

Highlights of [GAO-25-107384](#), a report to congressional requesters.

Why This Matters

Tornadoes claim more lives annually in the U.S. than hurricanes and earthquakes combined. In 2024, there were more than 2,100 tornadoes in the U.S., the highest annual total on record dating back to 1950. FEMA helps tornado survivors and communities through a variety of programs.

GAO Key Takeaways

The President approved 94 major disaster declarations involving tornadoes, in fiscal years 2019 through 2024. For those disasters, FEMA obligated \$2.8 billion for Public Assistance and the Individuals and Households Program, as of December 2024.

FEMA also assists tribal, state, local, and territorial governments through its Emergency Management Performance Grant program. This program is the primary source of federal support for developing and maintaining emergency management expertise. It pays for salaries and provides resources related to hazard preparation.

Per statute, only states and territories are eligible to receive Emergency Management Performance Grant awards directly from FEMA; Tribes are not eligible to apply directly. States may distribute grant awards to local governments and Tribes.

From fiscal years 2014 through 2023, 17 states did not distribute any awards to Tribes within their state.

When communities cannot access assistance to build emergency management capacity, it could mean not being able to plan and prepare for a disaster, such as a tornado.

In April 2023, FEMA submitted a legislative proposal to Congress outlining several possible solutions that would enable Tribes to more easily access this funding. Congress has not yet acted on FEMA's legislative proposal, as of August 2025.

A Home in Nebraska Damaged by a Tornado in April 2024



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107384

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed FEMA data on tornado disasters from 2019 through 2024. We also visited four states, and interviewed emergency management officials from seven counties and two Tribes impacted by tornadoes during that span.

What GAO Recommends

We are recommending that Congress consider creating a new program or amending an existing program to provide grants directly to tribal governments to build emergency management capacity. We are also making three recommendations to FEMA to improve access to assistance. FEMA concurred with the recommendations.

For more information, contact Chris Currie at curriec@gao.gov.