

News Clippings

November 9, 2009

Flood

Clark County

FEMA denies appeal for help

[Read the Article](#)

Indianapolis

FEMA denies disaster assistance for Central Indiana

[Read the Article](#)

Indianapolis

FEMA Denies Indiana Disaster Appeal

[Read the Article](#)

Indianapolis

FEMA turns down Indiana disaster aid appeal

[Read the Article](#)

Severe Weather

Indianapolis

FEMA again denies disaster status for S. Indiana flooding

[Read the Article](#)

FEMA denies appeal for help

By **MATT THACKER**

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November 04, 2009 09:20 pm

— Indiana has again been denied its request for federal disaster assistance from the flooding that began on Aug. 4.

The decision, while expected by many, has left some Clark County residents angry and local government officials looking for solutions.

“I’m not really surprised — disappointed — but (FEMA’s denial) certainly is not what those individuals affected by this was expecting,” said Clark County Emergency Management Director Les Kavanaugh.

A statement from the Indiana Department of Homeland Security released Wednesday morning announced the Federal Emergency Management Agency had denied Gov. Mitch Daniels’ request for assistance.

Federal assistance was first requested by Daniels on Sept. 9, but FEMA rejected that request on Sept. 24. Daniels sent another letter on Oct. 2 appealing the decision.

Clark County was one of nine counties to request individual assistance. Floyd County had requested individual and public assistance.

Rachel Meyer, public information officer for Indiana Homeland Security, said the governor will now send a request to the Small Business Association asking for assistance.

“(Daniels) will send the letter as soon as possible,” she said. “As far as when we’ll know an answer, I really can’t say.”

Meyer noted that it took only two weeks for FEMA to deny their initial request for disaster assistance but nearly five weeks to deny the appeal.

Howard Dye, 63, of Francis Court in Jeffersonville, said his home had at least \$12,000 in damage, but his insurance would not pay anything because it the damage was considered an “Act of God.”

“I don’t think it’s right,” Dye said of FEMA’s decision. “The flooding ruined all the carpet in my house, and we should have been able to get something.”

Local leaders disappointed with decision

U.S. Congressman Baron Hill, a Democrat representing Indiana’s 9th District, also condemned the decision.

“Baron was very disappointed about the appeal decision. It’s something he’s not really going to accept,” said Katie Moreau, a spokeswoman for Hill.

Several local municipalities have said they are already strapped for cash and have no money to

assist in disaster relief.

“At the local level, I don’t know of any source of funding,” Kavanaugh said. “In all likelihood, there are no other options.”

Ken Alexander, Sellersburg municipal works director, said there was substantial damage to some areas of Sellersburg.

“We do see some possibilities of some funding possibly left over from the previous storms from the state, but it doesn’t look like that is available at this point,” he said.

The Town of Clarksville’s building department released a statement that it is “extremely disappointed” in FEMA’s denial, which it says is a “huge set back to residents as they try to recovery.” The statement also notes that the town is working on several projects to help alleviate future flooding problems.

Governor will ask for SBA assistance

Officials are now waiting on a decision from the SBA. Some officials said they believe SBA money could be made available to individuals, while others said it would primarily be for businesses.

“I’ve been assured by SBA that the agency declaration will be expedited and could come as early as Friday,” said State Rep. Ed Clere, R-New Albany.

Clere said the next step would be for SBA officials to set up a field office, which could be finished within three days. He is advocating that the field office be set up in Floyd or Clark counties.

Clere said that if SBA assistance is denied, residents who applied for assistance should become eligible for \$5,000 Indiana Homeland Security grants. The problem is those grants would not become available until after assistance is denied.

“I am looking at ways to streamline the process. We just can’t afford any further unnecessary delays,” he said. “Folks affected by the flood have waited too long.”

Congressman Hill looking at changes in legislation

Homeland Security officials knew that the region did not quite meet the threshold for damage, but Daniels argued that the individual and public damage combined warranted federal help.

“(FEMA) said there just was not enough damage,” Meyer said.

Some Clark County residents have expressed anger that Louisville received assistance when Southern Indiana was denied, even though Louisville experienced the same weather event.

Moreau said Hill is working on legislation that would allow FEMA to consider how disasters impact a region. Under current law, FEMA could only consider Indiana counties when calculating the region’s total damage.

“Baron has met with FEMA officials and other emergency officials to try and get ideas about how to address this problem, where Louisville was granted for aid when there’s very little distance obviously between the two,” Moreau said.

She explained that the legislation would not be applied retroactively and would only be used for future weather events.

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[Back to Top](#)

[WXIN](#)

FEMA denies disaster assistance for Central Indiana

The decision affects individual and public assistance grants to Hoosiers in southern and central Indiana who experienced damage from severe weather Aug. 4-9.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) notified the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) that the appeal for federal disaster assistance has been denied.

The decision affects individual and public assistance grants to Hoosiers in southern and central Indiana who experienced damage from severe weather Aug. 4-9. In response to the denial, Governor Daniels will submit a request for assistance from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Federal assistance was first requested on September 9 following damage that occurred in the southern and central parts of the state from a tornado, severe straight line winds, torrential rains and flooding that swept through the counties beginning Aug. 4. Up to 10 inches of rain fell over a 23-hour period in some locations, quickly leading to severe flooding. On September 24, FEMA rejected that request. On October 2, a letter was sent to FEMA appealing the decision.

Individual assistance was requested for Brown, Clark, Floyd, Franklin, Jackson, Jennings, Marion, Ripley and Rush counties. Decatur County was added to the appeal. Individual assistance can include grants for housing, possessions, vehicles, counseling, unemployment and U.S. Small Business Administration loans.

Public assistance was requested for Brown, Decatur, Floyd, Franklin, Jefferson, Jennings, Owen, Parke, Ripley and Switzerland counties. Public assistance means state government and local governments and certain non-profit organizations in these counties would be eligible to apply for federal assistance to pay 75 percent of the approved cost of debris removal, emergency services related to the disaster and repairing or replacing damaged public facilities, such as roads, buildings and electrical cooperatives.

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[Back to Top](#)



FEMA Denies Indiana Disaster Appeal

Rick Howlett November 4, 2009, 3:30 pm |

Federal officials have for the second time denied an assistance request for southern and central Indiana residents affected by flash flooding and other weather disasters in early August.

Rachel Meyer with the Indiana Department of Homeland Security says an appeal filed by Gov. Mitch Daniels last month still came up short of the damage threshold required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“We’re going to request Small Business Administration loans, to try to help those who were affected by flooding, tornadoes, severe wind and all that,” Meyer said.

Daniels has been seeking individual or public assistance for about a dozen Indiana counties, including Clark and Floyd, for damage from severe weather that struck the region August fourth through the ninth.

[Back to Top](#)



November 4, 2009

FEMA turns down Indiana disaster aid appeal

By *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

INDIANAPOLIS - The Federal Emergency Management Agency has again turned down a request for assistance to southern and central Indiana residents affected by severe storms in August.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday that FEMA officials had denied an appeal of the agency's previous decision. Gov. Mitch Daniels appealed the decision last month, including additional damage reports from residents.

The federal disaster aid is for areas hit by storms Aug. 4-9, some of which dumped up to 10 inches of rain in some locations.

Individual disaster aid was sought for residents of Brown, Clark, Decatur, Floyd, Franklin, Jackson, Jennings, Marion, Ripley and Rush counties. Aid was requested to local governments in Brown, Decatur, Floyd, Franklin, Jefferson, Jennings, Owen, Parke, Ripley and Switzerland counties.

[Back to Top](#)

November 4, 2009

FEMA again denies disaster status for S. Indiana flooding

*By Lesley Stedman Weidenbener and Harold J. Adams
The Courier-Journal*

INDIANAPOLIS – For a second time, federal emergency officials have denied disaster aid to Southern Indiana victims of early August's severe weather, leaving residents without the help granted to those who suffered from the same storms just across the Ohio River in Louisville.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency initially denied Indiana's request for assistance in September. Gov. Mitch Daniels appealed the denial, an appeal that FEMA has now rejected.

The decision announced Wednesday drew mostly angry reactions in Clark and Floyd counties, which accounted for well over half the 550 affected homes included in a nine-county request for individual storm victims.

"I think it stinks," said Jeffersonville resident Wanda Hall, citing a long list of damages to her Francis Court home. "We had to replace all new walls, all new carpet. All my furniture got ruined. Everything in my garage got ruined. I mean, we just had a total mess here."

Hall said she doesn't understand why disaster aid was awarded to Louisville but denied to Indiana for similar damage. "I don't feel like that we're any different than them over there," she said.

Mindy Christian, emergency director for the City of Jeffersonville, agreed.

"It's maddening," Christian said. "We've proved to them that it's the same storm that hit Louisville ... and I don't understand it. There's no reasoning for it."

"So now we're going to have to face all of these people who have taken every spare cent that they had to replace what they lost, and Louisville's getting things just handed to them."

The Town of Clarksville issued a statement saying it was "extremely disappointed. ... This denial is a huge setback to residents as they try to recover."

Indiana Homeland Security spokeswoman Rachel Meyer said given FEMA's denial, Daniels plans to submit a request for assistance from the U.S. Small Business Administration. The SBA can make low-interest loans available to residents, if the request is approved. But she conceded, "It is something that can be denied" as well.

In August, FEMA designated Jefferson County, Ky., a major disaster area for the Aug. 4 drenching that sparked widespread flash flooding, closing streets and inundating basements. Daniels said in his appeal that the disaster was "as great or greater to our citizens and small communities."

The governor requested individual assistance for storm victims in Brown, Clark, Floyd, Franklin, Jackson, Jennings, Marion, Ripley and Rush counties. If approved, the assistance could have

included help with housing, counseling, unemployment and small business disaster loans.

But Christian said the state had to have at least 200 homes with “major” damage, and Indiana apparently fell short of that number.

“I can only speak for Jeffersonville,” she said. “We only had 68 (homes on the list). None of those were what they considered ‘majors.’”

She said the “major” standard was a fully flooded basement plus a foot or more of water on the first floor. In homes without basements, four feet of water would have to be on the first floor, she said.

Terry Herthel, emergency management director for Floyd County, said, “We just didn’t have enough to do it. There was not enough major damage” according to the FEMA standards.

Herthel said it was clear early on when FEMA was in town to conduct assessments in August that the prospects for a federal disaster declaration were slim.

“We could tell by the numbers that chances are we were not going to get it. We weren’t even close,” he said.

With the rejection of the appeal, he said, the way is at least cleared for the SBA loans request and a possible release of money from the Indiana Disaster Relief Fund, a state fund administered by Indiana Homeland Security.

Asked about the fund, Meyer said its use is up to the governor.

“At this point we haven’t made any decisions of whether we’re going to dip into that or not,” she said.

Calls about the fund to the governor’s office were not returned Wednesday.

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[Back to Top](#)