

# FEMA Offers More Flexibility and Assistance to Ensure Equity Across all Communities

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**NASHVILLE, Tenn.**— FEMA recently made changes to its policies to ensure disaster assistance is equitably provided to all eligible survivors, including those in historically underserved communities. These changes became effective Aug. 23, the same date a federal declaration was made for Middle Tennessee for the severe storms and flooding that occurred on Aug. 21 in Dickson, Hickman, Houston and Humphreys counties.

FEMA will now accept a broader range of ownership and occupancy documentation to assist those typically in low-income populations. This change should reduce the administrative burden to those whose homes have been passed down over the generations without any traditional ownership verification, known as the legal term “heirship properties.” For these homeowners, FEMA will now accept a public official’s letter or receipts for major repairs or improvements to verify ownership. Survivors with heirship properties or who are living in mobile homes or travel trailers may self-declare ownership as a last resort.

To confirm occupancy, FEMA will now accept motor vehicle registrations, or letters from local schools (public or private), documents from federal or state benefit providers, social service organizations (such as community assistance programs and non-profits), or court documents. Survivors living in mobile homes or travel trailers can also use a signed statement from a commercial or mobile home park owner or self-declaration as a last resort.

Also, to encourage real-time feedback to applicants, FEMA has trained staff to verify documentation on site while conducting home inspections. This decreases the burden on survivors to appeal a FEMA decision in writing by verifying documents at the time of inspection.



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FEMA is also amending its policy to provide assistance to those who suffered a disaster-related disability and now require special components, such as ramps or grab bars, to make their damaged home safe and functional for them, regardless of whether those components were in the survivor's home before the disaster.

Financial assistance is also available to repair homes impacted by disaster-caused mold growth.

FEMA also provides interpreters, real-time captioning, and information in alternate formats such as Braille, large-print, audio, and electronic versions. The agency also provides free services to help survivors communicate with its staff and understand FEMA programs. Among the aids: Information available in accessible electronic formats on FEMA's website and social media; Qualified American Sign Language interpreters; Qualified multilingual interpreters; and information written in multiple languages.

The fastest and easiest way to apply for assistance is online at [DisasterAssistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov). Tennesseans in the designated counties can also ask questions or apply for FEMA assistance at **800-621-3362** (TTY **800-462-7585**). Lines are open daily from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. local time, seven days a week. Those who use a relay service such as a videophone, InnoCaption, or CapTel should update FEMA with their specific number assigned to that service.

Because of the recent hurricanes and other severe storms, flooding and fires across the country, wait times may be long. Please be patient. Those who would like to speak to someone face-to-face may apply for assistance or get answers to their questions by visiting one of the [Multi-Agency Resource Centers](#) in your county. Other ways to apply include: online at [www.disasterassistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov) or by downloading the FEMA app to a smartphone or tablet.

For more information on Tennessee's disaster recovery, visit [www.tn.gov/tema.html](https://www.tn.gov/tema.html) and [www.fema.gov/disaster/4609](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4609). You may also follow FEMA on [www.facebook.com/fema](https://www.facebook.com/fema) and Twitter [@FEMARegion4](https://twitter.com/FEMARegion4).



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