

# CONGRESSIONAL ADVISORY

## NATIONAL DISASTER HOUSING STRATEGY RELEASED

January 16, 2009

The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) today announced the release of the *National Disaster Housing Strategy*. This document is a living document, which will be updated as needed to reflect emerging and ever-changing developments and initiatives in the field of disaster housing.

While we realize that the *Strategy* has been delayed from the initial deadline, it has always been FEMA's desire to ensure that upon release, *the Strategy* not only met the requirements set forth by the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), but provided our Federal partners, state and local governments a foundational toolbox that would summarize for the first time in a single document, the many sheltering and housing capabilities, principles, and policies that guide and inform the disaster housing process.

The area of disaster housing has increasingly received more attention in recent years, and that is certainly reflected in the number of comments FEMA received after the release of the initial draft of the *Strategy*. To date, FEMA has received nearly 500 comments from individuals, industry representatives, associations, and State and local government representatives. Since Aug 2008, our housing staff has been adjudicating these comments and seeking additional guidance and direction from our stakeholders in order to address these concerns.

Additionally, FEMA has worked jointly with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the National American Red Cross, and included experts from all levels of government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to establish the National Disaster Housing Task Force. The Task Force will focus full-time attention on disaster housing, developing operational plans, building disaster housing capabilities, and achieving the vision and goals of the *Strategy*.

We have also been able to glean best practices by actively deploying the Joint Housing Solutions Group (JHSG) to assess alternative forms of disaster housing in an effort to identify those that may meet specific needs for portability and livability in disaster situations. The JHSG just completed its two-year review report which outlines milestones and future objectives.

First deployed following the October 2007 wildfires, FEMA has also been actively encouraging states affected by disasters to lead Joint Housing Task Forces, with the goal of outlining the housing priorities and needs of the State and resources to support the ongoing disaster housing operations. Finally, FEMA has worked along with eligible States to conduct pilot testing of additional programs authorized by PKEMRA in order to assess the feasibility of alternatives to our traditional direct financial assistance programs to applicants.

This continuous effort on the part of FEMA over the past two years to draft, collaborate on, and refine *the Strategy*, has culminated in this current release of *the Strategy*, which we believe charts a new direction that our disaster housing efforts must take to better meet the disaster housing needs of individuals and communities moving forward. The *Strategy* promotes a national housing effort that

engages all levels of government, the nonprofit and private sectors, and individuals to collectively meet the urgent housing needs of disaster victims and enable individuals, households and communities to rebuild and restore their way of life when a disaster threatens or strikes. This administration wanted to ensure its commitment to Congress, but most of all to the American public to provide *the Strategy* that will be the guiding operational roadmap for the delivery of disaster housing.

The *National Disaster Housing Strategy* recognizes that effective housing solutions are those that go beyond simply providing a housing unit to also address the complex needs of disaster victims, The *Strategy* reflects the combined efforts of FEMA and many partner agencies, and incorporates feedback from organizations and the public that have a role in disaster housing, whether it's at the tribal, state or local level, with our private sector partners and with individuals. It includes seven annexes that summarize current disaster housing efforts and programs and provide the foundation to review, analyze, and improve disaster housing.

A copy of the National Disaster Housing Strategy will be posted on our website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)