



News Release

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FEMA GRANTS MAY BE SPENT FOR MANY DISASTER-RELATED NEEDS

BURLINGTON, Vt. – “What can I spend the money for?” is a question being asked by many Vermonters who have received recovery grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“The purpose of FEMA grants is to help Vermonters begin the recovery process during these very challenging times,” said Federal Coordinating Officer James N. Russo. “We want everyone to have the maximum possible flexibility within the rules to spend grants in the way that is most helpful to their recovery.”

More than 90 percent of the grants FEMA has provided to Vermonters have been for home repair or replacement. Recipients may spend these grants in any way that helps them achieve the goal of permanent safe, sanitary and functional housing. Instead of spending the grant to improve the habitability of their damaged homes, recipients may choose to apply the funds to purchasing other housing.

As with many other federal programs, the government audits a percentage of grants to assure the money was spent as intended.

“Unfortunately, we have seen in other disasters that a small number of people will take a FEMA housing grant to Las Vegas or use it to buy a luxury vehicle,” Russo said. “That is the kind of fraud an audit is meant to uncover. We are not going to second guess recipients about how they chose to spend their housing grants so long as they spent them to improve their long-term post-disaster housing situation.”

In addition to housing repairs, FEMA provides grants for rental assistance and “other needs” assistance.

Grants for rental assistance must be spent on rental of alternative housing when the disaster rendered the person’s pre-disaster housing uninhabitable. FEMA has provided rental assistance grants to more than 1,200 displaced Vermonters so far. Rental assistance can be for homeowners or for renters. It is always temporary until the person can get back into long-term housing, which can be either the repaired pre-disaster home or another home.

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Rental assistance grants may not be spent on home repairs, personal property or any other items. They may be spent only for rent. If an applicant wishes to recertify for additional rental assistance after the first grant is used up, receipts for use of the prior grant will be required.

FEMA makes “other needs assistance” grants for a wide variety of losses that the disaster caused. Some examples are a self-employed person’s lost tools, a student’s lost educational materials, furniture, vehicle damage, clean up and debris removal costs after the disaster, moving and storage expenses or medical and dental expenses caused by the disaster. These grants can also be used for other necessary expenses and serious needs caused by the disaster.

Everyone who receives a FEMA grant should save receipts for three years in case they are audited. If specific receipts are missing, a credit card statement or other evidence should be sufficient to show the grant was spent to help with recovery from the floods and storms.

To register for assistance call **800-621-FEMA (3362)**, or register online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or via a web-enabled mobile device at **m.fema.gov**. Multilingual registration assistance is available. Those with a speech disability or hearing loss who use a TTY can call 800-462-7585 directly; or 800-621-3362 if using 711 or Video Relay Service.

FEMA’s mission is to support our citizens and first responders and to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). Those with a speech disability or hearing loss who use a TTY may call 1-800-462-7585 directly; or call 1-800-621-3362 if using 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS).

FEMA’s temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, applicants who receive SBA loan applications must submit them to SBA loan officers to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.

SBA disaster loan information and application forms may be obtained by calling the SBA’s Customer Service Center at 800-659-2955 (800-877-8339 for people with speech or hearing disabilities) Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET; Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. ET or by sending an e-mail to disastercustomerservice@sba.gov. Applications can also be downloaded from www.sba.gov or completed on-line at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/>.

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