



President Obama orders federal disaster aid in wake of tornadoes for Hampden, Worcester counties

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R By **The Republican Newsroom**



File photo by Mark M. Murray / The Republican

The buildings at the corner of Main and Union streets in downtown Springfield are seen last week after crews started to knock them down after they received heavy tornado damage June 1.

President **Barack Obama** Wednesday declared a major disaster exists in the commonwealth of Massachusetts and ordered federal aid to supplement commonwealth and local recovery efforts in the area struck by **severe storms and tornadoes** on June 1, 2011.

According to a statement from the White House, the President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in the counties of Hampden and Worcester Counties.

Assistance may include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster, the White House announced.

Federal funding also is available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe storms and tornadoes in Hampden County, the White House said.

Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for the entire commonwealth.

W. Craig Fugate, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, named James N. Russo as the Federal Coordinating Officer for Federal recovery operations in the affected area.

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FEMA said additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the commonwealth and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

The White House said residents and business owners who sustained losses in the designated counties can begin applying for assistance tomorrow by registering online at <http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov> or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA(3362) or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY) for the hearing and speech impaired.

The toll-free telephone numbers will operate from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week until further notice.

The formal request from the governor to the Obama Administration to declare Western Massachusetts a federal disaster area was placed on the president's desk Monday.

Gov. Deval L. Patrick said that day he was hopeful that Obama will make a speedy decision on his request which is needed to clear the way for communities and individuals to receive federal assistance.

Peter Judge, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, said he expected a speedy approval.

"We've crossed our T's and dotted our I's," Judge said. "We expect a relatively quick turnaround."

Dennis W. Pinkham, spokesman for the Boston regional office of the Federal Emergency Management Administration, said all requests for disaster assistance must be reviewed by FEMA officials before they are forwarded to the White House, and that could take some time.

"They have had so many disasters going on they have to get a second look at it," he said.

Joplin, Mo, for example, which was hit by a deadly tornado on April 19, was not declared a federal disaster area until May 9.

Meanwhile round-the-clock details of additional police to deter looting have been largely successful, police said Monday with some exceptions.

Throughout portions of Western Massachusetts turned upside down by the tornado, cleanup continued while officials pinned hopes on the arrival of federal disaster relief aid.

In the request before the president, state officials were able to document the cost of damages to uninsured buildings, road and infrastructure, plus the cost of essential overtime and materials is in the vicinity of \$25 million, nearly three times the minimum amount of \$8.5 million for federal assistance.

In his letter sent on Saturday to the president, Patrick said 319 homes were destroyed by the tornadoes and another 600 had major damage. The estimated cost of damage in Hampden County is \$23.9 million, while the Worcester County communities of Sturbridge and Southbridge had damage estimates of \$378,305 and \$208,006 respectively.

State and local governments would be eligible to apply for federal aid after the state receives a disaster declaration. Under the program, the federal government would pay at least 75 percent of the eligible costs for repairing or replacing public properties such as damaged roads, bridges and buildings and for removing debris. Also homeowners and renters could apply for grants to pay for temporary housing needs, low-interest federal disaster loans would also be available to homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and private non-profit organizations. Patrick has stimulated that Hampden County would need \$12.2 million in low-interest loans for home owners and \$8.3 million for businesses.

More details coming on MassLive as they become available.

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