

# Historic Disaster Response to Hurricane Harvey in Texas

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**AUSTIN, Texas** – With nearly 4.5 feet of rain and 130 mph winds, Hurricane Harvey propelled a disaster response that was the largest in Texas state history.

Neighbors, strangers, nonprofit organizations and governments at all levels joined together to mount an extraordinary effort to save lives and meet the needs of thousands of people who suffered from the storm and subsequent flooding. It was Texans helping Texans, aided by people who came to Texas from all parts of the nation.

Before the storm made landfall near Rockport on Aug. 25, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had pre-positioned supplies and personnel in the state, ready to join the Texas Division of Emergency Management, local agencies, nonprofit and faith-based organizations and the private sector in responding to the devastation caused by the storm.

President Trump issued a major disaster declaration immediately that allowed dozens of federal agencies to assign personnel to support the State of Texas in response and recovery. Within days, the number of FEMA employees, other federal agencies, and the National Guard deployed topped 31,000, all focused on helping Texans respond to Harvey.

Historic response to Hurricane Harvey in Texas 19 Trillion Gallons of Rain 80,000 Homes had 18 inches of floodwater

More than 19 trillion gallons of rainwater fell on parts of Texas, causing widespread, catastrophic flooding. Nearly 80,000 homes had at least 18 inches of floodwater, 23,000 of those with more than 5 feet. The Houston area experienced the largest amount of rainwater ever recorded in the continental United States from a single storm (51.88 inches). Twenty-four hospitals were evacuated, 61 communities lost drinking water capability, 23 ports were closed and 781 roads were impassable. Nearly 780,000 Texans evacuated their homes. In the days after the storm, more than 42,000 Texans were housed temporarily in 692



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shelters. Local, state and federal first responders rescued 122,331 people and 5,234 pets.

## Moving to Recovery

The volume of applications for disaster assistance was one of the highest in FEMA history. To date, 792,000 households have applied for assistance. Most of those registrations were online at [DisasterAssistance.gov](https://DisasterAssistance.gov) or on mobile devices using the FEMA app. Because of the exceptional volume, FEMA's national processing service center used surge staff from FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies to assist with the traffic. The Internal Revenue Service, for example, assigned 2,300 staff to FEMA's service center beginning Sept. 5.

Within 30 days, more than \$1.5 billion in federal funds was paid to Texans impacted by the disaster, including assistance grants, low-interest disaster loans and flood insurance advance payments.

During that period, 270,916 Texas households were provided \$571.8 million from FEMA for temporary housing, basic repairs to make homes safe and habitable, and for other essential needs. More than 24,000 families are living temporarily in hotel rooms paid for by FEMA because their homes are uninhabitable. More than 2,100 remain in shelters until longer-term housing can be found.

Texans filed more than 87,000 flood insurance claims and the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has made \$608 million in expedited claims payments. NFIP implemented temporary changes to the claims process to help policyholders get started rebuilding as soon as possible.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the principal source of federal funds for rebuilding after a disaster, has approved \$367 million in low-interest disaster loans to more than 4,340 Texas businesses, homeowners and renters as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

"Texans have been through a terrible experience," said Federal Coordinating Officer Kevin Hannes. "Many people can't get back into their houses and the State of Texas is leading a joint effort to come up with innovative ways to provide housing for those affected by the disaster. Agencies from all parts of the federal



government are coordinating with state and local governments, nonprofits and the private sector to help Texans get back on their feet.”

FEMA coordinates federal response and recovery activities through mission assignments to other federal agencies. In Texas, FEMA mission-assigned more than two dozen federal agencies.

### **Agencies respond to Hurricane Harvey**

The **Coast Guard** deployed 2,060 personnel, 50 aircraft, 75 boats and 29 cutters, rescuing 11,022 people and 1,384 pets.

**FEMA** assigned 28 **Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)** teams from across the nation to deploy to Texas to assist state and local agencies with the lifesaving mission. The teams rescued 6,453 people and 237 animals, using boats and high-water trucks. Search and rescue efforts involved USAR, National Parks Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Customs and Border Patrol and the Department of Defense.

FEMA supplied 3 million meals, 3 million liters of water, 9,900 blankets, 8,840 cots and 10,300 hygiene kits to the state for distribution to survivors. FEMA quickly provided \$186 million in Public Assistance funding to reimburse local and state agencies for the cost of emergency protective measures and debris removal. FEMA deployed teams of specialists to neighborhoods and disaster recovery centers to help Texans with registration and questions about disaster assistance. FEMA coordinated National Business Emergency Operations Center calls among 150 private sector partners working on disaster response, worked with social media companies to share disaster information and assisted cell service companies in providing charging stations for disaster survivors.

The **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** deployed more than 1,110 personnel with medical equipment and supplies. Personnel provided medical care to 5,359 patients and conducted 60 shelter assessments. The department helped move Port Arthur residents who had been living in floodwater-contaminated houses and apartments to temporary housing at the Bob Bowers Civic Center.



**U.S. Geological Survey** (USGS) scientists deployed to the coast to help the **National Weather Service** (NWS) forecast storm surge and beach erosion, then worked through Harvey's landfall to keep the NWS informed of real-time flooding. After the floodwaters receded, USGS scientists collected more than 1,500 high-water marks to help develop future flood maps.

The **Department of Housing and Urban Development** (HUD) contacted all 61 public housing authorities in the disaster area to assess damage and to identify unoccupied units that could be made available to HUD-assisted and other survivors. Those authorities manage 91 public housing developments that serve 200,000 families. HUD did the same assessment with its 454 FHA-insured apartment complexes, comprising 50,000 units, of which 20,000 have direct HUD rental assistance. HUD also canvassed the four-state area surrounding the disaster for available public housing and multifamily housing units.

The **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** (USACE), deploying 390 personnel, worked with local and state agencies and the Coast Guard to clear navigation channels, allowing critical ports to resume operations. Engineers performed generator inspections and installations to provide temporary emergency power at critical locations and provided technical assistance for debris, temporary housing and commodities missions.

The **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA), working with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, completed 625 drinking water assessments and 441 waste water assessments. The agency conducted assessments of 43 Superfund sites and recovered 517 containers of unidentified, potentially hazardous material.

The **Department of Energy** (DOE) supported the Texas Division of Emergency Management and utility companies in efforts to restore power to more than 300,000 customers. Utility companies responded in a coordinated effort, activating their mutual support networks and assigning more than 10,000 workers from at least 21 states to the response and recovery effort, including crews, line workers and support personnel. DOE worked with the EPA to issue waivers that allowed more fuel to go into the supply pipeline. Secretary Perry authorized release of 5.3 million barrels of crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve as a resource if needed.



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The **Department of Defense** (DoD) supported more than 30 mission assignments from FEMA that included search and rescue, strategic airlift, transportation, evacuation, installations support, patient movement and logistics. As part of the search and rescue mission, U.S. Northern Command rescued nearly 3,000 people.

The **U.S. Small Business Administration** (SBA), working with the Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center, opened five business recovery centers to provide a wide range of services to businesses impacted by the disaster. SBA extended the deferment for first payment from the standard five months to 11 months from the date the borrower signs the loan closing documents. SBA provided an automatic 12-month deferment of principal and interest payments for SBA-serviced business and disaster loans that were in regular servicing status on Aug. 25 in the counties designated as federal disaster areas.

The **Civil Air Patrol** conducted 270 flights with 32 aircraft to assist with emergency response.

The **Department of Agriculture** (USDA) activated the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to provide food benefits to households that wouldn't normally qualify, if they meet disaster income limits and have disaster-related expenses. Schools in hurricane-stricken areas were allowed to provide meals through the National School Lunch Program to all students free of charge through Sept. 30. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service deployed 25 tons of pet food to affected areas and used helicopters to identify stranded livestock, assisting the Texas National Guard in dropping 210,000 pounds of hay to 10,000 head of livestock.

The **General Services Administration** (GSA) leased facilities to provide work sites for several thousand federal employees deployed to Texas, including a joint state/federal field office, area field offices and call centers.

The **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services** temporarily modified the Medicare, Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program to provide immediate relief to Texas disaster survivors.



The **Department of Transportation** provided technical assistance, training and on-site damage assessments for state and local partners to begin returning transportation infrastructure to pre-storm conditions. The Federal Highway Administration activated or deployed 36 employees in the response effort. Staff provided assistance for emergency repairs under the Emergency Relief Program with an initial \$25 million in quick-release funds. All major airports returned to normal operations by Sept. 6. Ports in Corpus Christi, Houston, Beaumont and Port Arthur were open with restrictions. Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County returned to limited service. As of Sept. 20, 191 damage inspection reports documented emergency repairs completed and permanent repairs to be completed.

The **Texas Workforce Commission** began taking unemployment insurance claims the day Hurricane Harvey made landfall. FEMA activated Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) for Texans whose employment was lost because of the disaster. The program is administered by the State of Texas. As of Sept. 19, the commission processed 136,576 unemployment insurance claims, of which 17,714 were under the DUA program. DUA call centers are operating seven days a week.

The **American Red Cross** provided \$45 million to more than 100,000 disaster survivors to help them with immediate needs. The Red Cross deployed more than 3,000 staff and volunteers, 171 emergency response vehicles, served 965,000 meals and 1 million snacks and operated shelters throughout the impacted counties.

More than **300 voluntary organizations**, including National and Texas Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters and locally based groups, are working to support Harvey survivors. Volunteers are working to remove muck from homes, support shelters, feed people, distribute supplies, provide emotional and spiritual care, clean up debris, repair and rebuild housing and provide crisis support. The Salvation Army deployed 4,457 volunteers who have served 40,714 hours providing feeding, shelter, emotional and spiritual care, donations and social services. AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams have deployed 109 volunteers mucking and gutting houses, chain-sawing trees and tarping roofs. Voluntary organizations have assisted 17,000 households with cleanup.



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Recovery in Texas will be a long-term process, led by the State of Texas. Federal agencies will continue providing their full support to the state and to local governments to help Texas rebuild with resiliency.

For more information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the [Hurricane Harvey disaster web page](#), the [FEMA Harvey Facebook page](#), the [@FEMARegion6 Twitter account](#) and the [Texas Division of Emergency Management website](#).

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