

Spotlight

Department of Homeland Security



Office of Inspector General

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Why This Matters

Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) response to the Galena disaster was appropriate and proactive under the Stafford Act. However, FEMA should take additional actions to ensure that disaster survivors receive disaster assistance in a timely manner. In Galena, the delay of Other Needs Assistance may have limited the options of disaster survivors to provide food for their families during the harsh Alaskan winter.

FEMA's Response

FEMA concurs with our recommendations. FEMA is taking actions to address the needs of non-traditional communities impacted by disasters. FEMA is developing policies to include authorizing Tribal governments to add equipment to the Other Needs Assistance equipment list; evaluating the Stafford Act to determine how local firms and individuals in remote areas can assist in disaster response and recovery efforts; working to understand cultural differences in disaster response and recovery efforts; and continuing to mitigate risk and monitor disaster programs to prevent fraud, waste and abuse.

For Further Information:

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

FEMA's Response to the Disaster In Galena, Alaska

What We Determined

FEMA generally responded appropriately and proactively using a variety of options available under the Stafford Act. However, FEMA could improve its response to the unique needs of disaster survivors and communities with limited cash resources who reside in remote and inaccessible locations. FEMA quickly decided to provide disaster survivors in Galena, Alaska, with a permanent housing option and responders with a temporary responder support camp. Those decisions were consistent with the authorities the Stafford Act grants to FEMA. However, FEMA experienced delays in implementing its policy changes in Other Needs Assistance that would have assisted disaster survivors prepare for winter. Specifically, FEMA approved Other Needs Assistance policy changes for Alaska on February 14, 2013, but did not implement these changes in its business rules until June 28, 2013 (finalized July 9, 2013)—roughly a month after the disaster occurred. Thus, it was not surprising when disaster survivors said they experienced delays in receiving the Other Needs Assistance, such as hunting and fishing gear, needed to provide food for their families during the Alaskan winter.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Associate Administrator for Response and Recovery, FEMA:

- Recommendation 1: Review its Individuals and Households Program and direct the Regions to work with the States to identify and address the unique needs of non-traditional communities.
- Recommendation 2: Determine if, under Section 307 of the Stafford Act (Use of Local Firms and Individuals (42 U.S.C. 5150)), FEMA can require, to the extent feasible and practicable, grantees and subgrantees to use local geographic preferences in the evaluation of bids and proposals.
- Recommendation 3: In accordance with Executive Order 13175, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments," issue a consultation policy to address cultural gaps that exist with Tribes.

Recommendation 4: Continue to mitigate the inherent risks associated with constructing permanent housing and a temporary responder support camp by closely monitoring compliance with Federal regulations and FEMA guidelines to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.