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FEMA rolls out $5 million for ice storm relief

By THE DAILY HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE
Staff Writer

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HOLYOKE - More than $5 million of the $50 million in anticipated aid is now available to reimburse seven state counties for costs associated with their response to the Dec. 11 ice storm.

More than 277 communities, as well as several state agencies eligible nonprofits, have applied for assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's public assistance program. The federal funds are aimed at relieving costs incurred by state and local responders between Dec. 11 and Dec. 18 of last year.

According to FEMA spokeswoman Suzanne Novak, a number of towns and cities in the county have not applied for federal aid, "which means they felt they did not have significant enough damage to apply," she said.

Amherst did apply, Novak said, however no estimates as to the cost of the damages there are currently available from FEMA. No one from Amherst Town Hall or the Department of Public Works were able to provide any estimates before press time.

Compensation by FEMA to each town is determined by the amount of money the town spent on emergency services and in debris management, said Novak.

In Hampshire County, the total cost thus far is $1,160,000 out of the 10 towns that provided debris estimates, according to figures provided by FEMA. The total amount of money used to clean debris in Franklin County is projected to be $1,550,760, based on 16 towns that have applied and provided their debris estimates. Combining both counties, the average per town is $104,260.

Chesterfield leads Hampshire County with $244,820 in debris costs; Ashfield was the hardest hit town in Franklin County to apply with an estimated $315,820 spent on debris removal.

Debris estimates are based on assessments that measure the number of cubic yards where debris has fallen and that needs to be removed. Each cubic yard is costs a town about $20.

Emergency services costs will not be calculated until a later date when members of FEMA will meet with officials in each town to assess their expenses, she said.

"Working in partnership with FEMA to reimburse these eligible applicants as quickly as possible remains a priority for all of us," said Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce.

The money given to each community by FEMA typically represents 75 percent of the eligible costs, while state and local government must cover the remaining expenses. Current figures estimate the total amount of aid will be around $50 million, but there is no cap on how much will be paid out.

Eligible projects include debris removal, emergency services, and repairing or replacing damaged public facilities. Eligible facilities include schools, libraries and other public buildings, roads, bridges, water control, utilities and recreational facilities. Nonprofit organizations may also qualify for support to restore facilities such as educational, utility, emergency, medical, custodial care and essential government services.

All funding must be approved by MEMA and FEMA. The submission process to receive aid is facilitated by a meetings held by a FEMA project specialist and representatives from the entity applying. Over 258 such meetings have been held since Jan. 14. Depending on when the meeting is held determines a community's application deadline.

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