity to these households?

Answer 8

Such households are entitled to a full month's benefits under the Enhanced National Evacuee Policy. States should issue a supplement to increase the benefit amount for September to the maximum allotment for the household size.