

**FEMA's Initial Response  
to Severe Storms and  
Flooding in West Virginia  
DR-4273**





# DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

## *FEMA's Initial Response to Severe Storms and Flooding in West Virginia DR-4273*

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**February 7, 2017**

### **Why We Did This Inspection**

On June 25, 2016, the President declared a major disaster for 18 counties in the state of West Virginia. We deployed an Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Emergency Management Oversight team to the disaster to evaluate FEMA's actions after the declaration. Our visibility and availability to FEMA, State, and local officials, and disaster affected individuals provides a strong deterrent to potential fraud, waste, and abuse.

### **What We Recommend**

This report contains no recommendations.

#### **For Further Information:**

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

### **What We Found**

FEMA responded effectively to the West Virginia storms. FEMA successfully overcame challenges that this disaster presented. We shared our concern related to FEMA's selection and use of a facility that was not compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Other challenges, such as disaster reservist staffing and issues with FEMA's Qualification System and Deployment Tracking System were also discussed. We observed that these challenges were consistent with information obtained in other EMOT deployments. Since FEMA is aware of these concerns, we choose to take no further action. However, we will include these measures in the planning of future EMOT, audits and risk assessment efforts.

### **FEMA Response**

FEMA officials generally agreed with our findings and observations. Because we are making no recommendations, we consider this report closed.



## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / [www.oig.dhs.gov](http://www.oig.dhs.gov)

February 7, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: MaryAnn E. Tierney  
Regional Administrator, Region III  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
*Thomas M. Salmon*

FROM: Thomas M. Salmon  
Assistant Inspector General  
Office of Emergency Management Oversight

SUBJECT: *FEMA's Initial Response to Severe Storms and Flooding  
in West Virginia DR-4273*  
Report Number OIG-17-37-D

Attached for your information is our final report, *FEMA's Initial Response to Severe Storms and Flooding in West Virginia DR-4273*.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we are providing copies of our report to appropriate congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Paul Wood, Acting Deputy Assistant Inspector General, Office of Emergency Management Oversight, at (202) 254-4100.

Attachment



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### Background

We deployed an Emergency Management Oversight Team (EMOT) to Charleston, West Virginia, on July 8, 2016, to review the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) initial response to the severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides that occurred in June 2016. Our assessment of FEMA's response focused on FEMA's activities just after the major disaster declaration. We inquired into FEMA's most pressing challenges, such as staffing resources, and assessed how well FEMA coordinated its activities with Federal, West Virginia, the West Virginia National Guard, and other local partners.

As part of our deployment, we visited disaster recovery centers, two branch offices, a manufactured housing unit staging site, and attended applicant briefings and kick off meetings. Additionally, we distributed copies of our audit report "Audit Tips for Managing Disaster-Related Project Costs" OIG-16-109-D to FEMA staff, recipients and subrecipients of FEMA's Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation grant funds. The report provides an overview of Office of Inspector General (OIG) responsibilities; applicable disaster assistance Federal statutes, regulations, and guidelines; the audit process and frequent audit findings; and key points to remember when administering FEMA grants.

### Results of Inspection

FEMA responded effectively to the West Virginia storms. FEMA successfully overcame challenges that this disaster presented. We shared our concern related to FEMA's selection and use of a facility that was not compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Other challenges, such as disaster reservist staffing and issues with FEMA's Qualification System and Deployment Tracking System were also discussed. We observed that these challenges were consistent with information obtained in other EMOT deployments. Since FEMA is aware of these concerns, we choose to take no further action. However, we will include these measures in the planning of future EMOT, audits and risk assessment efforts.

### FEMA's Major Challenges

FEMA faced several challenges that were successfully overcome. However, the two challenges we were most concerned involved FEMA's non-compliance with the *Americans with Disability Act* for its Joint Field Office and Staffing limitations in with FEMA's Qualification System and Deployment Tracking System.



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### **DR 4273 Joint Field Office Facility Was Not ADA Compliant**

FEMA through the General Service Administration (GSA) leased a Joint Field Office facility that was not ADA compliant. GSA conducted an analysis of eight buildings in the Charleston, West Virginia area. According to the Federal Coordinating Officer, there were a limited number of available and qualified buildings that met GSA/FEMA requirements. This forced GSA/FEMA, to pursue a lease with an owner whose building was not ADA compliant.

The FEMA inspection team identified several building limitations that should be addressed to ensure individuals with disabilities were accommodated. These items included

- changing the emergency strobe lighting for the hearing impaired; and
- ensuring accessibility to all building space for mobility challenged individuals.

These issues were discussed with the FEMA Disaster Chief of Staff, Office of Counsel, and Safety program managers. When GSA began to negotiate the building lease, GSA and FEMA scheduled a walk-through tour with the owner and a contractor to identify and resolve these issues. GSA and FEMA issued four lease amendments to ensure the owner addressed building limitations.

### **Disaster Reservist Staffing Shortfalls**

Joint Field Office officials reported the following issues with disaster reservists:

- More than 20% or over 200 of the 957 individuals were trainees;
- Some deployed reservists did not meet expectation or have specific skills for their deployment assignment and needed supplementary training;
- There were not enough coach evaluators, especially give the number of trainees. As a result, the Coach Evaluators assigned were overwhelmed and rushed people, who may not have been qualified for their assignment, through the training process; and
- There were problems noted with Deployment Tracking System, which only allowed for one individual position deployment at a time.

## **Appendix A**

### **Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

The overall objective of our review was to determine whether FEMA's response to the West Virginia storm was effective and efficient and to evaluate FEMA's actions, resources, and authorities according to Federal regulations and FEMA guidelines in effect at the time of our fieldwork.

We conducted this review between July 2016 and December 2016 pursuant to the authority of the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according



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to the *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. Those standards require that we plan and perform the review to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our objectives. We did not assess the adequacy of FEMA's internal controls applicable to disaster response because it was not necessary to accomplish our objective.

### **Discussion with Management and Review Follow-up**

We discussed the results of our audit with officials during our review. We also provided a draft report in advance to these officials and discussed it at the exit conference on July 21, 2016. Because the review did not identify any issues requiring further action from FEMA Region III, we consider this review closed. The Office of Emergency Management Oversight major contributors to this report are: Nigel Gardner, Audit Manager; Paul McPhail, Supervisory Program Analyst; Judy Martinez, EMOT Coordinator; Ken Valrance, Auditor in Charge, Nathaniel Nicholson, Auditor; and Kim Letnaunchyn, Program Analyst.

We appreciate the support and cooperation extended to our team by the Joint Field Office staff. Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Paul Wood, Acting Deputy Assistant Inspector General, Office of Emergency Management Oversight, at (202) 254-4100.



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**Appendix B**  
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