

# You Asked: What's a FEMA Group Site and How Do They Work?

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**Release Date:** fév 15, 2023

Hurricane Ian survivors in eligible counties whose homes were damaged, destroyed, or made unlivable or unsafe by the storm may be eligible for temporary direct housing assistance from FEMA. One of the possible direct housing solutions are group sites where multiple mobile housing units for survivors are installed on a shared piece of land.

**Question:** How long will it take to build a group site?

**Answer:** The average construction time for a group site can take up to 60 to 75 days after the construction contract is awarded. The construction contract is typically awarded 15-30 days after the lease is finalized.

**Question:** Why does it take so long for a group site to be built?

**Answer:** Every group site is a full construction project, subject to all the normal procedural requirements of construction, including use permitting, zoning, and connection to public utilities.

**Question:** How long do group sites last?

**Answer:** Direct housing assistance is available to eligible survivors for up to 18 months from the date of the disaster declaration. The 18-month eligibility period is only determined by the date of the disaster declaration, not when the applicant moves into the unit.

**Question:** Why 18 months? Can it be extended? For how long?

**Answer:** The 18-month period is determined by law. The 18-month period is the initial fixed time. The affected state can request that FEMA extend the direct housing mission based on need. If an extension to the original 18-month



program duration is requested by the state and authorized by FEMA, then FEMA may extend the closure date of the site due to extraordinary circumstances, with agreement of the landowner.

**Question:** Do survivors living at group sites have to pay rent?

**Answer:** No, not during the 18-month period following the disaster declaration. If the program is extended beyond the initial 18 months, FEMA is legally required to charge occupants rent. The rent is based on Housing and Urban Development's (HUDs) Fair Market Rate for the local area. However, FEMA works with low-income survivors to reduce their rent whenever possible.

**Question:** How long have previous group sites stayed open?

**Answer:** Some group sites have remained open for over two years, as was the case after hurricanes Katrina and Harvey. The length of time is determined by the continued need for housing in the impacted counties. The state may request extensions if there is a continued need for temporary housing.

**Question:** Does the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offer any assistance?

**Answer:** Yes. Applicants who need HUD assistance work through their local county housing authorities. Florida Housing Corporation may also be able to refer the survivors to the appropriate organizations.

**Question:** Do the housing units include trailers or mobile homes?

**Answer:** The housing units for temporary housing are mobile homes or Manufactured Housing Units (MHUs) and Travel Trailers (TTs). The type of housing unit depends on the need of the survivors and the space available at the group site.

The MHUs are furnished one-to-three-bedroom units that come with electric heat and air conditioning. Each MHU will be assigned based on family size and household needs. Each unit is upon contingent month-to-month recertification of eligibility.



**Question:** What keeps the potential temporary community from becoming a destination for the area homeless?

**Answer:** The number of persons per MHU is clearly defined and monitored. FEMA registration is much more stringent than the American Red Cross evacuation center requirements. All survivors living at a group site must meet the following requirements:

- Hurricane Ian survivors have registered with FEMA and can show proof of residency in the impacted area.
- Homeowners must have suffered a real property FEMA-verified loss amount of at least \$12 per square foot, or an alternate amount of damage determined by FEMA.
- Renters must show that their primary residence was destroyed or received major damage as a result of the disaster.

**Question:** Do group sites have community standards of conduct?

**Answer:** Yes. Like private rentals, occupants of the potential temporary community are required to uphold the rules and expectations of the community. MHU occupants must routinely update FEMA with Permanent Housing Plan (PHP) progress and meet other criteria to remain in the unit. FEMA may revoke an MHU if an occupant violates Code of Federal Regulations eligibility requirements. Occupants may have opportunities to fix certain violations and remain in the unit.

General conduct violations may include but are not limited to:

- Excessive noise;
- Disturbing the peace;
- Unleashed or unattended pets;
- Damage to the MHU beyond normal wear and tear; and
- Not cleaning the inside and outside of the MHU.

Program eligibility violations may include but are not limited to not being regularly available to meet with FEMA and not progressing with permanent housing plans in a reasonable timeframe.

**Question:** What are the consequences if a survivor violates the community's standards of conduct?



**Answer:** Violations of conduct standards may lead to FEMA taking back the unit. FEMA gives notice to MHU occupants who commit general conduct or program eligibility violations before revoking the unit. After the warning, FEMA issues a notice that revokes the MHU license for occupants who did not correct violations. FEMA provides occupants a notice that describes violations they must correct within 15 days to remain in the MHU. Notices are delivered personally or through mail.

Occupants who commit major violations may receive a warning and be given less than 15 days to correct the infraction. Examples of major violations include but are not limited to criminal activity and health or safety threats.

**Question:** Can survivors be evicted from a group site?

**Answer:** Yes. Survivors are evicted from a group site if:

- the survivor has violated the terms of service, or
- the housing mission has ended, and the survivor refuses to move out of the unit.

FEMA works with the U.S. Department of Justice on a formal eviction process. The eviction process is only initiated after many attempts to work with the survivor on identifying alternate housing or making progress in their permanent housing plan.

**Question:** If an applicant is having issues obtaining a permanent housing plan, does FEMA assist?

**Answer:** Applicants are referred to Disaster Case Management who can work with them on developing their permanent housing plan and help them connect to additional recovery resources.

**Question:** Will children be living at the group sites? How will the local schools compensate for the influx of any new school-aged children?

**Answer:** Group sites consist of all family types, including those with children. FEMA coordinates with the school district by notifying personnel of the potential number of school-age children living at the site and confirms that public school bus pickup is available and provided. All eligible survivors are treated equitably.



**Question:** Will local police and fire departments respond to emergencies at group sites within their jurisdiction?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Does that mean there will be fewer police and fire resources available for the local residents living near a group site?

**Answer:** No. Group sites do not add a significant demand to local emergency services. A group site exists to support the local community and the survivors who lived in that community pre-disaster. They, like you, must be treated equitably.

**Question:** Do group sites include recreation services?

**Answer:** If requested by the local city council, FEMA provides a playground for families living on the site. Group sites are designed for maximum housing within minimal square footage, so in some cases the housing footprint may need to be reduced to accommodate a playground.

**Question:** Are group sites fenced?

**Answer:** Yes, group sites are usually fenced and have privacy slats if recommended.

**Question:** Will these group sites cause more local congestion? Will residents have cars? Does the area around each housing unit include parking spaces?

**Answer:** Most registered survivors have cars, and every MHU includes at least one adjacent parking spot. No more than two vehicles per unit are allowed.

Group sites should not contribute any additional congestion because the occupants were, in almost every case, residents of the same community prior to the storm. While there may be some congestion at the entrance/exit during normal commuting hours, every precaution is taken and traffic patterns on the site are designed to minimize impact.

**Question:** Who pays for building a group site? Who pays for renting the land and installing the utilities?



**Answer:** There are no costs to the community or to the survivors. By contract, the federal government will pay the property owner fair market value for use of the land in the form of a lease or land use agreement. Site design, infrastructure installation, and installation and preparation of the individual housing units are all provided by FEMA and paid for by federal dollars. All utilities are installed and connected by a FEMA contractor in coordination with the local electric, water and sewer providers.

**Question:** What happens when the group site is no longer needed and permanently shut down? Who will remove the MHUs and infrastructure?

**Answer:** FEMA will remove all MHUs. After all units have been vacated and removed from the site, the infrastructure is removed, and the property at the request of the local government or property owner the site is returned as close as possible to its pre-existing condition.

**Question:** When an applicant moves out of a unit, what happens to the unit?

**Answer:** The unit is cleaned and prepared to be used for the next household in need. If the need has been met in all the areas, the unit may be deactivated and returned to storage. Depending on its condition, the unit could be also put up for auction on [GSAuctions.gov](https://www.gsauctions.gov).

**Question:** What happens to the land long term? Is it permanently rezoned for housing, or for another purpose?

**Answer:** FEMA works with the local government to determine how they want to use the land after a group site is closed. In most cases, the rezoning is temporary in nature as directed by the county approving authority.

