

Legislative Brief

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#254
STRONG

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

BACKGROUND

Texas has experienced its share of hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and wildfires in recent years. Most of these disasters led to the massive displacement of residents and to intense and widespread damage to private property and public infrastructure. And now the world is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disasters and emergencies will happen. While the next storm cannot be stopped and the timing of the next disaster is unknown, counties are prepared to navigate the challenges that come with these perils and to serve their constituents.

STEPS IN PLACE



Housing Recovery after a disaster is essential, and it is a critical step in limiting the long-term economic impact of a catastrophe. When workers and their families cannot return home, it can damage the local economy.

To aid housing recovery, the state has:

- Created the disaster response and recovery guide — through the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) — to coordinate availability and construction of short-term and long-term housing after a storm.
- Permitted local governments to create disaster recovery plans and establish procedures for state review of those plans.
- Designated the Texas General Land Office (GLO) as the state agency that receives and administers federal and state funds appropriated for long-term disaster recovery. The GLO will work with TDEM,

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to implement accepted local housing recovery plans.

- Created the Disaster Recovery Loan Program as an account fund for the comptroller to provide short-term loans to eligible political subdivisions.



Debris removal is essential to securing the safety of residents, restoring utilities, providing access for emergency vehicles and promoting the recovery of public services and private businesses. Counties often lack sufficient local reserves to adequately respond to this immediate need, and debris removal can be slow in some counties.

To help with debris removal, the state has:

- Required the updating of statewide contract management guides to include contract management standards and information on contracts related to emergency management. The guides will include preferred contracting standards; information on contracts for services that may be necessary to respond to a natural disaster or to construct, repair or rebuild property or infrastructure after a calamity, including clearing debris and providing information management services and construction services; and advice on preparing for a natural disaster, including procedures to assist an applicable state agency with contracting for such services before a disaster occurs.
- Developed a catastrophic debris management plan and model guide for political subdivisions to use for clearing and disposing of debris. This includes information on preparing for debris removal before

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a disaster, provisions for the use of trench burners and air curtain incinerators of vegetative debris, and sources for the equipment to use immediately after a disaster.

- Required TDEM to develop a plan to assist political subdivisions with executing contracts for likely services, including training on the benefits of executing disaster preparation contracts in advance, recommendations on the services that could be needed (debris management and infrastructure repair), and assistance with finding people capable of providing these services and with executing contracts with them before a disaster.



A strong state and local partnership saves time, money and, most important of all, lives. We need a streamlined system that cuts out bureaucratic hurdles, provides timely and accurate information, and empowers local communities.

There is no question that Texas will face more storms and other natural disasters in the future. Together we can be ready. State agencies and local governments can take a proactive stance ahead of the next disaster. ★