



Why This Matters

The Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) is an important part of the disaster declaration process because it is a factor in determining whether an event will become a federally declared disaster.

The Preliminary Damage Assessment process is a mechanism to determine the impact and magnitude of damage caused by a disaster, and the resulting unmet needs of individuals, businesses, the public sector, and the community as a whole.

FEMA's Response

FEMA concurred with Recommendation 1. FEMA is working with state and local government to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the PDA process through training and creating data collection tools.

FEMA did not concur with Recommendation 2. FEMA's per capita indicators clearly determine the severity, magnitude and impact of a disaster. Furthermore, any retroactive changes would affect the status of current disasters.

FEMA did not concur with Recommendation 3. FEMA asserts that its current per capita indicators are consistent with Section 320 of the Stafford Act.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@dhs.gov

Opportunities To Improve FEMA's Public Assistance Preliminary Damage Assessment Process

What We Determined

The Public Assistance PDA process does not provide a thorough, accurate assessment of a state's economic capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster. The Public Assistance PDA process should more accurately estimate the magnitude and economic impact of a disaster.

Since 1986, FEMA has used an outdated per capita amount as an indicator that a disaster might warrant federal assistance. The agency selected the per capita amount of \$1 based on the national per capita income; it did not adjust the amount annually for the changes in per capita income but decided to begin adjusting the amount for inflation in 1999. If the agency had continuously updated the indicator for changes in economic conditions, many recent disasters would not have met the financial per capita indicators for federal assistance. In addition, there may be a better indicator based on state's need for assistance than the current financial statewide per capita indicators based on changes in per capita income or the Consumer Price Index.

What We Recommend

Assistant Administrator, Recovery Directorate, FEMA:

Recommendation #1: Improve the Public Assistance Preliminary Damage Assessment to more accurately estimate the magnitude and economic impact of a disaster.

Recommendation #2: Update the current statewide per capita indicator criteria to better reflect current economic conditions.

Recommendation #3: Evaluate other federal data source measures to determine whether they provide a better indicator of a state's capacity to respond to a disaster and, if appropriate, replace the current statewide per capita indicator measurement.