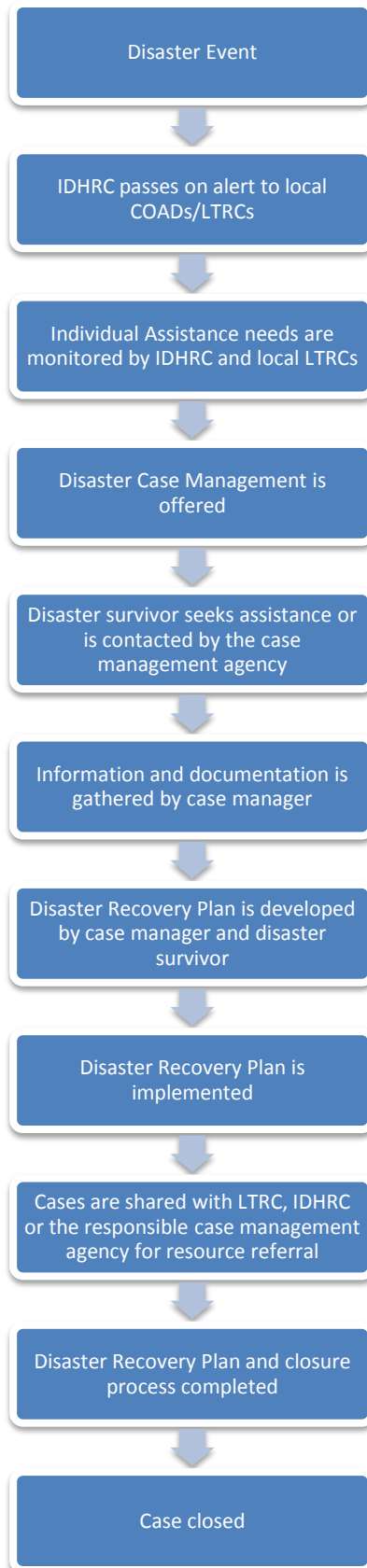


# The Disaster Recovery Process



## Disaster Event

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A disaster is an event that disrupts normal life, causing physical or mental trauma and damage to property and/or community infrastructure. Disasters may include hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, fire, explosion, acts of public violence or terrorism, or technological disasters involving toxic materials. Depending on the severity of the disaster, disaster declarations can vary.

When most of us think about responding to a disaster, we envision people evacuating flooded homes, moving into temporary shelters, or lining up for water and food because this is what we see on television and read in the newspaper. It is important to understand; however, that there are actually four phases in the disaster response cycle: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation.

Recovery starts soon after impact and lasts an extended period of time, even up to several years. Typical activities include restoration of infrastructure and vital life support systems, resumption of the routines of daily life and initiation of plans for permanent housing (repairing, rebuilding or relocating of homes). Human, material and financial resources may dwindle with decreasing public awareness. A strong, well-organized long-term recovery group can maximize the utilization of available resources to address recovery needs. Additionally, the incorporation of mitigating activities into a community's recovery process may reduce future loss and impact.

**Source:** [NVOAD LTRC Manual](#)

## Disaster Declarations

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Defining an incident as an emergency and/or major disaster is based upon the impact of the incident on the community and the ability of the community to coordinate a response. The emergency management system in the United States is based upon the ability of the local government to provide the first level of response. Should the level of the incident require a response and recovery effort above and beyond the resources of the local government, the local government may request assistance from the next level of government. This process continues until the final level of federal government assistance is sought.

Most disasters that occur in the United States are not at a level that would require the coordination of federal agencies and assets. The absence of a federally declared disaster does not prevent local and state governments from entering into agreement with federal entities to provide assistance on their own accord.

### **State Declared Disaster**

State governments have the responsibility to respond to emergency and disaster needs of the state's inhabitants. To do this, each state works in concert with local governments, voluntary agencies, business/industry and others in the community to develop an all-hazards emergency operations plan (EOP). When an emergency and/or disaster occurs, state and local governments will activate their respective EOPs. Should the severity of an emergency and/or disaster be at a level that will require a coordination of state and local government resources, the governor of a state will declare a state of emergency, activating the state's EOP. Once a state of emergency has been declared, full resources of the state can be accessed to respond to the incident.

### **Federally Declared Emergencies and Disasters**

After a preliminary damage assessment (PDA), the governor's request for a Federally Declared Emergency or Disaster is made through the regional Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) office. The governor must certify that state and local government obligations and expenditures (of which state commitments must be a significant portion) will comply with all applicable cost-sharing requirements.

A declared allows FEMA to assist a state in carrying out its response and recovery activities. Not all programs are activated in every declared disaster. The governor requests specific areas and programs in the request letter to the President.

Under the Stafford Act there are two categories of declaration that the President may grant in response to a state's request for disaster assistance: Emergency Declaration and a Major Disaster Declaration. An Emergency Declaration may provide for debris removal, search and rescue, emergency medical care, emergency mass care, emergency shelter, and provision of food, water, medicine, and other essential needs, including movement of supplies or persons. Based on the governor's request, the President may declare that a major disaster or emergency exists, thus activating an array of federal programs to assist in the response and recovery effort.

## State Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

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The State EOC is housed in the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division (HSEMD). During a disaster the State EOC is activated and the Division and other government and private sector partners coordinate state and local response and recovery efforts.

Information on the State EOC can be found at:

<http://www.iowahomelandsecurity.org/Disasters/HSEMDsRole/tabid/158/Default.aspx>