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May 16, 2025



THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON:

Reform and Reconciliation

This week, the first meeting of the FEMA Review Council was *finally* announced, almost a month after it was expected to convene—better late than never! They will be meeting on May 20, and we're all eager to hear more about the priorities of the Council and get a better sense of how it will operate, including how we can best engage with the Council to offer our insight and recommendations. With several current and former state directors appointed to the Council, we're hopeful that the body will take a serious and thoughtful look at how FEMA can be reformed to better support the states and survivors before, during, and after disasters. For more information about the Council—including how to virtually attend—check out the updates below.

The FEMA Review Council came up several times during this week's House Homeland Security Committee hearing on the FY26 DHS budget proposal. While most of the hearing was focused on the administration's immigration policies, there were a number of questions posed to Secretary Noem about her plans for FEMA and the significant changes already made to the agency. While she reiterated her critiques of FEMA, she did appear to *somewhat* soften her tone and did not call for the agency to be abolished outright. She noted that dramatic changes were needed, and that the agency must be reformed to respond to people's needs in a time of crisis. Secretary Noem also emphasized that the administration wants to empower state and local governments to take on more responsibility, with FEMA playing more of a supporting role. While details were very limited, she did at least appear to recognize the need to give states time to build out their capacity. That said, we've heard shifting and conflicting messaging on the administration's plans for the future of FEMA, so it's probably best not to ready *too* much into this change in tone.

Lastly, the negotiations around reconciliation have not slowed down, and it's unclear if the House GOP is any closer to a package that will get the necessary votes to move forward. Speaker Johnson has given himself a deadline of Memorial Day, so we'll see if he can make it work and get the package on the floor next week. Even if he does, the Senate is expected to make significant changes—which the House may not be able to stomach—so there's still a long way to go. We'll keep you posted!

[Upcoming Congressional Hearings...](#)

The Department of Homeland Security's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2026

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

Tuesday, May 20; 9:30 AM (ET)

Defending Against Drones: Setting Safeguards for Counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems Authorities

Senate Judiciary Committee

Tuesday, May 20; 10:15 AM (ET)

Mass Gathering Events: Assessing Security Coordination and Preparedness

House Committee on Homeland Security | Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology

Wednesday, May 21; 2:00 PM (ET)

[More News from the Nation's Capital...](#)

GAO REPORT: INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE GUIDANCE

On Wednesday, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report entitled [Disaster Assistance: Updated FEMA Guidance Could Better Help Communities Apply for Individual Assistance](#). The *James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023* includes a provision for GAO to review the Individual Assistance (IA) declaration factors. This report addresses (1) trends in IA disaster declarations; (2) the resources FEMA uses to help states understand the IA declaration process and the extent to which this information is updated; and (3) the extent to which FEMA uses information on vulnerable populations when making recommendations for IA declarations. GAO analyzed data from FEMA's disaster declaration system from FY15-18 and FY20-23—the time periods before and after 2019 when FEMA revised its IA declaration factors. GAO also reviewed agency documentation, and interviewed officials from FEMA and a non-generalizable selection of 11 states. Multiple state directors participated in this effort, providing their perspectives and recommendations to GAO.

GAO found that FEMA provides training and other resources to help states understand the IA declaration process but uses outdated information to convey the likelihood of approval. When evaluating an IA declaration request, FEMA considers a state's cost-to-capacity ratio, which measures the estimated cost of assistance relative to the state's capacity to respond to a disaster. The higher the ratio, the more likely FEMA will approve an IA request. FEMA's IA guidance discusses how this ratio helps states understand the likelihood of IA approval and includes a table with historical approval rates of IA declarations for each range of ratios. However, the approval rates are based on data from 2008 through 2016. GAO found that using data from 2020 through 2023 would increase the IA approval rates across all ratio ranges. By updating this table regularly, FEMA could communicate a more accurate likelihood of approval to states. This could better inform states' decisions on whether to request IA and help communities receive needed assistance after a disaster.

FIRST FEMA REVIEW COUNCIL MEETING ANNOUNCED

On Tuesday, DHS [announced](#) that the FEMA Review Council will meet in person on Tuesday, **May 20, 2025 from 3:00-4:00 PM (ET)**. This meeting will be open virtually to members of the public. This meeting will be led by the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of Defense to discuss the work ahead for the Council and the potential future of FEMA. The meeting will include the swearing in of members, remarks from leadership, and an overview of the Council and its structure.

The Council meeting location is to be determined, and members of the public may attend virtually. Registration to attend the meeting is required and must be received via email no later than **5:00 PM (ET) on Monday, May 19, 2025**. To register, you must provide your full legal name and email address to Patrick Powers, Designated Federal Officer of the President's FEMA Review Council, via email at FEMAreviewcouncil@hq.dhs.gov. Members of the public who have registered to participate will be provided the agenda and virtual link.

FEMA ANNOUNCES EXPEDITED LIQUIDATION/CLOSEOUT EXTENSION PROCESS FOR CERTAIN FISCAL YEAR 2020 PREPAREDNESS GRANTS

On Wednesday, FEMA posted [Information Bulletin \(IB\) No. 527: Expedited Liquidation/Closeout Extension Process for Certain Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2020 Preparedness Grants](#). This IB serves to modify the Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) and provide an expedited submission, review, and decision process for grant recipient liquidation/closeout extension requests for certain FY20 preparedness grant programs.

An adjusted payment review process was implemented by DHS, to ensure allowability in accordance with 2 C.F.R. §200.305. This enhanced process was in place from March 19, 2025, to April 15, 2025. Due to the timing of the implementation of this adjusted process for grant payments, some grant recipients may need additional time to liquidate and or closeout their open FY 2020 grant(s). Therefore, to relieve some of the administrative burden on recipients, FEMA is instituting a streamlined process for FY20 liquidation/closeout extension requests. This IB is applicable to the following FY20 Preparedness Grant Programs:

- Homeland Security Grant Program
- Nonprofit Security Grant Program
- Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program
- Port Security Grant Program
- Transit Security Grant Program
- Intercity Passenger Rail Program

The deadline for submitting liquidation/closeout period extension requests under this IB is **May 31, 2025**. Recipients will have one month to complete any remaining drawdowns and close the award.

CIS/MS-ISAC WHITE PAPERS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Center for Internet Security (CIS) and its Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) recently published two white papers on artificial intelligence (AI).

[The Evolving Role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Cyber Threat Landscape:](#)

The adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) for malicious cyber activity is in a transitional period. Cyber threat actors (CTAs) are exploring incorporating GenAI into their campaigns while relying on more traditional tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The use of these platforms is growing, but widespread adoption is limited by technical barriers, defenses, and the proven effectiveness and reliability of more conventional attack methods. Network defenders are learning to leverage GenAI to improve detections, defeat existing attacks, and mitigate the spread of GenAI-enhanced attacks. The result is a race between network defenders and CTAs seeking to gain the upper hand in deploying GenAI. As GenAI continues to grow and evolve, and as network defenders adapt to the new landscape, this transitional phase marks a critical juncture where CTAs are testing the potential of GenAI without fully pivoting from more conventional playbooks.

[This white paper](#) provides an overview of the developments of this phase, and aims to provide essential information for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments (SLTT) to improve their defenses against future threats.

[Leveraging Generative Artificial Intelligence for Tabletop Exercise Development:](#)

Tabletop Exercises (TTXs) help teams identify gaps in preparedness, improve coordination, and rehearse incident response plans in a low-risk environment. SLTTs play a critical role in preparedness and response operations for their communities but often operate under significant resource constraints that limit the amount of time, personnel, and money that can be devoted to creating effective TTXs. GenAI introduces a new tool to this process, allowing for faster, more scalable, and highly customizable

scenario creation, but it does require the user to use detailed data and prompts to generate useful scenarios. This can lower the barrier of entry for SLTTs and broaden the accessibility of TTXs to many under-resourced communities.

[This white paper](#) examines how SLTTs can use GenAI platforms to design TTXs for a variety of cyber and physical scenarios as well as provides examples of how to leverage open-source GenAI platforms.

[Other News from DC and Around the Country...](#)

CNN: [FEMA is “Not Ready” for Hurricane Season, Internal Agency Review Shows](#)

News From the States: [Dozens of Members of Congress from Both Parties Plead with Trump to Unfreeze FEMA Grants](#)

Reuters: [FEMA Cuts Emergency Training Under Trump as Hurricane Season Looms](#)

Devdiscourse: [New FEMA Chief Pledges Sweeping Changes Under Trump Administration](#)

Politico: [Lots of Talk, Little Outward Progress as House GOP Closes in on Megabill](#)

Bloomberg: [Whistleblowers Say DHS Cuts Disrupted Probes of Abuse, FEMA Bias](#)

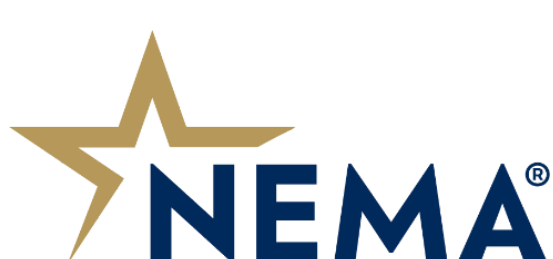
Fire Rescue: [Researchers Aim to Use AI to Guide Disaster Response Through Social Media Scanning](#)

HS Today: [Multiple Attorney General's Sue DHS to Protect Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Funding](#)

LA Times: [As Climate Hazards Worsen, Trump Moves to Weaken FEMA and Shift Disaster Response onto States](#)

NOTUS: [Republicans Are Uneasy About Trump's Slash-and-Burn at FEMA](#)

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