

Urban & Community Disaster Response

A Project of the Southern Group of State Foresters & the Northeastern Area (USDA Forest Service)

Overview:

A disaster response pilot project initiated by the U&CF programs in Virginia and North Carolina is being tested at a regional scale by the Southern Group of State Foresters. Urban Forest Strike Teams (UFST) are composed of state forestry agency certified arborists trained to make urban tree damage assessments following natural disasters.

The Initiative involves recruiting, training and deploying professional urban foresters and arborists (required to have basic ICS and arboricultural certification and experience) to assess tree damage using FEMA and tree risk management standards. Strike Teams evaluate individual trees, street by street in a defined disaster area to assess storm damaged trees on public property and rights-of-ways to identify removal or pruning hazards, and qualification for FEMA debris reimbursement. GPS systems are used to enter data and identify locations. Maps and data sheets are provided to the community to help them document debris for FEMA, plan the work needed, effectively contract for debris cleanup, and document the cost of the damage. The teams can also provide technical assistance with debris estimation.

Mobilization:

The assessment is not intended to be part of the initial emergency response – but, is typically done in the weeks after the storm during the (later) response and recovery stages. A good fit for the process might be a community situation where:

1. There is **significant damage** to public trees in a community,
2. The damage is such that the **community finds it challenging** to decide what trees meet FEMA debris standards or represent a significant risk to the public,
3. The footprint of the **damage area is concise** enough that a team could work efficiently,
4. The **community may not have staff with technical tree expertise**, or their staff may not have the time to do tree assessments because of the scale of the disaster,
5. The **community has the capacity to use and follow up on recommendations**. Information compiled by the teams can be used immediately for FEMA documentation and in contracting for debris removal.

UFST can work with the community, State Emergency Management and FEMA to meet requirements of the response.

Mission ready Packages:

EMAC Mission Ready Packages are being developed that define eight levels of support that include: reconnaissance, logistics, state/local coordination, assessment crews, and GIS. Packages can be combined to create teams and mobilization for a range of disaster scale and response timelines. Typical team deployments are 12-14 days and use ICS standards and policy.

Cost:

Teams are fully equipped and require either locally provided lodging and meals, or per diem. Additional expenses include regional travel to the disaster area or command center, reimbursement for local deployment travel, and pre-approved expenses (water, marking paint, expendable safety related purchases).

Hourly, daily, and deployment costs are part of the EMAC Mission Ready Packages.

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