



### Why This Matters

Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs) who perform community relations work serve as a personal resource and communications link with disaster survivors. As the first and sometimes only Federal responders that disaster survivors may see, DAEs provide the human link to bring disaster survivors into the assistance network established to help them in their recovery.

Community relations personnel assess critical disaster survivor needs; ensure that disaster survivors have an understanding of and access to assistance programs; and help manage expectations of the local community and disaster survivors. Their workload is substantial and often in communities with limited English proficiency or areas with large populations of the most vulnerable residents.

In response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, FEMA deployed more than 800 DAEs to perform community relations work.

### FEMA Response

FEMA concurred with our report and its conclusion.

#### 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)

## FEMA Deployed the Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee

### What We Determined

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) policy requires that, as appropriate, community relations personnel start executing their mission either in advance of an event or within 12 hours of an Individual Assistance declaration. However, FEMA must balance the need to deploy substantial numbers of DAEs quickly with its responsibility to practice sound stewardship of taxpayer funds.

To help meet these dual responsibilities, FEMA developed guidance for managing disaster staffing levels and administrative costs. Excluding catastrophic or extremely large disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, FEMA defines different targets for three distinct event levels. The appropriate event level can be determined within days of a disaster declaration. It is based on the disaster's projected total cost; levels of damage; amount of direct Federal assistance needed; level of coordination required among Federal, State, and local resources; and extent to which Emergency Support Functions agencies have been activated.

We concluded that, given the magnitude of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee and number of people affected, FEMA deployed the appropriate number of DAEs to perform community relations work. This amount was well within FEMA's staffing level targets and compares favorably with the total number of reservists deployed in response to the disasters. FEMA generally managed the deployments in a manner consistent with achieving efficient Joint Field Office operations. We did not make any recommendations.