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Support FEMA Reform

Missouri River Energy Services (MRES) is comprised of 61-member municipal electric communities in four states: Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. As municipal-owned utilities, each exists to serve their customers with reliable and affordable power---the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays an important role in that, helping ensure municipally owned utilities can recover faster and better serve their communities following disasters.

Background

MRES and its members are accountable to the communities they serve and strive to ensure the continuity of resilient power delivery. When snowstorms, floods, or tornadoes strike, local municipal utilities are often first to respond—working around the clock to restore power, coordinate with emergency managers, and protect public safety. Each event not only strains local emergency resources but also creates financial burdens as cities and their utilities work to restore essential services.

Many of MRES' members have applied for numerous grants under FEMA. For example, Denison Municipal Utilities in Iowa was selected for a \$13.36 million project to improve its community safety and electric service reliability through the Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities (BRIC) program, but no funds have yet been distributed as FEMA distributions have been paused.

FEMA assistance is vital, yet the process has too often been burdened by administrative complexity, inconsistent interpretations, and long reimbursement delays. MRES continues to advocate for strong federal policies that would streamline the delivery of crucial disaster and relief funds.

Support for FEMA Act

Among the most recent proposals to modernize FEMA, MRES supports **H.R. 4669, the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act of 2025**, bipartisan legislation that strengthens FEMA's capacity to respond effectively to today's increasing frequency and severity of disasters.

Key provisions of the legislation:

- **Quicker reimbursements:** FEMA would be required to reimburse municipal utilities for emergency response work within 120 days of submitting a request and immediately approve 90% of eligible costs upfront.
- **Speedier project approvals:** FEMA must review major, long-term repair or rebuilding projects within 90 days and release funds within 30 days of approval—reducing the long delays that slow local recovery.
- **Building back stronger:** Municipal utilities would be allowed to use disaster recovery funds to upgrade and harden their systems—making them more resilient to future storms—instead of being forced to rebuild infrastructure “exactly as it was.”
- **Reimbursement for financing costs:** The bill would allow FEMA to reimburse municipal utilities for interest expenses on loans they take out while waiting for FEMA funding, easing the financial burden of delayed payments.

- **Better access to mitigation funding:** The legislation would make it easier for municipal utilities to tap FEMA’s hazard mitigation programs, helping communities strengthen reliability and reduce future disaster impacts.
- **Independent FEMA:** The bill would re-establish FEMA as a stand-alone agency reporting directly to the president, improving accountability and focus on disaster recovery missions.

The bill would improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency within FEMA’s disaster assistance programs—ensuring faster reimbursements, clearer eligibility guidance, and better coordination with state and local entities. Importantly, H.R. 4669 recognizes that municipal utilities and local governments are on the front lines of disaster response and must have timely access to federal assistance to restore essential services.

MRES urges its congressional delegation to support the bipartisan FEMA Reform Act (H.R. 4669), which will modernize FEMA’s structure and programs to improve disaster response, recovery, and mitigation across all sectors. These reforms will ensure that municipal utilities and the communities they serve can recover more swiftly and effectively, thereby strengthening local resilience and safeguarding public safety.