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Major Disaster Assistance from the Disaster Relief Fund: State Profiles

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Summary

The costs associated with providing assistance following a major disaster can be considerable. The agency with the primary responsibility for this relief is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Through the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), FEMA is able to finance relief for all major disasters that are declared by the President. These declarations have occurred in every state since FY2000, with obligations for each incident ranging from a few hundred thousand dollars to more than \$30 billion.

DRF obligation data provided by FEMA demonstrates a number of important points. First, there is considerable variation in federal spending for major disasters from one year to the next, regardless of the number of declarations. Second, the majority of DRF obligations are used to finance approved expenses under the Public Assistance (PA) program, which include debris removal operations and the repair and replacement of infrastructure. Third, compared to expenditures for other declarations, major disasters continue to be the largest source of DRF obligations each year.

The report below outlines the trend in DRF obligations for both the national and state level for the period FY2000 through FY2013. Linked to this report are individual profiles for each state. This report also includes additional resources and key policy staff that can provide more information on the programs that are discussed.

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Overview

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288) authorizes the President to declare major disasters and emergencies in response to incidents that overwhelm the capabilities of states, tribes, and local governments and therefore require federal assistance. The primary source of funding for federal assistance following an incident is the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which is managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This fund provides assistance as a result of major disaster declarations, emergency declarations, and Fire Management Assistance Grants. Major disaster declarations historically account for the vast majority of obligations from the DRF.

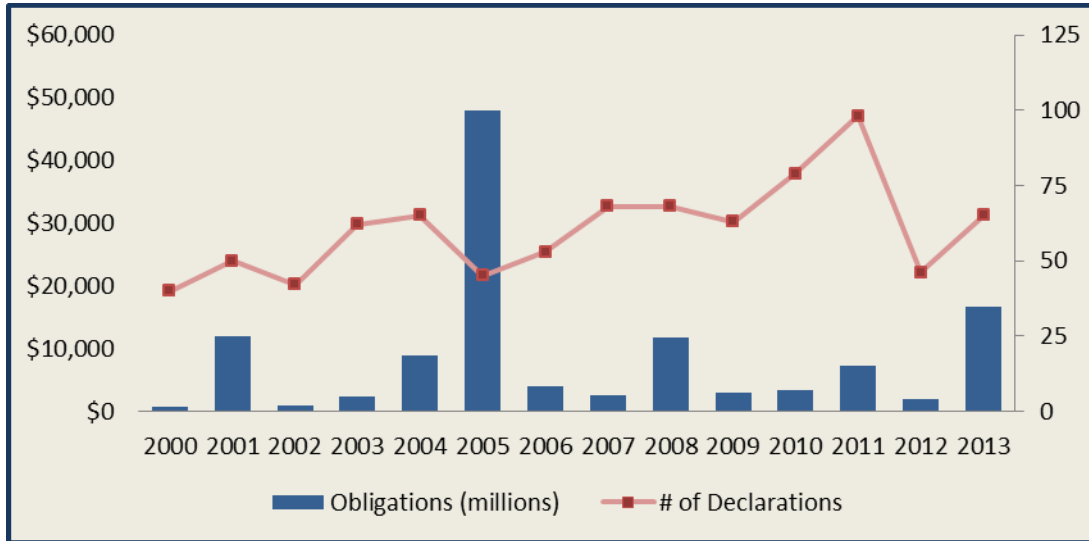
In addition to providing a national overview, this report also includes a summary of DRF obligations for each individual state. Information is also provided on the types of assistance that are available for major disasters and other assistance that is financed through the Disaster Relief Fund. For each individual state, there is information on significant incidents within the state during this period, impacted localities, and a summary of total assistance received for major disaster declarations. Additional CRS resources that address these issues are included below. The electronic version of this report includes a summary of DRF obligations at the national level and links to the individual CRS reports on each of the states.

Many other federal programs provide assistance following a major disaster and are not funded through the DRF. While the specific agencies and programs will vary from one disaster to another, an overview of selected programs can be found in CRS Report R42845, *Federal Emergency Management: A Brief Introduction*, coordinated by (name redacted).

Major Disaster Declarations: FY2000-FY2013

A total of 844 major disasters were declared between FY2000 and FY2013. These declarations resulted in \$123.2 billion in total obligations from the DRF. The highest single year was FY2005, when nearly \$48 billion was obligated. Most of these funds were for states in the gulf region following Hurricane Katrina. **Figure 1** displays the total obligations per fiscal year across the country.

Figure 1. Disaster Relief Fund Obligations for Major Disasters, FY2000-FY2013
(Amounts in millions of dollars)



Source: CRS analysis of FEMA obligation data. Data includes projected obligations as well as actual obligations.

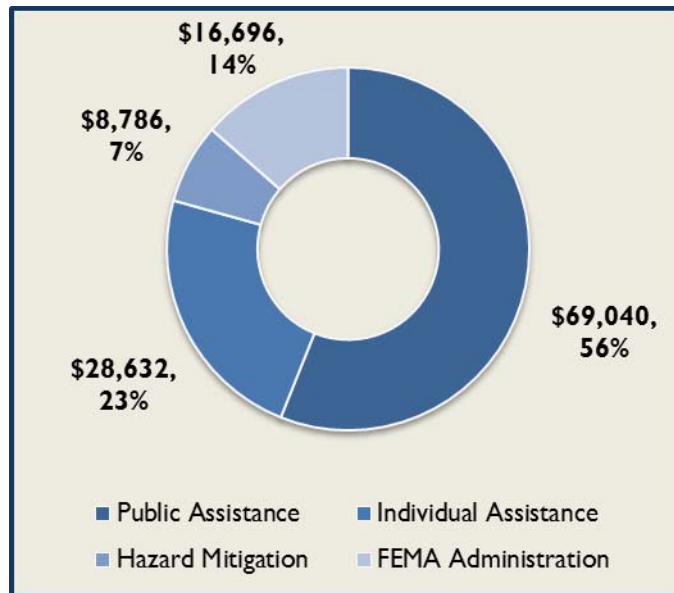
Types of Assistance Provided for Major Disasters

A major disaster declaration can include funding for different purposes, depending on the needs of the state. These purposes include:

- Public Assistance (PA) that is used to conduct debris removal operations, repair or replace damaged public infrastructure, and other assistance;
- Individual Assistance (IA) that provides direct aid to impacted households, and other assistance;
- Hazard Mitigation (HM) that funds resilience projects and programs, typically across the whole state; and
- FEMA administrative costs associated with each disaster declaration. This amount includes the costs of temporary hires, facilities, travel, and training associated with specific disasters.

The decision to provide certain types of assistance is made at the time of the major disaster declaration. For many major disasters, both public assistance and individual assistance will be provided. For others, only one of these may be included. In almost all cases, funds are available for hazard mitigation activities. **Figure 2** below compares the total amounts obligated for each of these activities between FY2000 and FY2013.

Figure 2. Major Disaster Obligations by Assistance Type, FY2000-FY2013
(Amounts in millions of dollars)



Source: CRS analysis of FEMA obligation data. Data includes projected obligations as well as actual obligations.

Other Assistance Provided by the Disaster Relief Fund

In addition to the major disasters listed above, other forms of assistance are also funded through the Disaster Relief Fund. These include both emergency declarations and Fire Management Assistance Grants. The assistance provided for these declarations typically involves lower obligation levels than major disaster declarations, although there is significant variation across incidents.

Emergency Declarations are often made at the time a threat is recognized and are issued to assist state, local, and tribal efforts prior to the incident. For the period FY2000 through FY2013, total obligations for emergency declarations were \$2.4 billion.

Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs) are issued to provide aid related to the control, management, and mitigation of fires. Total obligations for FMAGs from FY2000 through FY2013 were slightly higher than \$1.0 billion, with nearly the entire total obligated for public assistance.

Additional Resources

Many existing CRS products address issues related to the Disaster Relief Fund, the disaster declaration process, and federal emergency management policy. Below is a list of several of these resources:

- CRS Report R41981, *Congressional Primer on Responding to Major Disasters and Emergencies*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted);
- CRS Report R43519, *Natural Disasters and Hazards: CRS Experts*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted);
- CRS Report RL34146, *FEMA’s Disaster Declaration Process: A Primer*, by (name redacted);
- CRS Report R42845, *Federal Emergency Management: A Brief Introduction*, coordinated by (name redacted);
- CRS Report R43537, *FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund: Overview and Selected Issues*, by (name redacted);
- CRS Report RL33053, *Federal Stafford Act Disaster Assistance: Presidential Declarations, Eligible Activities, and Funding*, by (name redacted).

FEMA is also responsible for administering the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). More information on whether a community participates in this program can be found in the NFIP Community Status Book, <https://www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program/national-flood-insurance-program-community-status-book>.

Table I. Major Disaster DRF Assistance: State Profiles

Data includes declarations between FY2000 and FY2013

State	Profile
Alabama	CRS In Focus IF10058, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Alabama</i>
Alaska	CRS In Focus IF10059, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Alaska</i>
Arizona	CRS In Focus IF10060, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Arizona</i>
Arkansas	CRS In Focus IF10061, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Arkansas</i>
California	CRS In Focus IF10062, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: California</i>
Colorado	CRS In Focus IF10063, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Colorado</i>
Connecticut	CRS In Focus IF10064, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Connecticut</i>
Delaware	CRS In Focus IF10065, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Delaware</i>
District of Columbia	CRS In Focus IF10066, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: District of Columbia</i>
Florida	CRS In Focus IF10067, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Florida</i>
Georgia	CRS In Focus IF10068, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Georgia</i>
Hawaii	CRS In Focus IF10069, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Hawaii</i>
Idaho	CRS In Focus IF10070, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Idaho</i>
Illinois	CRS In Focus IF10071, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Illinois</i>
Indiana	CRS In Focus IF10072, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Indiana</i>
Iowa	CRS In Focus IF10073, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Iowa</i>
Kansas	CRS In Focus IF10074, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Kansas</i>
Kentucky	CRS In Focus IF10075, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Kentucky</i>
Louisiana	CRS In Focus IF10076, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Louisiana</i>

State	Profile
Maine	CRS In Focus IF10077, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Maine</i>
Maryland	CRS In Focus IF10078, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Maryland</i>
Massachusetts	CRS In Focus IF10079, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Massachusetts</i>
Michigan	CRS In Focus IF10080, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Michigan</i>
Minnesota	CRS In Focus IF10081, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Minnesota</i>
Mississippi	CRS In Focus IF10082, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Mississippi</i>
Missouri	CRS In Focus IF10083, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Missouri</i>
Montana	CRS In Focus IF10084, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Montana</i>
Nebraska	CRS In Focus IF10085, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Nebraska</i>
Nevada	CRS In Focus IF10086, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Nevada</i>
New Hampshire	CRS In Focus IF10087, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: New Hampshire</i>
New Jersey	CRS In Focus IF10088, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: New Jersey</i>
New Mexico	CRS In Focus IF10089, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: New Mexico</i>
New York	CRS In Focus IF10090, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: New York</i>
North Carolina	CRS In Focus IF10091, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: North Carolina</i>
North Dakota	CRS In Focus IF10092, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: North Dakota</i>
Ohio	CRS In Focus IF10093, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Ohio</i>
Oklahoma	CRS In Focus IF10094, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Oklahoma</i>
Oregon	CRS In Focus IF10095, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Oregon</i>
Pennsylvania	CRS In Focus IF10096, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Pennsylvania</i>
Rhode Island	CRS In Focus IF10097, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Rhode Island</i>
South Carolina	CRS In Focus IF10098, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: South Carolina</i>
South Dakota	CRS In Focus IF10099, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: South Dakota</i>
Tennessee	CRS In Focus IF10100, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Tennessee</i>
Texas	CRS In Focus IF10101, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Texas</i>
Utah	CRS In Focus IF10102, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Utah</i>
Vermont	CRS In Focus IF10103, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Vermont</i>
Virginia	CRS In Focus IF10104, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Virginia</i>
Washington	CRS In Focus IF10105, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Washington</i>
West Virginia	CRS In Focus IF10106, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: West Virginia</i>
Wisconsin	CRS In Focus IF10107, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Wisconsin</i>
Wyoming	CRS In Focus IF10108, <i>FEMA DRF Major Disaster Assistance: Wyoming</i>

Source: CRS Analysis of FEMA obligation data.

Notes: Data on major disaster obligations in the territories has been excluded due to differences in program implementation. Additional information on these obligations is available upon request.

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Acknowledgments

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