



Helping Communities Recover from Natural Disasters

Evaluation Description

July 2011

BACKGROUND

When communities are hit by floods, tornadoes, or other natural disasters, state government helps them recover. In contrast with the initial emergency response, recovery efforts include assistance to rebuild homes and businesses and replace damaged roads and public buildings, among other things. Local governments and federal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, are also often involved, as are certain nonprofit organizations.

Disaster-recovery assistance at the state level involves multiple departments. In the event of a presidentially declared disaster, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) plays a key organizing and coordinating role. It convenes the Minnesota Recovers Task Force to coordinate recovery efforts and award state funding when insurance and other disaster-recovery programs do not meet local needs. When disasters do not qualify for presidential declarations, DPS offers technical assistance to cities but does not coordinate a state response. The departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Employment and Economic Development, the Housing Finance Agency, and others are also involved in recovery efforts.

Funding for the state's recovery efforts comes from multiple sources. If a disaster qualifies for a presidential declaration, nonfederal sources must provide a 25-percent match to the federal assistance that is distributed to affected communities. In recent years, state funds have provided this match. Earlier, however, the state and local governments shared the match, paying 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Beyond the match for federal aid, additional state aid may be drawn from existing programs or appropriated by the Legislature. Matching funds and additional funds come largely from appropriations and bonding bills.

The amount of state assistance for natural disasters varies. In a 2010 special session, the Legislature

appropriated \$73.6 million for flood relief in southern Minnesota and \$6.6 million for tornado relief in Wadena. The bonding bill passed in the 2011 special session included \$50 million to the DNR for projects to prevent or alleviate flood damage.

EVALUATION ISSUES

1. What is the state's approach to disaster recovery, and how has it changed over time?
2. Is the state's approach cost-effective? Does it result in timely aid? Has spending been equitable and targeted to those most in need?
3. How well are the state's recovery efforts integrated with insurance and nonprofit agencies involved in disaster recovery?

DISCUSSION

The evaluation is focusing on recovery efforts rather than immediate emergency responses. It is limited to natural disasters, namely, tornadoes and floods.

To conduct the evaluation, we will analyze trends in disaster-recovery spending and the aid's effects on local firms, employees, and households. We plan to study in depth a small number of case studies to examine the timeliness and effectiveness of recovery aid. We will interview representatives of pertinent government agencies, insurers, and voluntary organizations. To understand local needs and capacities, we will survey emergency-management directors in counties and cities.

We plan to issue a report in early 2012. Direct questions about this evaluation to the evaluation manager, Jody Hauer, at jody.hauer@state.mn.us or 651-296-8501.