



April 22, 2022



THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON: The Battle Over Masks Continues

This week, in worrying news for FEMA, the Office of the Inspector General issued a management alert to the agency based on finding of the COVID-19 funeral assistance program being inconsistent with previous interpretations for reimbursement. More information on that report can be found below.

We are likely looking at a battle in the courts, with the CDC requesting an appeal by the Justice Department to a Florida federal judge striking down the mask mandate. The Biden Administration has said it would support the mask mandate if the CDC continued to recommend its enforcement.

Next week, hearings will pick up again as the House begins to examine the Administration's budget, with respective committees going over various federal agency allocations.

Hearings the Week of April 25, 2022

[A Review of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security](#)

House Committee on Homeland Security
Wednesday, April 27, 2022 at 2:00pm ET

[A Growing Threat: The Impact of Disinformation Targeted at Communities of Color](#)

House Committee on Administration, Subcommittee on Elections
Thursday, April 28, 2022 at 10:00am ET

[Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)

House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Thursday, April 28, 2022 at 1:30pm ET

More News from the Nation's Capital...

OIG Reports FEMA COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Program Inconsistent with Policies

On Monday, the Office of the Inspector General issued a management alert to advise the FEMA that its COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Program operating procedures are inconsistent with FEMA's previous interpretation of long-standing regulations for ineligible funeral expenses established in FEMA's Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG). This interpretation of regulations for ineligible funeral expenses remains unchanged in current FEMA Policy.

During OIG's ongoing audit of the COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Program, they determined, and verified through analyzing a sample of completed program applications, that FEMA regularly reimburses applicants for expenses expressly excluded from funeral assistance in the IAPPG. Due to the unprecedented size of this program and the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA must take action to curb reimbursement of ineligible expenses to avoid further waste and abuse of taxpayer dollars.

For more information on this management alert report, click [here](#).

CISA, FBI, NSA, And International Partners Issue New Cyber Advisory

On Wednesday, CISA, along with the FBI, NSA, Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), National Cyber Security Centre New Zealand (NZ NCSC), and the United Kingdom's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-UK) and National Crime Agency (NCA), with contributions from industry members of the Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative, issued a joint [Cybersecurity Advisory](#) on Russian state-sponsored and criminal cyber threats to critical infrastructure that could impact organizations both within and beyond Ukraine. It is the most comprehensive view of the cyber threat posed by Russia to critical infrastructure released by government cyber experts since the invasion of Ukraine in February.

The advisory provides technical details on malicious cyber operations by actors from various Russian actors. It also includes details on Russian-aligned cyber threat groups and cybercrime groups. Some of these cybercrime groups have recently publicly pledged support for the Russian government and have threatened to conduct cyber operations in retaliation for perceived cyber offensives against Russia or against countries or organizations providing materiel support to Ukraine.

The advisory recommends several immediate actions for all organizations to take to protect their networks, which include to prioritize patching of known exploited vulnerabilities; enforce multifactor authentication; monitor remote desktop protocol (RDP); and provide end-user awareness and training.

More information can be found on the [CISA website](#).

FEMA Updates State and Local Mitigation Planning Policy Guides

On Tuesday, FEMA updated its state and local mitigation planning policy guides to reflect programmatic and administrative regulatory changes. The agency routinely updates the policies to continually improve and better support stakeholders in meeting federal requirements when creating hazard mitigation plans. The updated policies facilitate consistent evaluation and approval of state and local hazard mitigation plans and promote mitigation planning and risk-informed decision-making. They also support stakeholders in meeting federal requirements with their hazard mitigation plans to receive certain types of funding.

Changes to state and local policies include:

- Inclusion of key priorities such as climate adaptation, equity, resilience and building codes.
- Updated guidance and procedures that support states seeking enhanced status. Enhanced states demonstrate a comprehensive mitigation program and capability to manage additional federal mitigation funding.
- Incorporates new FEMA grant programs, such as Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Post-Fire and the Rehabilitation of High-Hazard Potential Dams program.
- Strengthened connection with Fire Management Assistance Grant program.
- Alignment with national initiatives and programs such as the National Mitigation Investment Strategy.
- A renewed focus on resilience to support communities in creating holistic plans that will help the whole community understand the importance of mitigation and develop mitigation actions based on current and future risks and capabilities.

The policies will become effective for all mitigation plan approvals one year from the official release date.

DHS CWMD Convenes BioWatch Advisory Committee Senior Leadership Meeting

On April 5, the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office (CWMD) hosted a meeting with over 80 senior state and local officials who support the BioWatch program in their respective jurisdictions. This meeting provided partners an update on the future of biodetection and a forum for participants to share best practices and exchange ideas across the BioWatch jurisdictions.

The BioWatch program operates 24/7/365 in over 30 major metropolitan areas to provide an early indication of a potential airborne biological attack. The program is managed by DHS CWMD, supported by other federal agencies, and is operated by a network of scientists and laboratory technicians, as well as emergency managers, law enforcement officers, and public health officials from across federal, state, and local levels of government.

During the meeting, Acting Assistant Secretary for CWMD Gary Rasicot discussed CWMD's plans to formalize a process to hear feedback more frequently and routinely from BioWatch partners.

CISA Expands JCDC To Include Industrial Control Systems Industry Expertise

On Wednesday, CISA announced the expansion of the Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative (JCDC) to include Industrial Control Systems (ICS) experts—security vendors, integrators, and distributors—to further increase U.S. government focus on the cybersecurity and resilience of industrial control systems and operational technology (ICS/OT). Companies initially joining the JCDC-ICS effort include Bechtel, Claroty, Dragos, GE, Honeywell, Nozomi Networks, Schneider Electric, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, Siemens, and Xylem, as well as several JCDC Alliance partners.

JCDC-ICS will build on the existing platform of the JCDC by taking advantage of the knowledge, visibility, and capabilities of the ICS community to build plans around the protection and defense of control systems; inform U.S. government guidance on ICS/OT cybersecurity; and contribute to real time operational fusion across private and public partners in the ICS/OT space.

More information about CISA's work with the ICS community is available [here](#).

National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) Listening Sessions

FEMA is seeking input from our state, tribal, and territorial leaders, volunteer organizations, non-government and professional organizations partners to ensure the NDRF update will facilitate a more collaborative approach to disaster recovery. If you are interested in having input, please register for one of these sessions:

NDRF represents the many partnerships which are critical to successful recovery, input from a broad array of our partners and stakeholders is essential to ensuring that the next NDRF contemplates the many sources of recovery resources that can be brought to bear to assist impacted communities after disaster.

April 26, 10 a.m. EDT - [Register](#)

May 3, 1 p.m. EDT - [Register](#)

May 19, 3 p.m. EDT - [Register](#)

For questions, contact the NDRF inbox fema-ndrf-2022-update@fema.dhs.gov.

Additionally, if you are unable to join one of the sessions please reach out as FEMA will provide an avenue for partners to provide feedback or input in addition to the listening sessions.

Other News from DC and Around the Country:

HSToday: [Are Smart Buildings the Next Target for Cyberattacks?](#)

Governing: [Water Systems Face Unique Challenges from Russian Cyber Threats](#)

The Conversation: [Natural Disasters Cost The Nation: We've Calculated The Income Tax Revenue Lost In Their Wake](#)
HSToday: [FEMA Administrator Criswell Urges Resilience Planning During National Hurricane Conference](#)

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