Disaster Relief Fund State of Play: In Brief

Updated October 16, 2023

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R47676

Contents

Figures

Tables

Contacts

Introduction

The Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) is one of the most-tracked single accounts funded by Congress each year. It is the primary source of funding for the federal government's domestic general disaster relief programs.

Discussions at an April 2023 House Appropriations Committee hearing indicated that an additional supplemental request was anticipated to address an expected shortfall[1] in part of the DRF for FY2023.[2]

On August 10, 2023, the Biden Administration submitted a supplemental appropriations request to Congress that included $12 billion for the DRF, which would cover the projected shortfall and provide additional resources for potential forthcoming catastrophic events. Three weeks later, the Administration raised that request to $16 billion.

On August 29, 2023, FEMA announced it was implementing special guidance restricting further obligations from the DRF to ensure funding is available for essential "life-safety and life-sustaining efforts."[3]

On September 31, 2023, Congress passed and President Biden signed into law P.L. 118-115, a continuing resolution lasting through November 17, 2023, that included $16 billion in supplemental appropriations for the DRF and an anomaly to allow for faster allocation of the continuing resolution's temporary budget authority if necessary. As a result, on October 2, 2023, FEMA lifted its restrictions on obligations from the DRF.

This report summarizes

- what the DRF is used for, and how its structure reflects that;
- how it is funded;
- its recent funding history; and
- why it remains reliant on supplemental appropriations even when its budget request is met or exceeded, as was the case in FY2023.

More detailed history and policy discussion of the DRF is included in CRS Report R45484, *The Disaster Relief Fund: Overview and Issues*.

Note: The content in this In Brief will be included in an updated version of the above report, at which time this report will be archived.

What Is the DRF Used For?

The DRF funds disaster activity pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended (Stafford Act; 42 U.S.C. §5121 et seq.). It pays for several key

[1] At the time, FEMA anticipated that by the end of the fiscal year, funding requirements for major disasters would exceed DRF resources by almost $12 billion.

[2] House Appropriations Committee, "Joyce Remarks at FY24 Budget Hearing for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (As Prepared)," April 18, 2023, available at https://appropriations.house.gov/news/statements/joyce-remarks-fy24-budget-hearing-federal-emergency-management-agency-prepared.

[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), "Immediate Needs Funding Fact Sheet," Office of External Affairs email attachment, August 29, 2003. Also available at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_inf-fact-sheet.pdf.

disaster response, recovery, and mitigation programs that provide assistance to communities impacted by presidentially declared emergencies and disasters.[4]

The DRF does not fund all federal disaster assistance. Many federal agencies other than FEMA have specific authorities and resources to support certain disaster response and recovery efforts. However, the DRF does provide *most* of the federal government's support for immediate disaster response, through FEMA's own capabilities, and through the mission assignment process, whereby FEMA coordinates a government-wide response and reimburses agencies it calls into action that do not have independent authority nor funding for disaster recovery operations.[5]

DRF Structure

Major Disasters Category

Since 2012, the DRF has been split into two categories. The larger of the two—the "major disasters" category—is for costs pursuant to specifically declared major disasters. In recent years, this category has represented more than 95% of DRF obligations.

The DRF "major disasters" category funds several different Stafford Act programs identified as "Direct Disaster Programs":

- Individual Assistance (IA);[6]
- Public Assistance (PA);[7] and
- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).[8]

Under the Disaster Recovery Reform Act,[9] an automatic set-aside was created within the "major disasters" category for pre-disaster mitigation grants through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program.[10]

Most public discussion about depletion of the DRF is technically a discussion about depletion of the unobligated balance of the major disasters category of funding, not including the BRIC set-aside.

DRF Base Category

The smaller category, known as the DRF "base," covers most other Stafford Act-related costs including

[4] For more details on disaster declarations, see CRS Report R41981, *Congressional Primer on Responding to and Recovering from Major Disasters and Emergencies*, by Elizabeth M. Webster and Bruce R. Lindsay.

[5] For details on how this process, known as "mission assignments," works, see https://www.fema.gov/partnerships/mission-assignments.

[6] For more detail, see CRS In Focus IF11298, *A Brief Overview of FEMA's Individual Assistance Program*, by Elizabeth M. Webster.

[7] For more detail, see CRS In Focus IF11529, *A Brief Overview of FEMA's Public Assistance Program*, by Erica A. Lee.

[8] For more detail, see CRS Insight IN11187, *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Assistance*, by Diane P. Horn.

[9] P.L. 115-254, Division D.

[10] While the funding is "set aside" for BRIC, it remains available for broader use for other activities within the "major disasters" category in the event the DRF runs low on budget authority. For more information on the BRIC program, see CRS Insight IN11515, *FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation: The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program*, by Diane P. Horn.

- Pre-disaster surge activities;
- Activity pursuant to emergency declarations;
- Fire Management Assistance Grants; and
- Disaster Readiness and Support Activities.

The reason for the bifurcation of the DRF was the implementation of special budgetary treatment for the costs of major disasters in 2012. Under the Budget Control Act of 2011,[11] a special accommodation was made that allowed for congressionally designated appropriations for costs incurred pursuant to Stafford Act major disaster declarations to not count against discretionary spending limits.[12] Therefore, that spending had to be specifically identified, and the distinction between "major disasters" and the DRF "base" emerged.

Base funding for the DRF cannot be used for the costs of major disasters. Under appropriations law, providing a specific amount for an activity in statute means other resources not specifically designated for that activity cannot be applied to it without specific statutory direction.[13]

DRF Appropriations

Annual and Supplemental

The DRF receives an annual appropriation under FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act. Once the budgetary treatment of major disaster costs was implemented in the annual appropriations process, beginning in the FY2013 cycle, DRF annual appropriations covered a much larger proportion of actual DRF spending than before.[14]

---

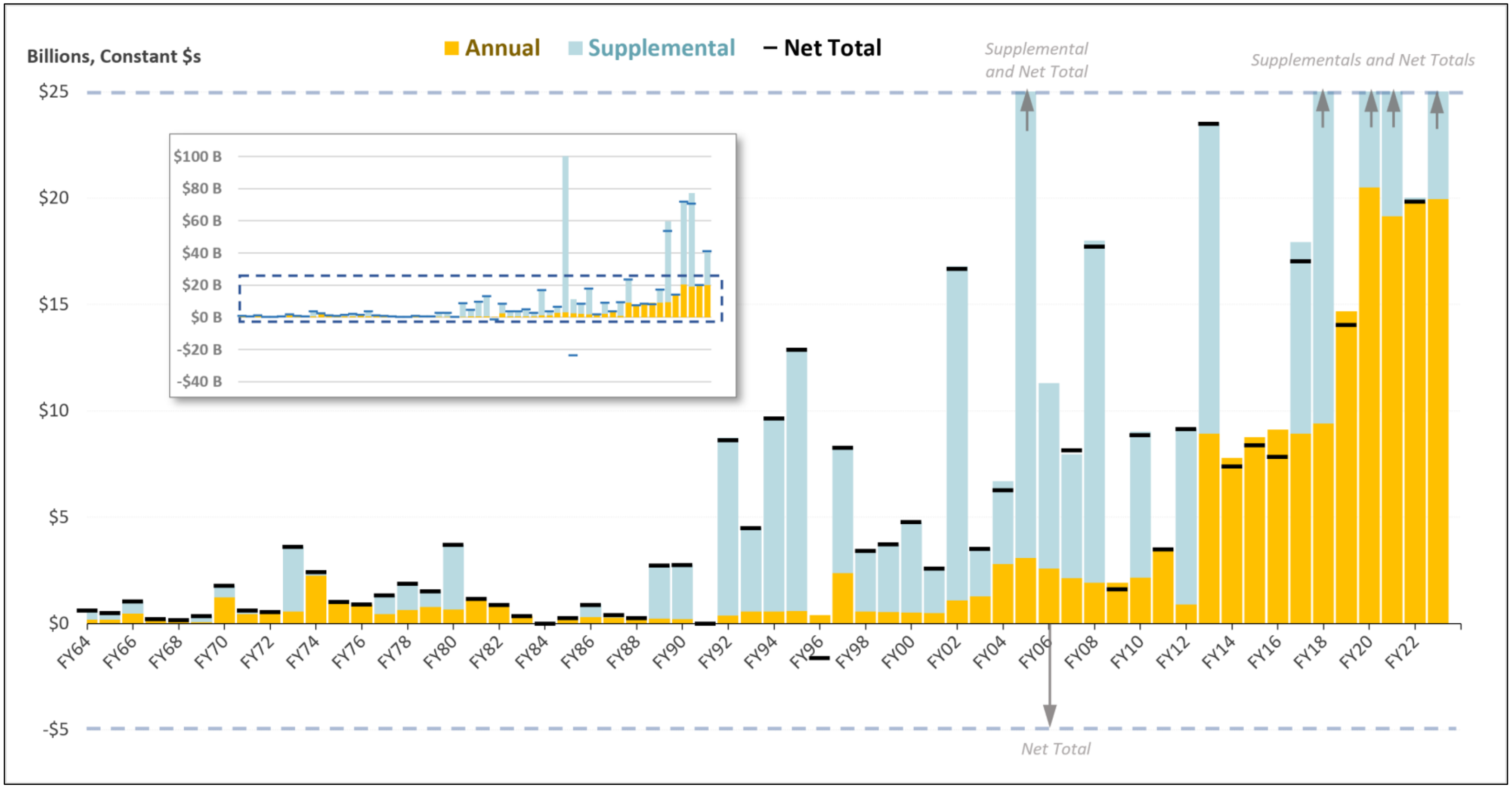
[11] P.L. 112-25.

[12] For more detail, see CRS Report R45778, *Exceptions to the Budget Control Act's Discretionary Spending Limits*, by Megan S. Lynch; and CRS In Focus IF10720, *Calculation and Use of the Disaster Relief Allowable Adjustment*, by William L. Painter.

[13] See "Augmentation of Appropriations," in Government Accountability Office, *Principles of Appropriations Law* (aka. "the Red Book), Third Edition, Volume II, pp. 6-162 et seq., available at https://www.gao.gov/legal/appropriations-law/red-book.

[14] For the underlying analysis, see CRS Report R45484, *The Disaster Relief Fund: Overview and Issues*, by William L. Painter.

Figure 1. DRF Appropriations History, FY1964-FY2023



Source: CRS analysis of appropriations legislation.

Notes: Totals for FY2005, FY2006, FY2018, FY2020, FY2021, and FY2023, referenced by the arrows, are beyond the scale of the main graph and are shown on the inset. FY2013 numbers do not reflect the impact of sequestration. Supplemental data include contingent appropriations and all appropriations under the heading of "Disaster Relief" or "Disaster Relief Fund" including the language "for an additional amount." Reductions reflected in the Net Total data include transfers and rescissions specifically enumerated in appropriations acts. For information on trends in the declarations that helped drive the demand for these appropriations, see CRS Report R42702, *Stafford Act Declarations 1953-2016: Trends, Analyses, and Implications for Congress*, by Bruce R. Lindsay.

As **Figure 1** indicates, the DRF has relied significantly on supplemental appropriations to ensure it has the resources to fund Stafford Act programs. Prior to the implementation of budget controls, funding for disasters was provided as needed. With the implementation of deficit reduction efforts in the 1980s, disaster assistance had to "compete" for a limited pool of discretionary budget authority in the appropriations process. The use of "emergency" exceptions in supplemental appropriations allowed Congress to fund more disaster relief outside the annual appropriations process, "making room" for other priorities. These "emergency" designations were rarely used in annual appropriations measures. The creation of the limited disaster relief adjustment to discretionary budget limits in the Budget Control Act created a mechanism that allowed more of those Stafford Act disaster-related costs to be funded in annual appropriations measures. While a handful of other disaster-related appropriations have periodically used the disaster-related flexibility, the DRF has exercised 95% of the available disaster relief adjustment.[15]

Even with this flexibility with regard to limits on discretionary spending, the annual appropriations request for the DRF notes, and has noted for many years, that in the event of a catastrophic incident (a disaster resulting in more than $500 million in spending from the DRF), a supplemental appropriation would be required.[16]

Continuing Resolutions

If annual appropriations for the coming fiscal year are not enacted prior to the end of the current fiscal year, Congress often passes a continuing resolution (CR) to provide temporary budget authority so that federal government agencies can continue to operate until annual appropriations are finalized. This temporary funding is provided at a rate for operations, which is usually based on the prior year annual appropriation (with some adjustments or exceptions), and is usually provided for a limited period of time. Under a CR, in most cases budget authority is gradually apportioned to agencies (as the final level of appropriations has not been set) because spending too large a proportion of an as-yet determined annual budget early in the fiscal year may create challenges later on.

The DRF appropriation is atypical in that its appropriations do not expire at the end of a given fiscal year, but are available for obligation until expended. This means that Stafford Act programs are often somewhat protected from the effects of a lapse in appropriations because the DRF usually has carryover balances available to continue to fund its operations. However, this is not always the case, and several times in recent years the unobligated balance in the DRF has fallen to levels that risked impacting disaster response operations.

Since FY2018, every continuing resolution that has funded DHS has included a provision that allows the temporary budget authority for the DRF to "be apportioned at a rate for operations necessary to carry out response and recovery activities under the Stafford Act."[17] This anomaly ensures that budget authority, rather than being slowly apportioned to FEMA like a typical continuing appropriation, would be available as needed in the event the DRF's existing carryover balances are spent down while the CR is in effect. The anomaly essentially allows the temporary budget authority of the CR to act as a temporary supplemental appropriation.

[15] See CRS In Focus IF10720, *Calculation and Use of the Disaster Relief Allowable Adjustment*, by William L. Painter.

[16] See, for example, FEMA, "Disaster Relief Fund: Fiscal Year 2019 Funding Requirements," Fiscal Year 2018 Report to Congress, p. 4, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/disaster-relief-funding-requirements_fy-2019.pdf.

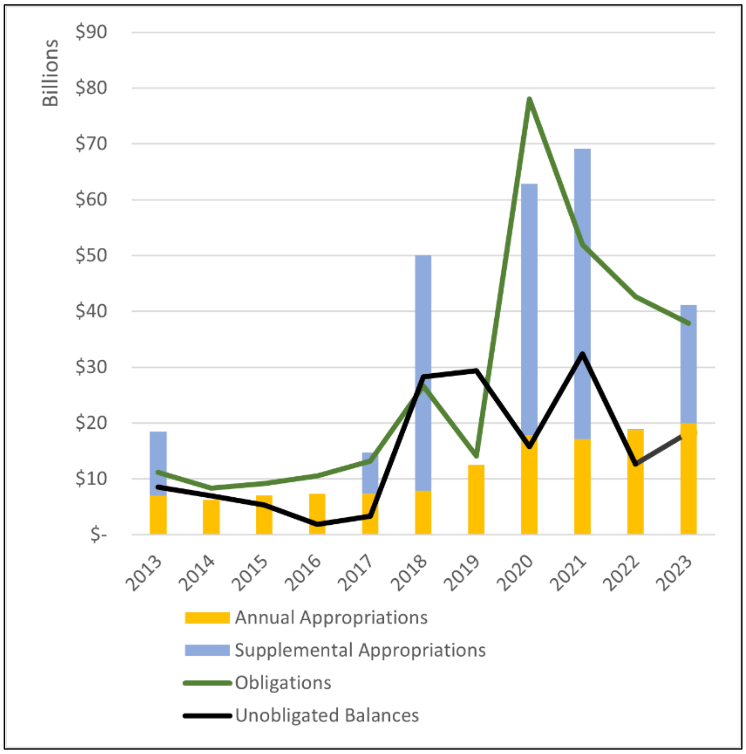
[17] P.L. 117-180, Division A, §135.

DRF Funding and Obligation Levels

Over the last 10 years, the amount of budget authority appropriated to the DRF has risen substantially, as has the amount obligated from each year.

Figure 2 and **Table 1** provide a visual representation and specific data regarding the gross budget authority provided in annual and supplemental appropriations to the DRF.

Figure 2. DRF Appropriations, Obligations, and Balances, FY2013-FY2023



Source: See **Table 1**.

Notes: All but the final data points represent end of year totals. All data reflects both the "major disasters" and "base" portions of the DRF. "Obligations" reflect obligations at the closeout of the fiscal year, and do not reflect potential future deobligations (recoveries). The final data for obligations and unobligated balances are pending adjustments from closeout of FY2023 FEMA records.

Table 1. DRF Appropriations, Obligations, and Balances, FY2013-Present

(in millions of dollars of budget authority)

Fiscal Year	Annual Appropriations	Supplemental Appropriations	Obligations	Unobligated Balances
2013	7,008	11,488	11,146	8,492
2014	6,221	—	8,368	6,978
2015	7,033	—	9,170	5,317
2016	7,375	—	10,536	1,819
2017	7,329	7,400	13,149	3,302
2018	7,901	42,170	26,650	28,285

Fiscal Year	Annual Appropriations	Supplemental Appropriations	Obligations	Unobligated Balances
2019	12,558	—	14,088	29,358
2020	17,863	45,000	78,039	15,792
2021	17,142	52,000	51,924	32,364
2022	18,799	200	42,683	12,624
2023	19,945	21,200	*37,877*	*19,277*

Source: CRS analysis of appropriations legislation and Appendix A of FEMA monthly reports on the DRF.

Notes: All data represent end-of-year totals and reflect both the "major disasters" and "base" portions of the DRF. "Obligations" reflect obligations at the closeout of the fiscal year, and do not reflect potential future deobligations (recoveries). Data in italics for obligations and unobligated balances are pending adjustments from closeout of FY2023 FEMA records.

When the DRF Runs Low

At times, the balance in the DRF has dropped to a point that raises concern about the availability of adequate resources in the DRF to address current and/or impending incidents. When this occurs, FEMA implements "Immediate Needs Funding" (INF) restrictions, which allow FEMA to prioritize, to an extent, obligation of funds from the DRF, limiting them to "life-safety and life sustaining efforts."

On August 29, 2023, FEMA announced the implementation of INF restrictions, noting that while FEMA "had intended to provide ten full days [sic] notice, the current disaster environment with a major fire and multiple hurricanes make it necessary to implement INF immediately."[18] The unobligated balance in the DRF was $3.4 billion that morning.

FEMA indicated that it would pause new Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation obligations that are not essential for lifesaving and life-sustaining activities. It further indicated that it would continue

- Individual Assistance payments directly to survivors for critical needs and housing;
- Public Assistance for states, tribes and territories essential for lifesaving and life-sustaining activities;
- State management costs;
- Mission assignments of federal partners for critical response activities;
- Fire Management Assistance grants; and
- Essential ongoing disaster operations, including salaries of FEMA field staff (Stafford Act employees).[19]

On October 2, 2023, after enactment of a continuing resolution[20] that provided up to $19.95 billion in temporary budget authority for the DRF through November 17, 2023, and a $16 billion

[18] FEMA, "FEMA Advisory: FEMA Announces Implementation of Immediate Needs Funding," Office of External Affairs email, August 29, 2003.

[19] FEMA, "Immediate Needs Funding Fact Sheet," Office of External Affairs email attachment, August 29, 2003.

[20] P.L. 118-15.

supplemental appropriation ($15.50 billion for the costs of major disasters, and $500 million for the DRF base), FEMA announced the suspension of the INF restriction.[21]

Prior to 2023, the most recent example of the implementation of INF restrictions was in August 2017, when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, and Hurricane Irma was anticipated to strike U.S. interests. FEMA initiated INF restrictions on August 28, 2017, as the unobligated balance in the DRF fell below $2.8 billion in the middle of responses to multiple major disasters. FEMA lifted the INF restrictions on October 2, 2017, when the DRF was replenished by a $7.4 billion supplemental enacted on September 8, 2017,[22] and by the release of additional budget authority pursuant to a continuing resolution.[23]

Prior to that implementation, INF restrictions were put into place seven times: each year from 2003 through 2006, as well as each year from 2009 through 2011.[24] After FY2011, when the DRF came very close to depletion, FEMA changed the internal processes of obligation from the DRF, to maintain unobligated balances longer over the course of regular operations.[25]

FEMA indicated in recent years that BRIC mitigation funding could be redirected to help cover the immediate response and recovery needs pursuant to major disasters once the major disasters subaccount is otherwise depleted.[26] The mitigation funding set-aside has never been actually used in this way before.[27]

Why Did the DRF Run Low in FY2023?

FEMA uses a combination of cost estimates from past (catastrophic and non-catastrophic) disasters where recovery is ongoing, and a 10-year rolling average of non-catastrophic disaster obligations to develop the budget request for the "major disasters" element of the DRF. It does not include funding for any new catastrophic incidents, although in recent years it has included a reserve for initial response to a "significant event."[28]

The amount of time from request to enactment, the fact that new catastrophic incidents are not included, and the reliance on past performance rather than future modeling all contribute to an increased likelihood of annual appropriations action underfunding the DRF.

Issues of Timing

The Administration releases its budget request, following the statutory model, about eight months prior to the start of the fiscal year it funds. The final deadline for agencies to provide new information for the request is approximately one month prior to the budget release. The

---

[21] FEMA, "Continuing Resolution Allows FEMA to Lift Restrictions on Disaster Relief Funding," October 3, 2023, press release (FEMA Release Number HQ-23-205), https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20231003/continuing-resolution-allows-fema-lift-restrictions-disaster-relief-funding.

[22] P.L. 115-56, Division B.

[23] P.L. 115-56, Division D, §129.

[24] FEMA, "Immediate Needs Funding Fact Sheet," Office of External Affairs email attachment, August 29, 2023.

[25] This reformed approach, known as Strategic Funds Management, obligates certain recovery projects costing more than $1 million on a rolling basis. For details, see FEMA, "Recovery Standard Operating Procedure 9570.24: Strategic Funds Management – Implementation Procedures for the Public Assistance Program," December 21, 2012, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_9570.24_startegic-funds-mgmt_SOP_12-21-2012.pdf.

[26] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of August 31, 2023*, September 11, 2023, p. 4, footnote 3.

[27] According to FEMA, there was roughly $4.4 billion of available mitigation funding as of the end of August 2023.

[28] In the FY2024 request, there was a $2 billion reserve for catastrophic incidents, and $1 billion for BRIC mitigation funding.

subsequent nine months involve disasters—and FEMA response efforts—that may not have been covered by the projected levels of activity in FEMA's annual appropriations request.

The focus of the budget request and appropriations process on a single fiscal year also contributes to complications in ensuring adequate DRF funding. Disaster recovery and mitigation efforts often involve evolving multi-year projects, and the timing of those projects may shift for a variety of reasons. This sometimes results in projected obligations shifting into another fiscal year. When focusing on a single year, it may therefore appear that an incident has become more or less expensive, when only an alteration in the schedule of obligations has been made.

Issues of Catastrophic Incidents

The major driver of obligations from the DRF is spending related to catastrophic disasters (i.e., those that cost the DRF more than $500 million each). The annual budget request omits any requirements for potential catastrophic disasters that may occur in the fiscal year the request covers. It also does not include the requirements of any catastrophic disasters that have already occurred (or will occur) in the active fiscal year—when the request was made and being considered.[29] For example, the most recent catastrophic event covered in the FY2024 budget request was Hurricane Ian, which hit the United States in late September 2022. The needs associated with the wildfires in Hawaii and Hurricane Idalia were not included, nor were any catastrophic incidents that may occur in FY2024. Given the practical inability to include these increasingly common costly events in a budget request, a shortfall in the account in any given year even if the request is funded is highly likely. Thus, FEMA notes in describing its funding requirements for the DRF that addressing needs associated with catastrophic disasters in the active fiscal year or the fiscal year covered by the request will require supplemental appropriations.[30]

For the costs of catastrophic disasters that are included in the request, the cost estimations upon which the request is based are sometimes less than reflective of future obligations. Such projected costs are developed from cost estimates, which are in turn developed "from the bottom up" by state and local governments—these are included in FEMA's funding requirement statement for the DRF. Readers can track these estimates by declaration within each catastrophic incident. When compared to information on the actual and estimated obligations in FEMA's monthly reporting, significant variances from the original estimate can be noted, even from month to month. An extreme example of this can be seen with the COVID-19 estimates discussed below.

The FY2023 Case Study

The Administration requested $19.74 billion for the costs of major disasters in FY2023. When FY2023 began, however, FEMA's monthly DRF reporting anticipated—with $18.8 billion of continuing appropriations available—exhaustion of the major disasters subaccount of the DRF in June, and a shortfall in that account of almost $12.2 billion by the end of the fiscal year.[31]

---

[29] Based on FEMA reporting on the formulation of the DRF budget request, this has been the case since at least the FY2019 annual appropriations cycle.

[30] For example, while it is not directly stated in the FY2024 budget justification, in separate reporting to Congress on the FY2024 budget request, FEMA states that "As in prior years, the budget assumes that future catastrophic events during the budget year will be funded separately with emergency supplemental appropriations." FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Fiscal Year 2024 Funding Requirements,* March 13, 2023, p. 4.

[31] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of October 31, 2022*, November 8, 2023, p. 4. DRF monthly reports are available at https://www.fema.gov/about/reports-and-data/disaster-relief-fund-monthly-reports.

Almost three months into the fiscal year, Congress not only provided $205 million more than had been initially requested in disaster relief-designated funding in the annual appropriations measure, it also provided $5 billion in emergency-designated supplemental appropriations in Division N of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023.[32] At the end of December 2022, FEMA's monthly reporting—with almost $25 billion in annual and supplemental appropriations available for FY2023—anticipated exhaustion of the major disasters subaccount of the DRF in July, and a shortfall in that account of more than $12.1 billion by the end of the fiscal year.[33]

Part of the reason for the gap's persistence had to do with projections for obligations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. States and FEMA have struggled to accurately project obligation needs for this novel incident. As noted above, FEMA relies on cost estimates and spend plans for each state to build its overall projection of need. The initial projection for COVID-19 DRF obligations (based on compiled declaration-by-declaration cost estimates) from the FY2023 budget request was $8.7 billion. The initial projection for FY2023, based on compiled spend plans, was close to $19.3 billion—$10.6 billion more than the original projection. Over the course of the fiscal year, the projection rose as high as $25.2 billion in projected obligations.[34] At the end of FY2023, after project delays associated with shortages in the DRF (discussed in the last paragraph of this section), actual obligations for COVID-19 for the fiscal year stood at $15.15 billion—still almost $6.5 billion above the projection used in developing the budget justification.[35]

In addition, new catastrophic disasters not included in the request continued to present costs. Three catastrophic incidents occurred in FY2022, but had not been included in the FY2023 request. Hurricanes Ida, Fiona, and Ian had already incurred $5.61 billion in unanticipated obligations in FY2022, and resulted in $8.51 billion in unrequested obligations in FY2023. The wildfires in Hawaii and Hurricane Idalia, declared less than two months before the end of FY2023, incurred more than $1.5 billion in combined obligations from the DRF in the closing weeks of the fiscal year. That totals $16.62 billion in total unanticipated obligations for catastrophic disasters, more than $10 billion of which were incurred in FY2023.

As of the end of August, 2023, FEMA projected exhaustion of the major disasters subaccount of the DRF by the end of September 2023, with the exception of a reserve for catastrophic incidents of $2.449 billion.[36] FEMA had restricted obligations for major disasters effective August 29, 2023, and estimated this "Immediate Needs Funding (INF) restriction" would delay $8 billion of obligations that would have occurred before the end of FY2023,[37] including

- $2.5 billion associated with Hurricane Maria;
- $4.5 billion associated with COVID-19 pandemic response;
- $272 million associated with Hurricane Ida;
- $265 million associated with Hurricane Ian; and
- $104 million associated with Hurricane Laura.[38]

---

[32] P.L. 117-328.

[33] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of December 31, 2022*, January 11, 2023, p. 4.

[34] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of April 30, 2023*, May 3, 2023, p. 7.

[35] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of September 30, 2023*, October 6, 2023, p. 7.

[36] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of July 31, 2023*, August 8, 2023, p. 16.

[37] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of August 31, 2023*, September 11, 2023, p. 4, footnote 7.

[38] FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of August 31, 2023*, September 11, 2023, pp. 18-20.

Looking Ahead to FY2024

On June 21 and July 27, 2023, respectively, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees marked up annual appropriations legislation for the Department of Homeland Security for FY2024, including $20.26 billion for the major disasters subaccount of the DRF. The House bill included $145 million for the DRF base, while the Senate bill did not include any funding for the DRF base.

On September 30, 2023, H.R. 5860—a continuing resolution providing temporary continuing appropriations through November 17, 2023—passed the House and Senate and was signed into law as P.L. 118-15. This continuing resolution replenished the DRF in two ways:

1. The bill included a $16 billion supplemental appropriation for the DRF—$15.5 billion for major disasters and $500 million for the DRF base ($2 million of which was to be transferred to the DHS Office of Inspector General for oversight).
2. The bill also allowed the DRF to receive an apportionment up to the rate for operations necessary to fund response and recovery activities under the Stafford Act, thus making available up to $19.95 billion in temporary budget authority. This temporary budget authority is available through November 17, 2023, or until the DHS Appropriations Act, 2024 is enacted, whereupon any spending of that temporary budget authority would be charged against the FY2024 annual appropriation for the DRF.

FEMA's initial summary of FY2023 DRF obligations[39] indicated that at the end of FY2023, the DRF had $2.56 billion in unobligated balances for assistance pursuant to major disaster declarations remaining, and $716 million in the DRF base—not counting the supplemental appropriation included in P.L. 118-15 (which was technically enacted in FY2023).

That supplemental appropriation—at least the $15.5 billion designated for major disasters—is available to address the estimated $8 billion in disaster relief costs delayed under INF restrictions, as well as the costs of the two catastrophic disasters that occurred in FY2023 that were not accounted for in the FY2024 budget request as well as ongoing and future major disasters. With the availability of additional resources, as noted above, INF restrictions were lifted on October 2, 2023.

Author Information

William L. Painter
Specialist in Homeland Security and Appropriations

[39] Pending adjustments from the FY2023 fiscal closeout over the next two months.

Disclaimer