

Disaster Recovery Reaching All of the Diverse Communities of Southeast Michigan

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Detroit—Since the beginning of the response to and recovery from the June 25-26 severe storms, flooding and tornadoes, FEMA and the State of Michigan have been committed to ensuring that all survivors have access to the programs and assistance the Agency and State offer. This outreach effort has resulted in more than \$270 million in approved federal assistance to help more than 52,000 survivors in Macomb, Oakland, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties.

“From our first actions we have been committed to being sure that all people who are affected by this disaster receive the assistance they deserve and are entitled to,” said Federal Coordinating Officer Scott Burgess, who oversees FEMA’s response to and recovery efforts from this disaster. “Southeast Michigan is rich in diversity of people, ethnic groups, religions and cultures, and FEMA understands that certain communities are often disproportionately affected by disasters.”

FEMA has taken the following steps to ensure that all were included in the recovery from this disaster:

- The disaster application process was brought into these communities, concentrating on socially vulnerable populations that sustained disaster-related damage. FEMA personnel visited homes, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to help residents apply for assistance, identify and address immediate and emerging needs, and make referrals to other agencies for additional support. More than 30,000 homes and over 1,500 businesses,



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community and faith-based organizations were visited, reaching almost 12,000 survivors.

- Outreach personnel were equipped with translation services to ensure effective communication of available resource options to all survivors.
- Sites were established to facilitate non-citizen and minor child applications. These sites were staffed with multi-lingual personnel to reach those communities that often have lower disaster-assistance, applicant numbers.
- FEMA staff responded to invitations from local community and cultural groups to set up registration and information sites including with the Hispanic community.
- FEMA staff met with Dearborn Heights, Michigan, leadership to discuss cultural sensitivity concerns at the beginning of the recovery effort to improve outreach to the Arab-American community. Arabic-speaking police cadets assisted FEMA staff with door-to-door outreach, successfully increasing applicants in that community.
- FEMA staff coordinated with Muslim community leaders to schedule an application site at a mosque, further increasing the number of Muslim applicants.
- Special application sites were set up to help first responders who were affected by the June flooding and who also had scheduling conflicts and time constraints.
- Much of the success of these outreach efforts is attributable to the partnership FEMA had with the Wayne State University School of Social Work. Graduate students, many of whom live in the affected area, provided casework support to applicants. Targeted outreach was conducted to applicants that may experience significant barriers to disaster recovery. The students did callouts, visited homes and followed up to connect applicants with Michigan resources and FEMA services. They also coordinated with FEMA's Individual Assistance Strike Team to make sure applicants with pressing needs were helped quickly.

Our proactive outreach efforts were supported by several robust strategies to reach diverse and often vulnerable communities:



- Multiple communication channels were established to distribute information and educate communities about disaster-assistance programs. Channels included traditional and social media, as well as a particular effort to use smaller, more localized, community and cultural media outlets.
- Utilization of well-established FEMA translation services program that has the capacity to provide translation services for many languages. These services were used to translate news releases, fact sheets and flyers into Spanish and Arabic, among other languages, which were distributed to those communities.
- Particular effort was made to reach the Bengali and Polish communities, especially at the beginning of the recovery. Application flyers were translated into these languages.
- FEMA made the disaster-assistance process accessible to those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The agency established a contract to provide American Sign Language Services to provide interpreters for meetings, at disaster recovery centers, and when specially requested to support field outreach efforts.
- FEMA's Speakers Bureau coordinated with state and local governments, businesses and nonprofits across the affected area and held 38 meetings and information sessions, both in-person and virtually. Through this effort, FEMA reached almost 2,300 people.

For more information about Michigan's recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4607. **The deadline for individuals to apply for disaster assistance is Friday, Nov. 12, 2021.** Contact a FEMA representative at 800-621-3362 or visit DisasterAssistance.gov.

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency, or economic status. Reasonable accommodations, including translation and American Sign Language interpreters via Video Relay Service, will be available to ensure effective communication with applicants with limited English proficiency, disabilities, and



access and functional needs. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-3362 (including 711 or Video Relay). If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability and use a TTY, call 800-462-7585.

FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.

