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WVEMD Encourages Houses of Worship and Other Eligible Entities to Apply for FEMA Public Assistance Prior to Nov. 6 Deadline

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - The West Virginia Emergency Management Division (WVEMD) is encouraging churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship damaged by the July 21-22, 2026 severe storms, flooding, and landslides to find out whether they qualify for FEMA Public Assistance funding.

The program can help eligible organizations in Barbour, Doddridge, Lewis, Pendleton, Pleasants, Randolph, Ritchie, Tucker, Tyler, Upshur, and Wetzel counties pay for debris removal, emergency protective work, and the repair or replacement of damaged buildings and facilities. Public Assistance was added to the state's major disaster declaration (DR-4932-WV) for these 11 counties on October 7, 2026.

"Many of the churches in these counties are the places people turn to after a disaster, and some of them took serious damage," said WVEMD State Public Assistance Officer, Dr. Jason Means. "We want every congregation that may qualify to know about this program and to contact us before the deadline. We also want to be clear that this program is for organizations, not for individual residents."

Houses of Worship Are Eligible

Federal law makes a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other house of worship eligible for this assistance regardless of the religious character or primary religious use of the facility. A house of worship may not be excluded because its leadership or membership is limited to people who share its Faith. Each facility and each repair is still reviewed for eligibility, so applying does not guarantee funding.

What Additional Entities Are Eligible to Apply?

Only the following kinds of organizations with damage in the 11 counties listed above may apply:

- Local governments, including county commissions, municipalities, boards of education, public service districts, and other special districts.
- Certain private nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship, volunteer fire departments, rescue squads, hospitals and clinics, nonprofit utilities and water associations, community centers, senior centers, libraries, food banks, and homeless shelters.

A private nonprofit applicant must have a current IRS tax-exemption ruling letter or other evidence that it is a nonprofit organized or doing business under West Virginia law. However, the IRS considers houses of worship automatically exempt.

Two Steps for PNPs: SBA and Public Assistance

Federal law requires houses of worship and other nonprofits that do not provide critical services, such as power, water, or emergency medical care, to apply for a U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster loan before Public Assistance can pay for permanent repairs. Public Assistance may then cover eligible permanent repair costs if SBA finds the organization ineligible for a loan, or for costs beyond the maximum loan SBA approves.

Organizations should apply to SBA and submit their Public Assistance request at the same time. The SBA physical damage loan deadline for nonprofits in these counties is December 16, 2026. This later SBA date does not extend the November 6 deadline to request Public Assistance. Apply at lending.sba.gov or call SBA at 1-800-659-2955.

Deadline and How to Start:

Eligible organizations must submit a Request for Public Assistance to WVEMD by Friday, November 6, 2026. Houses of worship and other nonprofits should email WVEMD Public Assistance at WVPA@wv.gov with the organization's name, county, a contact person, and a short description of the damage. Organizations without email, or with questions, may call Dr. Means at (304) 550-4571. Organizations may also contact their county emergency management office for help.

Organizations that contact WVEMD should be ready to provide:

- Proof of nonprofit status, such as an IRS determination letter.
- Photos or other records of the damage and the facility's address.
- Insurance policy information and the status of any insurance claim. Public Assistance will not duplicate funding from other sources, and cannot pay for costs covered by insurance.
- Records of costs already paid for cleanup, emergency work, or repairs.

For more information, contact the West Virginia Emergency Management Division at 304-558-5380, or online at emd.wv.gov.

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