

California Wildfires – FEMA-1810-DR

Declared November 18, 2008

On November 17, 2008, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requested a major disaster declaration due to extremely high winds and wildfires beginning on November 13, 2008, and continuing. The Governor requested a declaration for Individual Assistance and Public Assistance, including direct Federal assistance, for five counties and Hazard Mitigation for all counties. Beginning on November 17, 2008, joint Federal, State, and local Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs) were conducted in the requested counties and are summarized below. PDAs estimate damages immediately after an event and are considered, along with several other factors, in determining whether a disaster is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the State and the affected local governments, and that Federal assistance is necessary.¹

On November 18, 2008, President Bush declared that a major disaster exists in the State of California. This declaration made Individual Assistance requested by the Governor available to affected individuals and households in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and Santa Barbara Counties. This declaration also made debris removal and emergency protective measures, under the Public Assistance program, requested by the Governor available to State and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis in response to the wildfires in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and Santa Barbara Counties. Direct Federal assistance also was authorized. Finally, this declaration made Hazard Mitigation Grant Program assistance requested by the Governor available for hazard mitigation measures statewide.²

Summary of Damage Assessment Information Used in Determining Whether to Declare a Major Disaster

Individual Assistance

- Total Number of Residences Impacted:³ 869
 - Destroyed - 745
 - Major Damage - 124
 - Minor Damage - 0
 - Affected - 0
- Percentage of insured residences:⁴ (54%)
- Percentage of low income households:⁵ (13%)
- Percentage of elderly households:⁶ -
- Total Individual Assistance cost estimate: \$8,093,551

Public Assistance

- Primary Impact: Costs associated with emergency protective measures
- Total Public Assistance cost estimate: \$65,950,000

- Statewide per capita impact:⁷ \$1.94
- Statewide per capita impact indicator:⁸ \$1.31
- Countywide per capita impact: -
- Countywide per capita impact indicator:⁹ \$3.28

¹ The preliminary damage assessment (PDA) process is a mechanism used to determine the impact and magnitude of damage and resulting needs of individuals, businesses, public sector, and community as a whole. Information collected is used by the State as a basis for the Governor's request for a major disaster or emergency declaration, and by the President in determining a response to the Governor's request (44 CFR § 206.33).

² When a Governor's request for major disaster assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended (Stafford Act) is under review, a number of primary factors are considered to determine whether assistance is warranted. These factors are outlined in FEMA's regulations (44 CFR § 206.48). The President has ultimate discretion and decision making authority to declare major disasters and emergencies under the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. § 5170 and § 5191).

³ Degree of damage to impacted residences:

- Destroyed – total loss of structure, structure is not economically feasible to repair, or complete failure to major structural components (e.g., collapse of basement walls/foundation, walls or roof);
- Major Damage – substantial failure to structural elements of residence (e.g., walls, floors, foundation), or damage that will take more than 30 days to repair;
- Minor Damage – home is damaged and uninhabitable, but may be made habitable in short period of time with repairs; and
- Affected – some damage to the structure and contents, but still habitable.

⁴ By law, Federal disaster assistance cannot duplicate insurance coverage (44 CFR § 206.48(b)(5)).

⁵ Special populations, such as low-income, the elderly, or the unemployed may indicate a greater need for assistance (44 CFR § 206.48(b)(3)).

⁶ Ibid (44 CFR § 206.48(b)(3)).

⁷ Based on State population in the 2000 Census.

⁸ Statewide Per Capita Impact Indicator for FY09, *Federal Register*, October 1, 2008.

⁹ Countywide Per Capita Impact Indicator for FY09, *Federal Register*, October 1, 2008.