

Biden-Harris Administration Sends Nearly 1,000 Federal Responders to Hawaii

Release Date: August 18, 2023

WASHINGTON -- Today, the Biden-Harris Administration announced that nearly 1,000 federal responders are on the ground in Hawaii to help the state recover from the devastating wildfires. In the days since President Biden declared a major disaster declaration for the state of Hawaii, FEMA has approved more than \$5.6 million in assistance to nearly 2,000 households including more than \$2.3 million in initial rental assistance.

Search and rescue teams remain on the ground to assist with efforts and are working diligently to ensure all properties are meticulously searched and any victims and personal property are handled with the utmost reverence and respect.

Thanks to the partnership between the Hawaii Fire Relief Housing program administered by the American Red Cross and funded by FEMA, the number of survivors in congregate shelters fell by 50% yesterday. The Red Cross expects to move all survivors who are in shelters into hotel rooms by next week. More than 300 Red Cross staff are working with partners to ensure people receive help as quickly as possible.

The Red Cross has distributed 30,000 meals and snacks to survivors and responded to more than 2,100 requests to help families locate missing loved ones. Additionally, the Salvation Army served roughly 12,000 meals a day to survivors since last week and continues this feeding mission and is also providing emotional and spiritual support to survivors in the west part of Maui.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) immediately deployed staff to Maui following the Hawaii wildfires and has a full incident command team on the ground working closely with FEMA and our federal, state and local partners. The agency's efforts are focused on identifying, removing and safely disposing of household hazardous waste and disaster debris to protect residents from



FEMA

Page 1 of 4

environmental and health hazards. This is the next step in the recovery process before the clearing of debris.

All of EPA's response efforts while on Maui will be guided by its cultural resources and historic properties plan that the agency is working to develop with the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Division. This plan will help responders identify, protect and properly handle cultural resources, which were significantly impacted during the wildfire.

FEMA is encouraging survivors to visit its newly opened joint Disaster Recovery Center at the University of Hawaii Maui College, located at 310 W. Ka'ahumanu Avenue, Kahului, Hawaii. Survivors can speak to FEMA specialists, get assistance registering for disaster assistance, get in touch with voluntary organizations and have access to other federal and state resources from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. HST seven days a week.

Biden-Harris Administration Actions to Support Residents of Hawaii

Agencies including FEMA, the Department of Defense, Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, the U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are all working in tandem to help support the communities impacted by this tragedy. In addition to the actions listed above, the following agencies are providing support:

- **The Federal Emergency Management Agency** continues to work closely with state, county, and federal partners to aid active response efforts and to help survivors jumpstart their recovery. More than 1,000 federal responders, including 350 search and rescue team members and K9 teams are deployed in Hawaii to support residents in their greatest time of need. FEMA's Disaster Survivor Assistance teams are going to shelters and survivors' homes to help people register for assistance. Nearly 6,000 survivors have registered for federal assistance and may be eligible for immediate resources such as hotel rooms or financial assistance. Survivors who have not yet registered can do so 24 hours a day by calling 800-621-3362, by visiting



FEMA

Page 2 of 4

www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by using the [FEMA App](#). If people use a relay service, such as video relay (VRS), captioned telephone or other service, they need to give FEMA the number for that service. Survivors may also be approved for a one-time immediate payment of \$700 for Critical Needs Assistance, one of several types of federal assistance they may be eligible to receive. Examples of other types of assistance include help with a temporary place to stay, funding home repairs and emergency needs that insurance and other financial assistance sources may not cover.

- The **U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau** created a [disaster and emergencies guide](#) to handling your finances including resources to help you recover, such as [tackling housing issues](#), [protecting your finances](#), [dealing with property damage](#), [managing your bills](#), and [asking for help](#) from financial companies like banks, credit cards and other lenders. If you're having trouble with a financial company, you can't resolve, [submit a complaint with the online](#) or by calling (855) 411-CFPB (2372).
- The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR)** deployed 85 experts from the National Disaster Medical System's Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team and a Victim Identification Center team to assist Maui County with victim identification and respectfully processing human remains. ASPR also deployed a portable morgue unit to help with processing human remains and five additional fatality management experts. ASPR is providing additional personnel to bolster mental health staff and resources available at Lahaina Comprehensive Health Center.
- The **U.S. Small Business Administration** has more than 30 staff on the ground in Hawaii and are phasing in more. Survivors and businesses who register for FEMA assistance will also be eligible for low-interest disaster loans. To be considered for all forms of disaster assistance, survivors must contact FEMA first. Information and details on the location of business recovery centers is available by calling the SBA Customer Service Center at **(800) 659-2955**. SBA's Disaster lending program has also started getting money to Maui.
- The **U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service** [approved waivers](#) which will allow Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households in Maui to purchase hot foods with SNAP benefits through Sept. 14; raise the maximum monthly and allow certain food substitutions for those using the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children program through Oct. 31; and, certain children's food programs may



FEMA

Page 3 of 4

serve meals in a non-congregate setting, adjust the time of meal service, allow parent pick up of meals and serve meals at school sites due to the unanticipated closures.

- The **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** is providing a 90-day relief from foreclosures of Federal Housing Administration-insured mortgages and home equity conversion mortgages. Homeowners affected by the disaster should contact their mortgage or loan servicer immediately. Call the FHA Resource Center at 1-800-304-9320 for additional information. To learn more about disaster relief options for FHA homeowners visit the [FHA Disaster Relief site](#). HUD also released [regulatory and administrative waivers](#) to help communities accelerate their recovery. This includes funding for housing rehabilitation and reconstruction, homebuyer programs replacing disaster damaged residences, infrastructure improvements and assistance to people at risk of homelessness.
- The **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** deployed 27 responders, 15 personnel providing virtual support and 41 contractors to assist with planning and assessments for generator installations and debris collection and removal. Temporary power personnel completed 10 of 11 generator installations.

Additional State and Voluntary Actions

- Maui County government officials are distributing food, water and other supplies at two locations in Lahaina: Gateway Center at 325 Keawe St. and Napili Plaza at 5095 Napilihau St. The Maui Humane Society has pet supplies at both locations.
- American Red Cross and Maui County continue to staff and support six shelters where food, water, hygiene kits and other essential resources are provided to survivors who are unable to return home. FEMA survivor assistance specialists are located at the shelters helping people register for federal assistance. Those affected by the fires may visit a Red Cross shelter to get a hot meal, charge their phone and access other essential support.

