

PROPOSED POLICY POSITION

3. SUPPORTING ADVANCED ACCESS TO HMAP FUNDING

BACKGROUND

The tornado outbreak in April and May 2011 devastated several Southern states, killing nearly 200 people and causing millions of dollars of damage. As the recovery from these catastrophic events continues, the danger from future storms remains very real. Therefore, states must recover and prepare simultaneously, which can be a daunting task in a time of economic strain. Thus, identifying “best recovery practices” will allow the federal government to provide the resources and flexibility necessary for an effective response.

The recent storms demonstrated that one effective way to prepare for severe weather is to have adequate storm shelter options before a storm develops. Providing residents with shelter options closer to home is a cost-effective alternative to often costly evacuation procedures. For example, according to the National Emergency Management Association, it is estimated that the cost of evacuating threatened coastal populations for Hurricane Gustav in 2008 was \$90 million. Much of this cost was attributed to a lack of shelters in close proximity to the disaster site. While federal funding is available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Programs (HMAP), the funding is often very limited and only available after a disaster declaration and on a competitive basis.

Providing states with the flexibility to apply for HMAP funds on a preparatory, rather than reactionary, basis would allow state and local governments to anticipate disaster needs in a more efficient manner. Greater access to shelters for affected population areas means governments need to spend less on transportation of displaced individuals, potentially reducing health and economic distress and ultimately saving state and local tax dollars.

RECOMMENDATION

The Southern Legislative Conference of The Council of State Governments urges the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Congress, in partnership with the states, to provide access to HMAP funds for construction or retrofit of residential, non-residential or community safe rooms in advance of severe weather incidents. The Southern Legislative Conference requests that a copy of this policy position be forwarded to the Southern Congressional delegation and to the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.