



2026 Winter Storm Fern: A Brief Overview of FEMA Programs and Resources

January 26, 2026

Introduction

On Friday, January 23, and continuing into Monday, January 26, **Winter Storm Fern**, a **major winter storm**, brought heavy snow, sleet, and freezing rain, as well as dangerously cold temperatures and wind chills to multiple states, ranging from the southern plains to the eastern United States. Southern states, including Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, experienced **power outages** as a result of ice and downed trees. A band of states from New Mexico to New England experienced **significant snowfall**, and **sleet** accumulated in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. **Extremely cold temperatures** are forecast for most of the country through the next several days.

Beginning on January 23, President Trump began issuing **emergency declarations**, to include the following:

- Arkansas ([EM-3636](#))
- Georgia ([EM-3642](#))
- Indiana ([EM-3641](#))
- Kentucky ([EM-3633](#))
- Louisiana ([EM-3638](#))
- Maryland ([EM-3634](#))
- Mississippi ([EM-3640](#))
- North Carolina ([EM-3637](#))
- South Carolina ([EM-3632](#))
- Tennessee ([EM-3635](#))
- Virginia ([EM-3631](#))
- West Virginia ([EM-3639](#))

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The emergency declarations authorize [Public Assistance](#) (assistance for nonfederal governments and nonprofits) for emergency protective measures. This may include assistance for costs incurred for emergency power restoration of public and nonprofit utilities, search and rescue, emergency sheltering, and the provision of emergency food, water, and medical supplies. Under the authorities of these declarations, FEMA [reported](#) that it has also deployed [specialized teams](#) to certain affected states to support state and local emergency managers.

As of [Monday, January 26](#), FEMA did not indicate that any governor or tribal chief executive had requested a major disaster declaration for Winter Storm Fern. However, the situation is ongoing and the President may declare emergencies in other states, or major disasters superseding these declarations, including if states demonstrate that they do not have the capacity to effectively respond to the storm without federal assistance. Major disasters for [snow assistance](#) may be authorized based on findings that an affected county has a record or near-record snowfall (see below) or is contiguous to a county that meets the criteria. Snowstorms resulting in [damage of sufficient severity and magnitude](#) (such as damage to infrastructure) may also warrant major disaster assistance.

Information about the 2026 Winter Storm and related declarations is available on [FEMA's incident web page](#).

Record or Near-Record Snowfall

FEMA uses data from the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's \(NOAA's\) National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\)](#) to identify the historical one-, two-, and three-day snowfall records for each county. FEMA also uses [NOAA daily snowfall reports](#) to evaluate snow assistance requests. For current snowfall incidents, FEMA uses snowfall measurements taken at [National Weather Service \(NWS\) Cooperative Network Stations](#), but also accepts other measurements considered accurate by the NWS.

FEMA Emergency and Major Disaster Assistance

FEMA provides three major categories of disaster assistance, some of which may be available pursuant to an emergency declaration and/or a major disaster declaration:

- [Public Assistance](#) (PA) provides grants and direct assistance to state, tribal, territorial, and local governments, and certain private nonprofit organizations, for emergency work (e.g., debris removal and [emergency protective measures](#)) and permanent work (for rebuilding and replacement of disaster-damaged facilities).
- [Individual Assistance](#) (IA) provides financial and direct assistance to affected individuals and households for housing and other needs, as well as crisis counseling, case management services, legal services, and disaster unemployment assistance.
- [Hazard Mitigation Grant Program](#) (HMGP) funds mitigation and resiliency projects and programs, typically across the entire state or territory (can only be authorized pursuant to a major disaster declaration).

The forms of assistance authorized by a declaration may vary by the [designated areas](#), per the declaration (subject to amendment). The President can also amend emergency and major disaster declarations to decrease the [cost-share requirements](#) for PA.

Snow Assistance and Eligible Activities

Emergency protective measures, such as sheltering and search and rescue, may be authorized in either a major disaster or emergency declaration. Under a Stafford Act major disaster declaration, FEMA may also provide PA for eligible snow-related activities—including snow removal, de-icing, salting, snow dumps, and road sanding—and other eligible activities essential to eliminate or lessen immediate threats to life, public health, and safety. FEMA may authorize assistance for reconstruction depending on the nature and scope of the incident.

Federal Funding for Disaster Response and Recovery

While it is not the only source of federal funding for disaster assistance, FEMA's [Disaster Relief Fund](#) (DRF) is the primary funding source for federal government response and recovery activities. For this reason, its level of unobligated funds is often used as shorthand for the overall availability of federal resources for response and recovery.

According to FEMA, as of January 26, 2026, the DRF has at least \$7.13 billion in unobligated resources in the major disasters portion of the DRF.

Additional Severe Winter Storm and Snowstorm Resources

FEMA Programs and Resources

- [Public Assistance Program Overview](#)
- [FEMA Blog](#)

CRS Resources

- CRS Report WMR10001, *CRS Guide to Federal Emergency Management*
- CRS Report R41981, *Congressional Primer on Responding to and Recovering from Major Disasters and Emergencies*
- CRS Report R47676, *Disaster Relief Fund State of Play: In Brief*
- CRS Report R48568, *Federal Power Act: The Department of Energy's Emergency Authority*, by Ashley J. Lawson
- CRS Report R48127, *Natural Gas Reliability: Issues for Congress*, by Paul W. Parfomak, Ashley J. Lawson, and Michael Ratner

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