

Flexibilities for Employees affected by Weather and Other Emergencies

Assistance and Resources available through USDA

Administrative Leave: Program supervisors may grant 40 hours of administrative leave to employees affected by a designated disaster, in accordance with Human Resources Desk Guide subchapter 4630.

Affected employees whose particular situation requires more recovery time may request an additional 40 hours of administrative leave, for a total of up to 80 hours. All requests for the additional 40 hours must be routed through the Human Resources Policy Branch (HRPB), Human Resources Division, Riverdale, and must be approved by the USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM).

In addition, the USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA) retains the authority to grant administrative leave in excess of the aforementioned 80 hours available through the Agency and the OHRM. However, any such request must include a detailed justification and must be submitted to the ASA through OHRM via HRPB. (*See Human Resources Desk Guide [HRDG] Subchapter 4630, Absence and Leave, Section D subsection b:* http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630sdsb.shtml#emergency)

Advanced Pay: USDA employees living in an area subject to an evacuation order during a disaster may request an advance in salary of up to 30 days, with the maximum duration to be determined by the authorizing agency official. Questions may be referred to Human Resources Operations in Minneapolis.

Advanced Pay Options: (*also see Prepaid Debit Cards*) At an employee's request, the National Finance Center can process an electronic funds transfer (EFT) payment to an affected employee's payroll account or alternative account. If an employee's financial institution is unable to process the EFT, then the employee may request payment to another EFT account or issuance of a pre-paid debit card. To request payment to an alternate EFT account or to request a pre-paid debit card, employees should contact Human Resources Operations in Minneapolis. (*See Departmental Regulation 2300-004, dated March 6, 2006:* <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR2300-004.htm>)

Agency Relief Fund: In past natural disasters, Agencies established Employee Relief Funds through non-deductible employee contributions to help Agency employees affected by a disaster. In the event of other disasters, Agencies can explore the possibility of establishing another employee relief fund. Based on past experience, these funds are limited by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax-exempt rules to a total of \$5,000. Applying to the IRS to request that the fund be allowed to collect a larger tax-exempt amount will require significant additional fees.

Automobiles: (*see Transportation To/From Work Using Federal Vehicles*)

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Biweekly Pay Waiver: The biweekly earnings limitation caps an employee's pay in each pay period to the amount of money earned at the GS-15 step 10 pay rate, or Level V of the Executive Schedule, whichever is higher. During a designated emergency when employees are engaged in mission-critical work and accruing overtime hours causing their biweekly pay to exceed the normal limitations a request for a waiver may be submitted to the HRPB Human Resources Division, Riverdale, to allow the earnings limitation to be applied on an annual rather than biweekly basis.

Direct Donations: The USDA Office of Ethics approves direct employee-to-employee non-tax deductible gifts of cash to benefit those employees affected by an emergency who wish to receive such donations. Requests for such approval will occur when deemed necessary. If approval is granted, employees wishing to donate to an adversely affected employee may do so by personal check made out to that individual. To obtain approval, contact the HRPB Human Resources Division, Riverdale.

Emergency Leave Transfer Program (ELTP): The ELTP is implemented after a Presidential declaration is issued in response to a major disaster or emergency that seriously impacts a substantial number of employees. The ELTP permits Agency employees to transfer unused annual leave to employees affected by the disaster. Employees who wish to request leave donations through the program must apply to become a leave recipient under the ELTP. Employees approved to be part of the program may receive up to 240 hours of donated annual leave to be used for the designated emergency. An employee must reapply to the ELTP if additional leave beyond the 240 hours is needed. Questions may be directed to Human Resources Operations in Minneapolis.

(See HRDG 4630, *Absence and Leave*, Section J subsection b:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/index.shtml)

Hot Spot: (see *Internet Usage*)

Housing: State-led Disaster Housing Task Forces address the temporary housing and long-term needs of survivors. Task Force activities include compiling available rental resources, providing transitional housing assistance and housing rental assistance to qualified survivors, projecting housing needs, and exploring other options. The Task Forces include representatives from State, local, and voluntary agencies, and Federal partners. In addition to USDA and FEMA, there are representatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These teams work together to ensure they are making the best use of existing housing resources (such as apartments and rental units), enlisting voluntary agencies to make minor repairs so survivors can remain in their homes, and investigating other temporary housing options specific to a particular area (see www.fema.gov). Questions may be referred to the Emergency Management Safety and Security Division, MRPBS, Riverdale.

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Internet Usage: The MRPBS Deputy Administrator grants permission to employees affected by an evacuation order to use Agency computer equipment and Internet connectivity to apply for assistance and access their personal e-mail accounts. Employees will be notified when such use is granted and in such instances, the following will apply:

- In those cases where normal Internet connectivity has been lost at Agency offices or home offices, employees are authorized to use Sprint “hot spots.” A hot spot is a device that enables a smartphone to access the Internet via a Wi-Fi connection.
- Employees who need to access a personal e-mail account normally blocked by the Department’s firewall may do so by directly connecting to the site rather than through the Agency’s Virtual Private Network (VPN).
- Employees who log in to the VPN connection may access work e-mail and files inside the APHIS firewall.

Pay Waiver: (*see Biweekly Pay Waiver*)

Per Diem: (*see Subsistence Payments*)

Prepaid Debit Cards: (*also see Advanced Pay Options*) Affected Agency employees may request that their normal salary payment be temporarily issued on a prepaid debit card if their financial institution is unable to process the salary payment via an electronic funds transfer (EFT). Employees wishing to make such requests should contact Human Resources Operations in Minneapolis.

Subsistence Payments: For employees ordered to evacuate, subsistence payments (i.e., per diem payments for mileage, meals, and/or hotel related to travel) may be provided from the date of departure from the evacuation area to the date of arrival at an Agency-designated “safe haven” [in accordance with 5 CFR 550.405(a).] An Agency-designated safe haven is defined as “a designated area to which an employee or dependent will be or has been evacuated” [Department Regulation DR 2300-004, USDA Evacuation Policies and Procedures, dated March 6, 2006]. In order to be eligible for lodging allowances, the employee’s designated safe haven must be a distance of 35 miles or greater from the employee’s official duty station or residence. Supervisors or higher level officials may authorize subsistence payments to employees and their dependents. Payments will be authorized (for both employees and dependents) on form AD-202. If required, voucher Form AD-616 will be used to authorize and voucher travel expenses for the employee. If required, SF-1164 will be used for dependents and must be approved by the employee’s supervisor or designated authority. Once completed, authorized forms will be routed through the normal travel voucher process. These forms are available at: http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/employee_resources/index.shtml. For questions contact the Travel Services Center, Financial Management Division, Riverdale.

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Transportation to/from work: *A ruling on the use of Government vehicles for employee transportation to and from work in various situations will be made on a case-by-case basis. Information will be provided at the time of incident.*

Assistance and Resources available from non-USDA Sources

FEMA Assistance: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers a wide range of services to all citizens affected by disasters. The disaster assistance process involves answering a short list of questions and covers assistance for housing, food, medical needs, and employment. Individuals and business owners who sustained losses in the designated disaster areas can apply for assistance by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**, or register by web-enabled mobile device at **m.fema.gov**, or apply online at **www.disasterassistance.gov**. Disaster assistance applicants who have a speech disability or hearing loss and who use **TTY** should instead call **1-800-462-7585**; for those who use **711 or Video Relay Service (VRS)**, please call **1-800-621-3362**. During an emergency, the toll-free telephone numbers operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Questions may also be referred to the Emergency Management Safety and Security Division, MRPBS, Riverdale.
(also see *FEMA.gov* and the section on Disaster Assistance, General Information/Resources that follows this section).

Red Cross Donations: The Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may authorize all Department and Agency Heads to allow a special solicitation of Federal employees at the workplace to support general relief efforts. In accordance with such an announcement, the Secretary of Agriculture may authorize a special solicitation (not connected to Combined Federal Campaign efforts) to USDA employees, which will encourage employees to make a one-time cash contribution to the American Red Cross relief efforts. Questions may be referred to the Emergency Management Safety and Security Division, MRPBS, Riverdale.

At **www.DisasterAssistance.gov**, you can find out about U.S. Government assistance, apply for assistance, and check your application status. This site can help you:

- Apply for help from FEMA online.
- Learn about Small Business Administration loans using an online application.
- Learn what help may be available from 17 government agencies; information is provided in both Spanish and English.
- Reduce the number of forms to fill out.
- Shorten the time it takes to apply for aid.
- Check the progress of your applications online.
- Continue to receive benefits from government programs even if you have to leave your home.
- Have your Social Security benefits sent to a new address.
- Find Federal disaster recovery centers near your current address.
- Search a list of housing available for rent.

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- Get information about your Federal student loan.
- Get help from the Department of State if you are affected by a disaster while living or traveling outside the U.S.
- Locate resources in your community that can help you move forward.
- Get the latest news on declared disasters.
- Find information about:
 - Evacuating,
 - Finding shelter,
 - Getting food and water,
 - Getting medical services,
 - Locating loved ones, and
 - Recovering and rebuilding the areas of your life affected by the disaster.