

Memorandum

September 12, 2005

To: All Employees

From: Deputy Director *S/ Marshall P. Jones, Jr.*

Subject: Hurricane Katrina - Volunteer Information

Many Service employees have asked how they can support the recovery efforts underway in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This memorandum provides information on how you can provide assistance to the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency so desperately needed in the Gulf Coast area. In addition, we will likely need assistance with our own Fish and Wildlife Service operations – we will use this process as a starting point for Service needs, but also will likely be putting out further specific requests for specialized assistance to the Directorate as those needs arise.

The Department of Homeland Security anticipates a call for up to 2,000 Federal volunteers to assist them in the government's response. Volunteers will be deployed to a field assignment for a minimum of 30 days to work with FEMA on this effort. If you are interested in volunteering, please read the attached information from FEMA – making sure that you meet the requirements outlined and that you are both physically and mentally prepared for the conditions that you will face in New Orleans and the other affected areas. Previous experience with FEMA/disaster response is especially needed.

If you wish to volunteer your services, you must complete the attached "Katrina Relief Volunteer Form." After completing the form, obtain your supervisor's approval and forward it through the appropriate channels to your Regional Director, or in Region 9 to your Assistant Director, for signature. The approved form should then be provided to your Servicing Human Resources Office. The Headquarters Human Resources Office will receive all of the forms and submit them to the Department of the Interior. **Please do not contact FEMA directly.** Your specific information will be provided to FEMA by the Department.

If selected, you will be contacted directly by FEMA and provided information on your deployment. Some volunteers are needed immediately, and others will be needed for future deployment, so you may not immediately hear from FEMA. If you elect to accept a volunteer assignment, you are required to notify your supervisor and your Servicing Human Resources Office.

Supervisors must determine whether the volunteer request will disrupt the mission requirements of the Service or priority relief efforts within the Department of the Interior. We have attached "Frequently Asked Questions For Supervisors." This document provides general information on duty status, travel, pay, and timekeeping.

If you wish to volunteer outside of this coordinated Federal effort, you must request leave. These requests will be subject to supervisory approval and the mission requirements of the Service.

If you have any questions, please contact Dick Georgen, Division of Human Resources, at 703-358-2100 or KatrinaVolunteers@fws.gov. This email address will be activated no later than Tuesday, September 13, 2005.

We appreciate the many Service employees who are so willing to give of their time and volunteer to provide the needed assistance to those impacted by hurricane Katrina.

INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Role of Assigned Personnel

- Establish and maintain positive working relationships with the citizens of the disaster affected communities.
- Collect and disseminate information and make referrals for appropriate assistance.
- Identify potential issues within the community and report to appropriate personnel.
- Convey a positive image of disaster operations to government officials, community organizations, and the general public.
- Perform outreach with community leaders on available Federal disaster assistance.

Training

- If selected for deployment, volunteers will be provided training at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Orlando, Florida, prior to being deployed to the field.
- Volunteers will be expected to use their government credit card (which should be in good standing) for transportation, lodging, meals, and other incidentals.

Skills Especially Needed

- Bilingual capabilities (all languages)
- Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
- Logistics capabilities
- Information technology (GS-2210's, including telecom specialists)

Deployment Information

- After training in Orlando, volunteers will be deployed to a disaster Joint Field Office (JFO) when conditions are safe. Some FEMA organizational clothing, identification, and equipment will be supplied. FEMA will also enter your contact information into their database so that volunteers can be reached either by their agency or by family and friends in case of emergency.
- When deployed, volunteers should bring personal effects sufficient to last for a minimum period of thirty (30) days.

FEMA VOLUNTEER AND DONOR AGENCY FAQs

Q. What happens if a volunteer is injured and needs to file a Worker's Compensation claim?

A. A FEMA on-site supervisor will assist the volunteer with his/her claim, and the volunteer will file the claim with his/her donating agency for processing. Costs will be borne by the donating agency and are not reimbursable through the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF).

Q. What training will volunteers receive?

A. Volunteers will be provided training at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Orlando, Florida, prior to being deployed to the field. After training in Orlando, volunteers will be deployed to a disaster Joint Field Office (JFO) when conditions are safe. Some FEMA organizational clothing, identification, and equipment will be supplied. FEMA will enter your contact information into their database so that volunteers can be reached either by their agency or by family and friends in case of emergency.

Q. May I drive to Orlando for training, rather than fly?

A. Driving to the Orlando training may not be a wise choice as volunteers generally return home from the site to which they are deployed. FEMA travel is usually only one-way.

Q. How does the reimbursement for volunteers' travel work? Should the donating agency put the employee on travel orders?

A. The volunteer employee uses his/her Government travel card while volunteering for disaster relief. When the employee arrives at the Orlando training site, s/he will be given claim forms for reimbursement. The employee will also be advised concerning procedures for scheduling any future travel which will be done through the FEMA travel service. The donor agency will process travel reimbursement following normal procedures and will be reimbursed by FEMA. The agency should put the employee who is volunteering on open-ended travel orders for thirty days, though the volunteer may return home sooner.

Q. Some employees have no Government ID. Is this an issue for FEMA? Does this prevent employees from volunteering?

A. No, this will not prevent an employee from volunteering. If an employee has been identified by his agency and reported to FEMA as eligible to volunteer, the employee does not need a Government ID.

Q. Does FEMA perform any sort of medical screening prior to deployment to a field location to determine if volunteers are fit to perform the work assigned?

A. No, FEMA does not perform a medical screening, though FEMA does provide any needed inoculations, such as for tetanus, prior to deployment to the field. If a FEMA volunteer trainer sees that a volunteer will clearly not be up to the physical demands of the volunteer assignment, it might be possible for FEMA to deploy the volunteer to less arduous tasks. It is presumed that the donating agency and the volunteer believe the volunteer is fit for the duties associated with the volunteer work.

Q. Why are series, grade and skills not on the spreadsheet for reporting volunteers? Is there some sort of skills screening done in Orlando, or elsewhere?

A. The volunteer's skills will be sorted out in Orlando, prior to deployment to the field. The volunteer will be assigned duties that are of critical need and these may not be directly related to the type of work in which the volunteer is regularly employed.

Q. What phone number can agencies or volunteers' families call to contact the volunteer in case of emergency? What phone number can a volunteer call for more information, after s/he has been reported by his/her agency as eligible to perform volunteer work?

A. 1-866-896-8003

Q. Will FEMA supervisors certify volunteers for hazard pay? Is hazard pay subject to reimbursement through the Disaster Relief Fund?

A. Volunteers to FEMA under this program will not be put in situations that would warrant hazardous duty pay.

Q. May a volunteer travel to and from his/her FEMA volunteer duties, for a home visit?

A. If a volunteer has stayed longer than thirty (30) days, s/he may travel round-trip to visit home, for which FEMA will reimburse the donating agency.

Q. What costs are covered by FEMA?

A. Overtime, Sunday pay, shift/night differential, holiday pay, travel costs and per diem, \$15 per week for phone calls, and \$15 per week for laundry. The donating agency continues to pay the employee's base salary. Donating agencies should keep records of these expenses to ensure proper reimbursement by FEMA.

Q. Do Federal volunteers get FEMA Federal badges?

A. Yes. All persons who volunteer will receive a FEMA badge.

Q. How long can a volunteer expect to be away from home?

A. Volunteer service will typically be for 30 days. Shorter or longer periods of service can be negotiated and accommodated.

Q. What is the duty status for persons who volunteer?

A: The employee volunteers should be maintained in regular duty status. They **are not** on excused absence or any leave status. Volunteers will be issued a hard copy T&A card at their field site. The FEMA supervisor on-site will sign the volunteer's time card and it should be returned to the volunteer's agency timekeeper. It will reflect both regular hours of work and overtime. The overtime can be charged back to FEMA. Further payroll instructions for recovering overtime costs from FEMA will be provided. Regular hours and AUO or LEAP are charged to the employing agency. If the donating agency also has a mechanism for tracking or estimating regular pay, it may be prudent to do so, in case Government costs of the recovery effort are requested at a later date.

Q. Do you have guidance on preparation of travel authorizations?

A: The appropriate official in your office should prepare the travel orders. Travel orders for volunteers who are traveling from outside the local commuting area to training in Orlando, FL, should be open-ended and assume a minimum 30-day deployment. Your office should pay for travel to the training site. FEMA will handle travel arrangements post-training. Additional information on travel cost reimbursement and travel expenses post training will be provided to the volunteers at the time of the training.

Q. Where can I find information on human resources benefits?

A: Information on human resources benefits as a result of Hurricane Katrina can be found on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website at <http://www.opm.gov/katrina/>. The website is continually updated with breaking news and information to keep employees informed on hurricane recovery activities.

Q. Can government contractors volunteer to go?

A: Government contractors should not volunteer under this program. Contractors are encouraged to check with their employers for information on any relief efforts that may be sponsored by their employers.

Q. Is psychological preparation included in the training and does FEMA provide for post-deployment de-briefing?

A: Yes. There is both pre-deployment and post-deployment support for volunteers.

Q. How will an agency know when its volunteers are deployed?

A: When volunteers reach the Orlando mobilization site, their contact information will be entered into the FEMA data base. When the volunteer is deployed, the donating agency will be notified. As this process may take a matter of days, volunteers should alert their supervisors prior to their deployment. Questions about deployed employees or emergency contacts may be directed to FEMA at 1-800-440-6728.

Marshall P Jones, Deputy Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
Tel: 202-208-6965 Fax: 202-208-6965