

Disaster Assistance

How much does it actually cost the federal government?

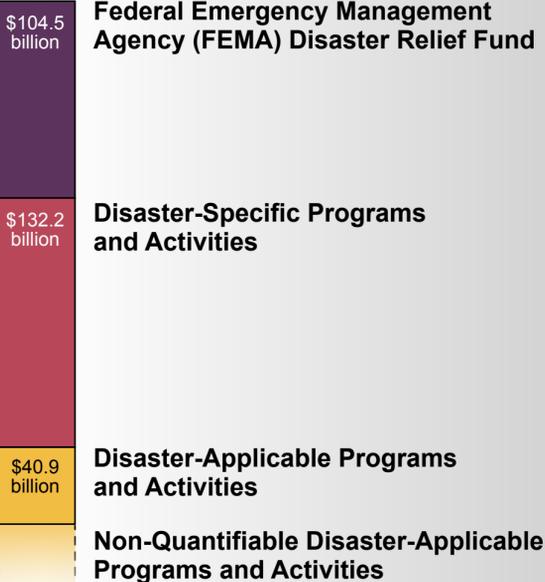
AN OVERVIEW OF GAO-16-797

What does disaster assistance spending look like?

The federal government spent at least

\$277.6 billion

during fiscal years 2005 through 2014 for disaster assistance.



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data and federal department and agency responses to GAO's data collection instrument.

This is across 17 federal departments and agencies:

Total Obligations During Fiscal Years 2005 Through 2014 (Dollars in Thousands)			
Federal department	Total obligations	Federal department	Total obligations
Department of Agriculture	\$50,200,291	Department of the Interior	\$3,534,454
Department of Commerce	\$2,486,283	Department of Justice	\$50,330
Department of Defense	\$10,787,829	Department of Labor	\$961,017
Department of Education	\$247,021	Department of Transportation	\$15,629,611
Department of Energy	\$48,298	Department of the Treasury	\$12,769
Department of Health and Human Services	\$8,832,302	Department of Veterans Affairs	\$59,001
Department of Homeland Security*	\$145,641,028	Environmental Protection Agency	\$3,569,075
Department of Housing and Urban Development	\$30,631,135	General Services Administration	\$18,745
		Small Business Administration	\$4,935,171
Total			\$277,644,360

*Includes obligations from FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. Note: Obligations reported for some disaster assistance programs and activities contain estimates. Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data and federal department and agency responses to GAO's data collection instrument.

Not all disaster assistance spending can be quantified.

The estimate of \$277.6 billion represents a minimum and not the total amount of disaster assistance because relevant obligations for some programs and activities are not separately tracked or are not available.

For example, costs associated with the U.S. Coast Guard's response to disaster and emergency events are funded by its search and rescue appropriation and are not separately tracked.



Our report contains a detailed look at each agency's disaster assistance obligations and expenditures.

Which disasters receive assistance?

The federal government provides assistance before and after disasters



to mitigate their impact and when the damage is severe and extensive enough to warrant it

or



when assistance is needed to supplement the efforts and resources of states, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating:

- damage
- loss
- hardship
- suffering

Our analysis looked at both



Stafford Act Disasters: Presidentially-declared major disaster or emergency

and



Non-Stafford Act Disasters: did not receive a Stafford Act declaration

Some examples:



Disease or pandemic outbreaks, such as H1N1 "swine flu" (2009)



Droughts in California and Oregon (2014-15)
Secretary of Agriculture declared disasters



Wildfires in Colorado and Oklahoma (2011-13)



Earthquakes in Washington D.C. and Virginia (2011)



Surge of unaccompanied migrant children along the Southwest border (2014)



Hurricanes Katrina (2005) and Sandy (2012)



Ammonium nitrate explosion in McLennan County, Texas (2013)



Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010)

What type of assistance?

We examined federal programs and activities that



These activities include:

Financial

and

Non-Financial



grants



loans



insurance programs



technical assistance



public health



environmental cleanup

We divided the assistance into three categories:

FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund (DRF)

The primary source of federal disaster recovery assistance, used for Stafford Act disasters



This "rainy day fund" allows FEMA to fund disaster assistance in many ways when a disaster is declared.

Through one method, called Mission Assignments, FEMA assigns disaster recovery duties to other agencies, and can use funds from DRF to reimburse them.

Mission Assignment Example:

Assigned Department: Department of Defense (DOD)

Programs: FEMA assigns DOD agencies various duties in response to a Stafford Act declaration, including emergency route clearance, airspace control, and deployable temporary medical facilities.



and

Disaster-Specific Programs

Specifically authorized for disaster assistance purposes

Example:

Department: Department of Housing and Urban Development

Program: Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program

Purpose: Provides grants to help cities, parishes, and states recover from presidentially declared disasters.



and

Disaster-Applicable Programs

Not specifically designated for disaster or emergency situations

Example:

Department: Department of Health and Human Services

Program: National Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program

Purpose: Provides funding to public health divisions in states and cities to save lives during emergencies that exceed day-to-day capacity of the health and emergency response systems.



LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

See GAO-16-797 at GAO.GOV

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