

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT FEDERAL ASSISTANCE FOR SNOWSTORMS

February 19, 2010

Q. My community has received federal aid for snow emergencies in the past. Will we be able to get aid for this season?

- A. In November 2009, FEMA revised the criteria for receiving assistance for snowstorms. FEMA has directed that federal assistance be authorized for storms that produce record snowfalls or otherwise cause an extreme hardship to the community. FEMA will consider the following factors when evaluating aid requests for snowstorms:
1. A "record or near-record" snowfall event has occurred in the county.
 2. The costs to the county municipalities for snow removal operations during a continuous 48-hour period, in addition to any other costs for Category B, Emergency Protective Measures, exceed the county per capita threshold of \$3.23. The formula to determine per capita cost is: Total Eligible Expenses ÷ County Population Reported in the 2000 Census = the Per Capita Cost.
 3. The total costs of all counties meeting both #1 and #2 above must exceed the state threshold of \$15.9 million.

Q. Commonwealth agencies assisted my county and my community with plowing and other activities. Who collects the costs incurred by these agencies in support of my county and municipality?

- A. PEMA is responsible for the collection of this data and ensuring that it is added to your county's costs before determining the per capita expenditures for your county.

Q. Who determines if my municipality is eligible for reimbursement of costs incurred as a result of the snow?

- A. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will make a recommendation to the President regarding which counties should be eligible for reimbursement for snow costs. If the President declares the county eligible, all municipalities in the county would be eligible for reimbursement by FEMA.

Q. How can I tell if my county experienced a record or near-record snowfall?

- A. FEMA recognizes snowfall amounts measured at National Weather Service (NWS) Airport Stations and Cooperative Observation Program (COOP) Network Stations. The NWS reports this data to the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), which in turn archives and publishes it as official data. The NCDC also maintains a historic record of one-day, two-day, and three-day snowfall events for reporting stations within a county. The current event snowfall amounts are compared against the station with the "Highest" historical record within the county. Daily and cumulative snowfall totals for the event in question must be compared to the historic record snowfall over the same time period. For example, if the current event snowfall occurs over one day, the snowfall for that day is compared to the one-day historic record snowfall. If snow falls over two days, then the cumulative total for those two days is compared to the two-day historic record snowfall, or the day with the highest snowfall can be compared to the one-day historic record, and the same would apply for a three-day event. Snowfall may occur over a

time period of 24-hours or less, but will still be considered a two-day snowfall if the snowfall accumulations occur during two 24-hour observing periods. Observing periods for snow measurements are from 7:00 a.m. through 7:00 a.m. Snowfall within 10 percent of the historic record amount is considered a "near-record" snowfall. Counties receiving a record or near record snowfall are considered "core" counties.

Q. How do I obtain historic snowfall data?

A. Historical record snowfall data is provided by the NCDC at:

http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/ussc/USSCAppController?action=station_select_countysf&state=36

Q. Where do I find official daily snowfall amounts for a recent storm?

A. The NCDC provides current daily snowfall totals reported by the NWS Stations at:

<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/snow-and-ice/dly-data.php>.

Q. The county next to me had a record snow and my county exceeded their snowfall but the snow did not exceed my county's record snowfall. Is there any assistance for my county?

A. Yes, a county that shares a common border with a "core" county and had a snowfall equal to or greater than the core county is a "contiguous" county and is also considered to have had a record or near-record snowfall. The contiguous county must then have costs that exceed its per capita threshold.

Q. My county does not qualify as a core or contiguous county but experienced significant damages and costs. Is there any assistance for my county?

A. Yes, under a "Severe Winter Storm" you are not required to meet the record or near-record requirements. A Severe Winter Storm is an event that occurs during the winter season that includes one or more of the following: snow, ice, high winds, blizzard conditions, and other wintry conditions; and that causes substantial physical damage or loss to improved property. A request for a Severe Winter Storm will provide reimbursement for a limited level of snow removal incidental to disaster response and recovery operations. Generally, snow removal that is necessary to perform otherwise eligible emergency work is eligible. For example, snow removal necessary to access debris or to repair downed power line is eligible, while normal clearance of snow from roads is not eligible. Under this type of request, the county per capita threshold requirement must be met but the record or near-record requirement does not.

Q. Why doesn't FEMA provide assistance automatically whenever there is a major snow event? This season's snowfall is already costing us a lot of money.

A. FEMA's policy is that state and local governments bear the primary responsibility for responding to emergencies. Federal assistance is supplementary and is appropriate only when an event is of such severity and magnitude that response requirements exceed state and local capabilities.

Q. There were counties that had snow operations going on, but did not have a record snowfall. Will these costs count toward the statewide per capita?

A. No, as stated in the policy, "each county included in a Governor's request for a declaration must have a record or near record snowfall; meet the contiguous county criteria described in this policy; **and** have estimated public assistance costs including

snow assistance costs within a 48-hour period that equal or exceed the county per capita cost threshold required for a major disaster declaration.”

Q. What is the reporting process for costs incurred under a disaster?

- A. Townships, boroughs, cities, and towns should compile their data and report the information to their county Emergency Management Coordinator, who will then enter the information into the PEMA on-line Damage Reporter.

Q. What costs would be eligible for reimbursement because of a disaster declaration by the federal government?

- A. The following costs associated with snow removal operations during the selected 48-hour period would be reimbursable:
- Overtime costs of permanent municipal employees (including benefits).
 - Regular and overtime for part-time/temporary/called-in employees.
 - Hourly equipment costs for equipment you own.
 - Costs of renting special equipment.
 - Costs for materials.
 - Costs for contracted services (privately owned plows, loaders, dump trucks, etc.).

Additionally, all of your costs for the other types of Emergency Protective Measures that may have been performed are eligible. Other types of Emergency Protective Measures include:

- Over-time costs for EOC operations.
- Warning of risks and hazards.
- Search and rescue.
- Security forces (police and guards) in the disaster area.
- Provision of shelters and emergency mass care.
- Provision of emergency medical care.
- Cost-effective measures by a state or local government to prevent damage to a public or private facility
- Cost effective measures by an eligible public non-profit organization to prevent damage to eligible facilities.

Q. If my county is eligible for reimbursement due to the record snow, can I claim all of the costs for the entire response and recovery period?

- A. No, for snow removal operations you will have to select a continuous 48-hour period and claim the expenses incurred during that period. Other costs relating to Emergency Protective Measures can be claimed for the entire incident period.

Q. Where can I find the FEMA Snow Policy?

- A. The revised FEMA Snow Assistance and Severe Winter Storm Policy, 9523.1, can be found at http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/9523_1.shtm.