

Awards for Permanent Work Increase in 2020

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Ninety-seven percent of FEMA obligations during the year were for permanent work

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – In the face of the obstacles of 2020 – earthquakes, floods and a pandemic that slowed the island’s productive sector – FEMA ended the year with a record number of obligations. Nearly 400 project obligations per month paved the way for a total of \$13.4 billion in recovery funds. To date, the Hurricane María recovery operations on the island have produced the largest amount of approved disaster funding for a disaster in FEMA’s history.

"This year's challenges further strengthened our commitment to the people of Puerto Rico. Our sense of duty and willingness is unstoppable, and we are proud to be able to help our island during this historic recovery," said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, José Baquero Tirado.

Improved Infrastructure

In September, while commemorating the three-year mark for Hurricane María, the Agency awarded the two projects with the largest amount of funds in FEMA history. The nearly \$9.5 billion obligation for the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority aims to move permanent work projects forward in several facilities that provide service to 1.5 million residential, commercial and industrial clients.

Likewise, over \$2 billion was obligated for the [Puerto Rico Department of Education to address damage in over 5,300 buildings, pavilions and recreational areas, among other sites, in over 1,100 schools.](#)

For his part, the Director for the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience, Ottmar Chavez, said that the Government of Puerto Rico has adapted to address all the pressing situations that arose. "We are very pleased to have achieved the largest allocation in the history of FEMA for the reconstruction of the



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electrical system and the Department of Education. We have also achieved million-dollar allocations to address the crises of hurricanes Irma and María, the earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. The work has been hard, but diligent,” he added.

Similarly, the municipalities will benefit from a \$1.2 billion injection for 3,741 projects for roads, public buildings, parks, sports facilities, community centers and other essential facilities for residents. Many of these spaces are used for community activities and as distribution centers during emergencies.

Hazard Mitigation

Though natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes cannot be avoided, there are ways to take measures to minimize their effects. To date, nearly \$240 million were awarded for this purpose.

In addition, about \$53.4 million was obligated under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to strengthen facilities across the island, like at the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. In the first phase of the project for the largest international travel hub in the Caribbean, designs are underway for an electrical system that will reduce the disruption of services if a failure occurs. Another \$18 million was allocated to update and enforce building code guidelines and compliance.

Environmental and Historic Preservation

Another FEMA priority this year were projects that seek to preserve the island’s cultural heritage. The National Archives and the Cabezas de San Juan natural reserve in Fajardo, for example, were approved \$7.4 million and \$701,300, respectively.

The Agency reinforced its commitment to the environment by performing several assessments of the Camuy caves, a natural treasure of internationally recognized value. Experts will prepare a cost estimate and make other recommendations that will improve the infrastructure of the Espiral, Catedral and Clara caves. The goal is reopen this natural formation as it represents an important income for the Camuy, Lares and Hatillo municipalities.

“Over the past three years, we have obligated over \$19.5 billion for costs related to hurricanes Irma and Maria under our Public Assistance program. We remain



steadfast in our commitment to the island,” concluded Baquero Tirado.

For more information on Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 and recuperacion.pr. Follow us on our social networks at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

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