

NEADA

NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

July 31, 2024

Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528
Email: alejandro.mayorkas@dhs.gov

Deanne Bennett Criswell, Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472
Email: deanne.criswell@fema.dhs.gov

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Administrator Criswell:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention extreme heat directly resulted in [2,302 deaths](#) in the United States in 2023, the highest number in at least 45 years. Extreme heat events are already some of the nation's most costly natural disasters according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

The National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), representing state directors of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), is writing in support of the recent rulemaking petition from major labor unions and environmental organizations and the subsequent supporting letter sent by the [14 state attorneys general](#) urging FEMA to treat extreme heat and wildfire smoke as major disasters. A similar letter was signed by [65 members of Congress](#).

FEMA's regulations do not recognize extreme heat and wildfire smoke as "major disasters." FEMA should update its regulations to recognize these events as qualifying major disasters because it would help states access vital funding provided by major disaster declarations. FEMA has never granted a major disaster request for extreme heat or wildfire smoke. The current situation leaves local governments with limited options, being forced to use state resources like LIHEAP to respond to life-threatening situations. LIHEAP funds are designed to help families pay routine heating and cooling needs, not to respond to major weather events that require families to significantly increase outlays to pay for summer cooling or to upgrade their cooling systems to allow them to stay safe during periods of extreme heat.

When hurricanes, tornadoes, or wildfires ravage communities, FEMA uses its power to provide needed federal support. Heat waves and wildfire smoke should be treated no differently, as the climate emergency drives up their frequency and intensity.

By including “extreme heat” and “smoke from wildfires” FEMA would be able to provide funds to cover assistance for emergency actions including reimbursing eligible applicants for the cost of home cooling and risk communication, as well as food, water, masks and air purification equipment and medical care. FEMA would also be able to provide assistance to reimburse costs associated with purchasing high efficiency air conditioning units and fans to assist in recovery, cover costs associated with repairing and replacing ventilation systems, and cooling technologies that are necessary for the habitability of homes, especially in hot climates.

We urge FEMA adopt the changes proposed by the state attorneys general in support of the rulemaking petition. Last year was the hottest year in US history. Extreme heat waves are becoming more common and should be included as part of FEMA’s tool kit to help families suffering from extreme weather conditions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Wolfe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Mark Wolfe
Executive Director