



Why This Matters

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is authorized under the Stafford Act to temporarily expand its staff size to respond to major disasters and emergencies. Disaster assistance employees (DAEs) fulfill this role by performing key program, technical, and administrative functions during disasters. We received a hotline complaint that FEMA was using DAEs for nondisaster-related functions, as a substitute for full-time and term employees. However, FEMA policy only allows DAEs to be employed for 78 weeks during each 104-week period.

DHS Response

FEMA concurred with three of our four recommendations, and partially concurred with the fourth recommendation. In FEMA's response to our third recommendation, it stated that no DAEs were currently working in excess of the deployment cap due to the reappointment of all DAEs as of March 2012. However, FEMA stated that if it determines a cap is necessary in the future, it will take actions to ensure adherence through better cadre management, including increased system functionality.

For Further Information:

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

FEMA Needs to Improve Its Internal Controls Over DAE Use

What We Determined

During a 4-year period, FEMA paid approximately 1,600 DAEs \$36 million more than they would have received if FEMA had enforced its own employment policy. The 1,600 DAEs represent about 14% of the 11,000 DAEs employed during the period. A number of factors contributed to DAE deployments exceeding FEMA policy caps. Regional cadre managers at three FEMA regional offices said that, because of system limitations, they would have to take extraordinary and time-consuming steps to manage to a 78-week deployment limit. In addition, they said that mission considerations, such as the scarcity of skilled employees to fill certain roles and the overall disaster activity in a region, may necessitate the extension of certain DAEs beyond the deployment cap. DAEs were deployed anywhere from an extra week or two to more than 400 individuals who were deployed for 26 weeks (6 months) to a year above the cap. The more notable examples of DAEs whose deployments exceeded the cap included a FEMA Region II DAE who was deployed full-time (208 weeks) during the entire 4-year period we examined, and a Region VII DAE who was deployed for 207 of 208 weeks during the period.

Although we received a hotline complaint asserting improper use of DAEs, we did not find widespread evidence of FEMA using DAEs to perform nondisaster-related work. In addition, it does not appear that FEMA's noncompliance with its own policy resulted in FEMA spending Disaster Assistance Fund appropriations on unnecessary work.

What We Recommend

Associate Administrator, Mission Support:

- 1) Reevaluate the appropriateness of the 78-week cap on the use of its DAE workforce. If FEMA decides that the cap is not necessary, it should abolish the cap.
- 2) If FEMA decides to maintain the cap, take appropriate steps to ensure that the Automated Deployment Database, or its replacement, incorporates features that will allow managers to identify when DAE program workers will exceed the 78-week maximum deployment limitation.
- 3) If FEMA decides to maintain the cap, identify all currently employed DAEs who have exceeded the 78-week deployment limitation and initiate actions to (a) replace those DAEs with other DAEs, or (b) approve waivers if those DAEs cannot be replaced.
- 4) If FEMA decides to maintain the cap, institute a monitoring program that provides FEMA senior management information concerning the extent to which FEMA field and headquarters offices are complying with the cap.