

Progress and Innovation in Puerto Rico: FEMA, COR3 and Other Federal Partners Continue Historic Recovery Mission Two Years After Hurricanes Irma and María

Release Date: September 12, 2019

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – Two years into Puerto Rico’s historic recovery mission, FEMA remains committed to supporting communities by working closely with the Government of Puerto Rico, the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency, or COR3 and other federal partners. Important strides have been made to support the Commonwealth’s Economic and Disaster Recovery Plan for Puerto Rico and pave the way for a more resilient island.

“Hurricane María in Puerto Rico has been one of the most challenging missions in FEMA’s 40- year history. With proven processes in place and thousands of permanent work sites inspected, the island is now on its way to meeting its long-term recovery goals,” said Acting Federal Coordinating Officer for Puerto Rico, James N. Russo.

To date, the federal government has spent over \$20 billion on response and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico.

Over \$1.3 billion have been approved to assist survivors during their recovery process under

FEMA’s Individuals and Households program, which includes temporary rental assistance, funds to repair or replace disaster-damaged homes and other immediate needs after the storm.

Survivors also received about \$2 billion in low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration to help with their recovery.



FEMA

Page 1 of 5

The Puerto Rico Department of Housing recently launched its housing reconstruction program with the first \$1.5 billion in Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery, or CDBG-DR, funding for Puerto Rico. More than \$20 billion have been assigned by the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development to address disaster-related unmet housing, infrastructure, mitigation and economic revitalization needs.

Public Assistance, where FEMA reimburses the Commonwealth for eligible expenses related to hurricanes Irma and María, totals \$5.8 billion so far.

Given the scope of hurricane-related damage in Puerto Rico, a significant amount of Public Assistance funds was used for measures to save lives, ensure public health and to remove over 11 million cubic yards of debris – enough to fill Yankee Stadium 23 times over.

FEMA works alongside the Commonwealth and COR3 to strategize major recovery projects and expedite recovery funding and reimbursement of all eligible costs. Public Assistance funding is obligated to private nonprofit organizations, municipalities and agencies of the Government of Puerto Rico through COR3.

"Hurricane Maria, without a doubt, was an unprecedented event. We recognize that even after two years the challenges continue, but from the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resiliency, my team and I are working tirelessly to achieve the reconstruction of a stronger Puerto Rico. Working together and in coordination with FEMA, we will be able to achieve our objectives efficiently and transparently for the well-being of the Island," said COR3 director, Ottmar J. Chávez

The island's critical infrastructure, including the power grid, roads and bridges, water systems and communications structure, are all poised to be built back stronger with the help of federal funds.

Collaboration between FEMA and the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, or PREPA, led to the recent approval of industry standards that serve as the baseline for all future designs and the construction of a more robust power grid. FEMA's recent obligation of about \$100 million in architectural and engineering design funding to PREPA will help reduce the "damage-rebuild- damage" cycle that



FEMA

Page 2 of 5

comes with restoring structures to pre-disaster conditions.

Over \$413 million has been obligated to address storm-related damage to the island's roadways, bridges and ports. Leveraging advanced technologies such as Light Detection and Ranging technology, or LIDAR, which uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure distance on the Earth's surface, is being used to support damage assessments and assist in large-scale recovery planning of critical infrastructure. This technology also aided in identifying mitigation opportunities, inaccessible locations and facilitated accurate land plotting.

Rebuilding the island's main water testing lab in Caguas is the largest water infrastructure permanent work project so far for the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority, or PRASA. A temporary FEMA-funded water testing lab is currently in place while the new lab is rebuilt.

With over \$180 million obligated so far for architectural and engineering designs, Puerto Rico's critical water infrastructure will be stronger than it was pre-storm.

Community aqueducts across the island have also received support from FEMA and other federal agencies. After assessing over 200 rural community drinking water systems, the EPA announced an agreement with community and nonprofit organizations to provide sustainable solutions to the roughly 90,000 people across the island who depend on these non-PRASA systems. More than \$10 million in funding from nonprofit partners will be used to identify sustainable design standards and technologies, establish disaster risk reduction approaches and provide technical assistance and training.

With support from FEMA, the Puerto Rico Planning Board is developing an update to the island's drainage and stormwater guidelines, which have not been updated since 1975.

Innovative solutions to the island's communications system include collaborations with the Puerto Rico Public Service Regulatory Board, PREPA and municipal governments. Plans to develop municipal hot spots, implement standardized backup power sources and bury power cables in the island's El Yunque Rainforest will increase redundancy and build resilience.



FEMA

Page 3 of 5

Together with the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a workshop that included participants from the Puerto Rico Police and Fire Departments, the Puerto Rico Emergency Management Administration, FEMA and other federal partners was held to establish an Emergency Communications Executive Committee. The committee will address the island's emergency communications needs to ensure successful coordination of emergency communications activities in the future.

As part of its focus on building capacity in Puerto Rico, FEMA has offered over 90 trainings and workshops to the Puerto Rico Emergency Management and Disaster Administration Bureau's staff to strengthen disaster response and recovery capabilities. Community outreach activities stressing the importance of preparedness and emergency family disaster planning have taken place across the island as well. Individual preparedness and readiness exercises and trainings serve to empower residents, highlighting that disaster response and recovery are most effective when they are locally executed, state managed and federally supported.

A recovery as complex as Puerto Rico's requires blending funds and support across the federal family of agencies as well as a strong partnership with the Government of Puerto Rico and COR3. With help from local governments, faith-based and nonprofit organizations and the community, the island's residents will benefit in their current recovery efforts and in building resilience for the future.

Preparedness efforts at all levels should be ongoing. Learn more about the importance of being prepared at [Prepared, Not Scared](#).

For more information on Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit

fema.gov/disaster/4339.

###

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362) 711/VRS - Video Relay Service). Multilingual operators are



FEMA

Page 4 of 5

available. (Press 2 for Spanish). TTY call 800-462-7585.

Follow us at:

www.fema.gov/hurricane-maria

www.facebook.com/femapuertorico

www.twitter.com/femaregion2



FEMA

Page 5 of 5