



FEMA

June 13, 2008

The Honorable Gene Taylor  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Taylor:

I understand that you are displeased by reports provided to you regarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) policy regarding the distribution of commodities following major disaster events, specifically the distribution of ice. Expecting that such reports may not always be comprehensive or entirely accurate, I wish to provide you with straightforward information, and then be available to you if you have additional questions or concerns.

FEMA is committed to meeting the immediate, emergency health and safety needs of residents of communities affected by Presidentially declared disaster events. We have learned that the primary needs include water and food, cots and blankets, and tarps to secure a home and make it safe for occupancy. We view these as priority needs and have developed a sustained capability to meet these needs by providing assistance directly to disaster victims. We also work closely with our State, local and non-governmental partners to conduct assessments and formalize requirements tailored within geographic areas, and then coordinate stockpiles and arrange delivery and distribution plans. We also encourage our State, local and non-governmental partners to extend beyond these primary commodities to identify and meet other needs, and provide reimbursement mechanisms to support their activities. Such is the case with ice. While FEMA does not consider ice as a primary commodity, we do acknowledge the value of providing ice and reimburse the activities of States and local governments who may choose to provide it in times of a disaster.

To better ensure your full understanding, I offer the following:

**This is not a new policy:** In April 2007, FEMA alerted all of our State, local, tribal, and non-governmental partners that we would no longer purchase, store and distribute ice within FEMA logistics warehouses and stockpiles. This policy was based on lessons learned from past hurricane response efforts, including the response to Hurricane Katrina. Several Katrina lessons learned reports, including the House and Senate Congressional Katrina Reports, the DHS Inspector General's Office, and the GAO – noted serious concerns with FEMA's management of ice stockpiles and direct distribution to disaster victims. Stepping back, but not away from the distribution of ice, FEMA chose to streamline our response efforts by partnering with more experienced experts trained in commodity distribution, e.g., the Defense Logistics Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, American Red Cross, and the private sector.

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**States can continue to provide ice:** This policy does not limit any state's ability to procure and distribute ice following major disasters. In fact, many states have proactively addressed their potential needs for ice by obtaining state contracts which contribute to a more capable state response. In the event that a state's capabilities to meet the need for ice in a disaster may become overwhelmed, FEMA is ready to work with states to ensure that requested ice can be provided. While FEMA will no longer be primarily responsible for purchasing, storing, and distributing ice, we have formed an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) who will be assigned a mission to support any state's need for ice. The associated costs for purchase and delivery of ice following major disasters are an eligible expense for reimbursement under the Public Assistance Program, which will allow states independently to purchase and distribute ice based on their requirements.

**FEMA encourages personal preparedness:** Planning and preparing for disasters is not only a responsibility of Federal, state and local organizations, but also of individual citizens. FEMA encourages individuals and families to assess their risks, be prepared in the event of a need to evacuate; and have a disaster kit for their homes. We provide a full range of information on individual and family preparedness through our web site that can be found at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

I trust that this information is helpful to you in better understanding FEMA's approach, which is to work through States and other partners to meet local determinations of the need for ice. I am convinced that adherence to this policy will permit FEMA and state and local governments to work cooperatively to efficiently and effectively meet the range of needs experienced by disaster victims.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please have your staff contact the Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 646-4500 for more information.

Sincerely;



R. David Paulison  
Administrator