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Southern California Wildfire Incident Period Amended To Include Fire-Related Floods, Mudflows And Debris Flows

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PASADENA, Calif. -- At the request of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the head of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has announced that the major disaster declaration issued for the Southern California wildfires on Oct. 27 has been amended to include damage from floods, mudflows and debris flows directly related to the wildfires.

Michael D. Brown, FEMA Director and Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response at Homeland Security, said that the action requested by the state extends the eligible incident period to include floods, mudflows and debris flows from Oct. 21, 2003 through Feb. 2, 2004.

President Bush authorized the expansion of aid after receiving FEMA's analysis of the governor's request to reopen the incident period to include homeowners, renters, businesses, local governments and certain non-profit agencies affected by the Christmas Day floods in San Bernardino County.

FEMA's federal coordinating officer will determine if disaster assistance can be made available in specific situations by evaluating watershed conditions, the effects of storm events, and the type of damage sustained.

"Only those areas within the designated counties that are determined to be damaged or adversely affected as a direct result of the compromised watershed conditions and fire-generated debris will be considered for assistance. We will review applications on a case-by-case basis," said William Carwile, III, federal coordinating officer. The designated counties are Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura.

"The President's inclusion of damages from flooding, mudflows and debris flows related to the recent fires is an important step in helping persons and local governments affected by those events," said Dallas Jones, director of California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and state coordinating officer. "At the Governor's direction we will be working hard with local government, FEMA and state agencies to insure that individuals, families and businesses receive the assistance for which they are eligible."

Homeowners, renters, businesses and local governments who have suffered or may incur damages as a direct result of mudflows, debris flows and flooding within the burned areas as defined can apply for federal and state assistance by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362).** The TTY number is **1-800-462-7585** for those who are speech or hearing impaired. Recovery specialists are available to take calls from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday, except for Monday Jan.19, in which FEMA offices and registration lines will be closed in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

In addition to assisting individuals with recovery from the effects of storms on burned watersheds, the federal government will provide assistance for such activities as:

- removal of debris deposited by fire-related storm events from public roads and flood control facilities;
- emergency response to fire-related storm events; and
- repair to public facilities damaged by fire-related storm events.

The incident period is closed for those who suffered damages from the Southern California wildfires. The deadline to have registered for federal and state disaster assistance with FEMA ended on Jan. 9.

Applicants who call to register after Jan. 9 for wildfires will be sent a notice indicating the process for late registration. This includes writing a letter explaining extenuating circumstances and submitting related documentation substantiating the reasons preventing the applicant from applying before the deadline.

FEMA disaster assistance covers basic needs only and will not normally compensate survivors for all of their losses. State and federal officials advise applicants to access insurance benefits first; FEMA and state assistance may help cover basic

needs not included under their insurance policy. Some disaster aid, such as individual assistance awards, does not have to be paid back, while other help may come in the form of low-interest loans.

People who made a mistake when reporting damage or may have misrepresented their losses have the opportunity to correct or cancel their claim. Individuals may call the Helpline at 1-800-621-3362 (TTY: 1-800-462-7585) to withdraw or correct an application and prevent prosecution. Anyone who knows of someone who has filed false damage claims or perpetrated any other disaster-related fraud, may report the incident to the **Fraud Hotline at 1-800-323-8603.**

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes and private non-profit organizations fund repairs or rebuilding efforts and cover the cost of replacing lost or disaster-damaged personal property. These disaster loans cover uninsured and uncompensated losses and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services coordinates overall state agency response to major disasters in support of local government. The office is responsible for ensuring California's readiness to respond to and recover from natural, manmade and war-caused emergencies and for assisting local governments in their emergency preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery efforts.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders and manages the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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