

*Joint Information Center
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News Release

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FREE LEGAL HELP AVAILABLE FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY IRENE

BURLINGTON, Vt. – A low-income homeowner believes her insurance company is underestimating the flood damage caused by Tropical Storm Irene. Another has lost important legal documents, while a renter is having a dispute with his landlord over repairs.

“These are just some of the difficulties that Vermonters may be facing after Irene that require legal assistance,” said Ross Feldmann, a member of the Vermont Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Division. “And help is available for those who can’t afford it.”

Those who need legal assistance dealing with issues related to Tropical Storm Irene and who do not have the means to hire a lawyer may call Disaster Legal Services at **800-889-2047** for free legal advice. Those who qualify for assistance will be matched with Vermont lawyers volunteering their time.

Legal assistance may include help with insurance or FEMA benefits claims, home repair contracts and contractors, building permits, replacement of wills and other legal documents destroyed in the disaster, counseling on mortgage-foreclosure or landlord/tenant problems and other issues potentially arising from the disaster. All calls are completely confidential.

Disaster Legal Services is a federal program operated by the American Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Division. By working with state and local bar associations, the program arranges free legal services for persons affected by presidentially declared major disasters.

In the last four years, the DLS program has provided legal help to more than 100,000 people affected by major disasters. In Vermont the program is sponsored by the Vermont Bar Association and Vermont Legal Aid under an agreement with FEMA.

Visit the ABA’s site at www.abanet.org/disaster, the National Disaster Legal Aid site at www.disasterlegallaid.org or www.vtlawhelp.org to find out more.

FEMA’s registration number is: **800-621-FEMA (3362)**. If you have a speech disability or hearing loss and use a TTY, call 800-462-7585 directly; if you use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 800-621-3362. Lines are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week until further notice, and multilingual assistance is available.

Online registration is available at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or at FEMA's mobile website, m.fema.gov for Smartphone or tablet users.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders 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). For TTY call 800-462-7585; or call 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/>.