

Major Disaster Declarations for Snowstorms and Severe Winter Storms

December 11, 2020

A presidential major disaster declaration pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (hereinafter the Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288, as amended; 42 U.S.C. §§5121 et seq.) for a “Snowstorm” or a “Severe Winter Storm” authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide [Public Assistance](#) funding for snow-related activities. Snow assistance is authorized for counties based on the finding that the county has a record or near-record snowfall or is contiguous to a county that meets the criteria.

Record or Near-Record Snowfall

FEMA uses data from the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s \(NOAA\) National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\)](#) to identify the historical one-, two-, and three-day snowfall records for each county. FEMA also uses [NOAA daily snowfall reports](#) to evaluate snow assistance requests. For current snowfall incidents, FEMA uses snowfall measurements taken at [National Weather Service \(NWS\) Cooperative Network Stations](#), but also accepts other measurements considered accurate by the NWS.

Declaration Requests

A request for a major disaster declaration for snow assistance must be submitted by the state or territory governor, or Chief Tribal Executive within 30 days following the snowstorm and include (1) information identifying which counties and contiguous counties need assistance, (2) the duration of the snowfall as identified or confirmed by the NWS, and (3) daily snowfall totals from NWS stations or NWS-verified sources as well as historical snowfall data from the NCEI. In addition, applicants must demonstrate that they do not have the capacity to effectively respond to the storm without federal assistance.

The information FEMA uses to determine record or near-record snowfalls includes:

- comparing current snowfall amounts with the historical record snowfall amounts for a like number of days;

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- snowstorm duration from NWS;
- if data from multiple NWS-verified sources exist within a county or tribal land, the highest current event snowfall reported by the NWS within that county or tribal land is compared to the highest historical record snowfall for that county or tribal land; and
- for counties or tribal lands that do not have NCEI or NWS historical record snowfall data, FEMA uses the historical record from the nearest NWS Cooperative Network Station in an adjacent county or tribal land for determining historical snowfall records.

Eligible Activities

Under a Stafford Act declaration, FEMA may provide assistance for eligible snow-related activities including snow removal, de-icing, salting, snow dumps, and road sanding and other eligible activities essential to eliminate or lessen immediate threats to life, public health, and safety. Emergency protective measures, such as sheltering and search and rescue, may be also authorized by the declaration. FEMA may authorize assistance for reconstruction depending on the nature and scope of the incident.

Snow assistance is available for all eligible costs incurred over a continuous 48-hour period. Each applicant designates the beginning of its 48-hour period, typically when the highest eligible costs have occurred. State or territorial agencies conducting snow-related activities in multiple locations may use different 48-hour periods for different locations. Once FEMA approves the 48-hour period, it cannot be changed. FEMA may extend the eligible time period of assistance by 24 hours in counties where snowfall quantities greatly exceed (by at least 50%) previous record amounts.

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