COMMUNITY RELATIONS SPECIALISTS CONTACTING SURVIVORS OF STORMS, FLOODING THAT STARTED IN MARCH

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Their boots were on the ground within hours of the Florida disaster declaration Tuesday. That’s the way they work.

In an effort to help people recover from the late March storms, tornadoes and flooding that struck north Florida, Community Relations specialists from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State Emergency Response Team (SERT) are in the field seeking to contact storm survivors throughout the area to assist in the recovery process.

People who suffered uninsured or underinsured losses in the 12 designated counties as a result of storms, tornadoes and flooding beginning March 26 may be eligible for federal-state assistance. The counties designated as major disaster areas for Individual Assistance are: Calhoun, Hamilton, Holmes, Jackson, Lafayette, Liberty, Madison, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Suwannee, Walton and Washington counties.

“This kind of local, direct contact is the key to a successful disaster recovery,” said Doug Wright, state official who is leading the state’s role in the recovery effort.

The specialists, wearing their familiar blue FEMA and SERT shirts, are in the field meeting with storm survivors, at recovery and senior centers, at community organizations, churches and with local officials to explain the recovery process and provide information. Teams are distributing thousands of informational flyers, visiting scores of homes and businesses and working in the affected counties to help identify and assist disaster victims.

“These highly-skilled people are FEMA’s front-line disaster workers who not only provide storm survivors with valuable recovery information, but also bring emergency managers equally valuable information about the needs and conditions in the field,” Jeff Bryant, FEMA’s federal official in charge of the recovery effort, said.

As the Community Relations specialists work throughout the designated areas, they will be offering individuals and business owners information about available disaster assistance programs that include:

- Grants to help pay for temporary disaster housing needs;
- Grants for essential repairs needed to make a residence safe, sanitary and functional;
- Low-interest loans to repair or replace damaged property for homeowners, renters, private non-profit organizations and businesses from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA); and
• Other Needs Assistance (ONA) grants for serious disaster-related needs and expenses not covered by insurance or other assistance programs.

Team members are reminding people that it is necessary to apply to FEMA for assistance in order to be considered eligible for help. There are two easy ways to begin the application process. One is to call FEMA’s toll-free number, **800-621-FEMA (3362)** or **TTY 800-462-7585** for the hearing- and speech-impaired. Both lines are active from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. local time seven days a week. Multilingual operators are also available to answer calls. Residents with Internet access also have the option to register on FEMA’s Web site at [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov) where valuable recovery information is also available. Applicants can also review the status of an application at that site.

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**FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.**

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). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

FEMA’s temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, applicants who receive SBA loan applications must submit them to SBA loan officers to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management and State Emergency Response Team (SERT) coordinates disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation programs with all 67 counties and the federal government. For more information and to GET A PLAN! please visit [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org).

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