



BACKGROUND

FEMA is required by law to provide public notice of the agency’s intent to provide federal assistance and grant opportunities post-disaster via the Public Assistance (PA), Individual Assistance (IA), or Hazard Mitigation Grant (HMGP) programs. FEMA is also required to engage in appropriate levels of public involvement for federal actions that require compliance under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), EO11988: Floodplain Management, EO11990: Wetlands Protection, and EO12898: Environmental Justice. FEMA also must give notice of the agency’s intent to protect the civil rights of persons with disabilities as required by the Rehabilitation Act.

Since 2007, the R4 Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation (EHP) Office has assumed responsibility to coordinate drafting and publishing the disaster-wide public notice, which is required to meet both EHP compliance requirements and federal grant public noticing requirements. Nationally and in R4, the most common method of meeting these requirements is to place a public notice in the newspaper of record or in papers with the widest circulation in the declared counties. On average, this method may generate at most 5-10 comments per disaster, with the usual number being close to or at zero.

In August 2016, the Regional Environmental Officers (REOs) and leadership from the Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation (OEHP) discussed the disaster-wide public notice process. The R7 REO, Ken Sessa, suggested a different approach to the process, such as publishing the disaster-wide public notice in the Federal Register, may be more effective than the agency’s traditional methods.

While the Federal Register is not widely read, building on Mr. Sessa’s suggestion, R4 EHP has vetted the following approach to the public notice process with OEHP, the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC), and External Affairs as a new, more effective approach to meeting public noticing and involvement requirements. It is anticipated that this approach will increase the reach of the disaster-wide public notice to disaster survivors. This new approach also is more cost effective as demonstrated by the table in the cost comparison section.

R4 PUBLIC NOTICE PROCESS (NEW APPROACH)

Step 1: Draft disaster-wide public notice (ensure 508-compliant) using existing OCC-approved template

Step 2: In partnership with External Affairs, draft media advisory regarding disaster-wide public notice

Step 3: Circulate draft public notice and media advisory for review amongst JFO senior and program leadership, including the FCO, DFCO, COS, Ops Chief, JFO Program Branch Directors, (IA, PA, and HMA), External Affairs, and OCC.

Step 4: Post disaster-wide public notice on FEMA website (request assistance from External Affairs)

Step 5: Send disaster-wide public notice to state EMA for posting on state website

Step 6: External Affairs sends out media advisory with copy of public notice attached to EA Stakeholder groups (news media outlets, intergovernmental organizations, disability coordinators, congressional offices, private sector, etc.)

Step 7: Print copies of disaster-wide public notice for posting and distribution at Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs), Mitigation Outreach Sites, Applicant Briefings (with request to post locally attached), and Kickoff-Meetings (with request to post locally attached).

Step 8: Address comments received.

COST COMPARISON

Public notice costs in R4 average approximately \$5000-\$10000 per disaster, with some disasters receiving quotes as high as \$25000, depending on the geographic extent of the disaster, cost to publish in major metropolitan publications, and the number of counties declared. The anticipated cost of the R4 new approach to the disaster-wide public notice should range of \$500 to \$2000, dependent on the number required to be printed. This represents an average costs savings of at least \$3000 per disaster, if not greater. See table below for public notice costs from some recent R4 disasters using the widely-practiced method of newspaper notices.

Table 1. Cost of Disaster-wide Public Notice for R4 Declarations

Disaster	P/N Costs	Disaster	P/N Costs
1858-GA	\$10545	4177-FL	\$3816
4216-KY	\$14303	1909-TN	\$18186
4268-MS	\$4172	4166-SC	\$5706