

Disaster Recovery Efforts Continue

In its fourth quarterly report, the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission reminds Iowans that, “while significant progress has been made in recovering from the floods and tornadoes of 2008, Iowa’s rebuilding effort is not complete. In addition, much work is still needed to mitigate risk from future disasters and rebuild a safer, stronger, smarter Iowa.”

The flooding, tornadoes, and storms of 2008 created the greatest disaster in Iowa history, and one of the largest in the nation’s history. It is estimated that it caused \$8 to \$10 billion in damage. Tens of thousands of Iowans faced \$1 billion in lost or damaged housing. About 4,800 small businesses and 800 medium size businesses saw damages exceeding \$5 billion. Farmers experienced \$3 billion in lost crops, equipment, and structures. FEMA estimates that local governments and the state of Iowa suffered more than \$1.2 billion in infrastructure damage.

To date, over \$3.6 billion has been allocated through federal and state programs for disaster recovery. Although this funding is in various stages of being allocated, over \$1 billion has already been spent.

Rebuild Iowa Coordinating Council

This council was created by the Legislature to oversee recovery efforts and facilitate communication. It is made up of state agency representatives, local leaders, and legislators. At its final meeting of 2009, the group developed the following goals for 2010 and future years.

- Restore lost housing stock through housing programs, while returning impacted Iowans to permanent housing.
- Ensure stability of impacted businesses.
- Continue to address Smart Planning goals.
- Complete flood plain mapping in Iowa so communities have the most updated information to make decisions.
- Increase participation in the National Flood Insurance Program and encourage Iowans to purchase flood insurance to minimize future risk.
- Leave behind a blueprint for future recovery efforts and establish which agencies will be responsible for various activities related to recovery once the Rebuild Iowa Office sunsets in June 2011.
- Continue to improve communications on all levels about disaster assistance programs and changes.
- Maintain a proper system for records retention so documents are not lost in future disasters.
- Encourage mitigation efforts when building new structures around the state, such as safe rooms, incorporating rules into building standards and codes.
- Continue to work with federal agencies to increase flexibility of disaster funding and programs.
- Connect with older Iowans, children and other populations to make sure they are not left out of disaster plans.
- Maintain disaster-related mental health programs so help is immediately available following a disaster.

Input from Iowans

Throughout the recovery process, input from affected Iowans has been sought. Speak Up Iowa hearings were held across Iowa in the fall of 2008 to gather suggestions. During the summer of 2009, a Speak Up II survey was used to determine how recovery efforts were going.

This coming May, the Speak Up Iowa III survey will go to impacted homeowners, business owners, and community leaders to gauge how the recovery effort is perceived among those hit hardest. They will also be asked what programs they utilized for disaster assistance, how much they received, and their opinion on how easy or difficult the application process was to go through. This will help improve disaster programs offered nationwide and in Iowa.