

Obama Wants Localities to Prepare for Climate Change

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The federal government will expand its efforts to help states and local governments prepare for natural disasters and climate change, under a series of actions announced by the White House July 16.

The measures include awarding utilities in eight states a total of \$236 million to improve rural electrical grids; providing drought assistance to parched communities in the West; and expanding disaster relief to include projects that would help minimize damage from future events.

President Barack Obama announced the actions as he met for the fourth and final time with a 26-member task force of state, tribal and local officials studying resilience.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) said it approved loans or grants for local utilities in eight states: California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia. By far the largest recipient is Sumter Electric Cooperative in central Florida, which will receive \$110 million to build or improve more than 1,400 miles of line.

The USDA dedicated nearly \$20 million of the awards for rolling out “smart grid” technology, which is designed to increase reliability and better manage resources during peak demand.

The USDA will also be providing more money for drought-stricken areas later this week. “These funds will help rural communities that have experienced or are likely to experience a significant decline in the quantity or quality of drinking water due to severe drought and other emergencies,” the White House said in a release.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will begin work on a pilot program to prepare communities for future disasters even as they recover from current ones. The approach would involve partnering with states, local governments and non-profit organizations to coordinate responses and funding.

FEMA is also working on incorporating responses to climate changes in plans states are required to develop to prepare for disasters.

The administration also announced it would:

- Improve three-dimensional mapping by the U.S. Geological Survey to help communities better prepare for flooding, coastal erosion, storm surges and water planning.
- Launch pilot programs with the state of Colorado and the city of Houston to increase cooperation between federal agencies and local communities in preparing for “region-specific vulnerabilities” related to climate change.
- Incorporate planning for climate change in its criteria for \$1.5 million in competitive grants to states and tribes for coastal management programs.

The administration said Wednesday's actions were based on early feedback from the task force group, which is scheduled to issue its final report this fall.

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<http://www.govtech.com/public-safety/Obama-Wants-Localities-to-Prepare-for-Climate-Change.html>