



September 22, 2011

The Honorable Peter King
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman King and Representative Thompson:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), and the U.S. Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM-USA), we urge quick action to fully fund the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We realize the difficulty in determining the true cost of existing disasters, but encourage you to allocate the amount which will successfully closeout all open disasters, satisfy the requirements of the current disaster impact between now and the end of the fiscal year, and fully fund the DRF for fiscal year 2012 with all possible haste. People who have been hurt by disasters and emergencies—those that just happened and those yet to happen – are depending on being able to get assistance from this fund.

The DRF is FEMA's fund for Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation programs supporting disaster response and recovery efforts. Unfortunately, according to FEMA, the DRF is nearly depleted at this time with only \$215 million as of September 21. The situation continues to degrade. Due to recent disasters and their impact on our citizens, the DRF is so low in funding that FEMA has instituted a policy referred to as "immediate needs" which delays critical permanent restoration projects to communities depending on them for recovery. Some of these communities and events include the recent tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri, and Hurricane Irene. These disasters were equally destructive and *all* communities affected require this critical federal assistance.

The need for DRF funding continues to grow daily as we address the impact from the Joplin tornadoes and Hurricane Irene as well as recent flooding and wildfires. We need to be ready to provide critical federal assistance from the DRF for those projects currently delayed as a result of the immediate needs funding policy activation and to anticipate future disasters.

Here are some of examples of projects delayed due to insufficient DRF funding levels:

- More than \$12 million in disaster funding for *Mississippi* will be delayed from recent tornados and flooding. Also, none of the replacement projects for Smithville, where all city buildings were destroyed, are being funded.
- The recent flooding of the Mississippi River in *Louisiana* resulted in \$60 million worth of projects that will be delayed.


- In **Indiana**, 97 percent of current project worksheets impacting 36 counties totaling \$12 million are currently delayed. Plus, another \$8 million over 12 projects for hazard mitigation will not be funded at this time.
- Approximately 850 projects in **Kentucky** are on hold with a value of about \$25.3 million
- **Alabama** continues to struggle to recovery from massive storms and tornados from earlier this year. As a result, 515 projects are currently delayed totaling nearly \$32 million.
- In addition to funding needed for the current onslaught of wildfires, **Oklahoma** is awaiting nearly \$56 million in DRF funds for public assistance and hazard mitigation.
- **Arizona** anticipates a hold on project reimbursements totaling nearly \$3 million especially as the City of Flagstaff has been subjected to repetitive pos-wildfire flooding.
- Nearly \$1.8 million is needed in **Arkansas** to complete 149 difference projects caused by two difference disasters.
- Three disaster projects in **Maine** await approval from the December 2001 storms totaling \$200,000. Hurricane Irene also caused another \$3.725 million in estimated damages which may not be funded.
- **Kansas** currently requires \$38 million in funding over 13 different disasters just in public assistance. An additional \$23 million is needed for hazard mitigation and the short construction season will push many projects into next year.
- There are approximately \$31 million in DRF funds on hold resulting from **Ohio's** federal declaration for flooding in April and May for 21 counties. Nearly 95 percent of the work is for road damage and several major roads remain closed due to these disasters.

As you can see, the impact of disaster relief funds is realized across the county. In addition to backlogged funding and project worksheets, most states and communities will have entirely lost the 2011 construction season by the time the DRF is replenished. FEMA can clear the current backlog, and projects can once again begin.

We look forward to working with the Committee as the budget process progresses. We encourage you to utilize our memberships as a resource and continue efforts to build a strong and robust emergency management baseline in our country. Together, we will carry-on the initiatives so thoughtfully developed by this Committee over the years.

Please contact our respective representatives in Washington, D.C. should you require additional information from either of our organizations. NACo Associate Legislative Director Dalen Harris can be contacted at 202-492-4236, IAEM Policy Advisor Martha Braddock can be contacted at 703-624-9284, and NEMA Director of Government Relations Matt Cowles can be reached at 202-624-5459.

Sincerely,



Lenny Eliason
NACo President



Jim Mullen
NEMA President



H.E. "Eddie" Hicks, CEM
IAEM-USA President