



FEMA

INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION

FACT SHEET

Disaster Legal Services

BACKGROUND

The purpose of Disaster Legal Services (DLS) is to provide legal assistance to low-income individuals who, prior to or as a result of the disaster, are unable to secure legal services adequate to meet their disaster-related needs. This fact sheet outlines when DLS can be provided and explains the general conditions and limitations of DLS.

When the President declares a disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through an agreement with the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association, provides free legal help for survivors of that disaster. FEMA utilizes this agreement under the authority of Section 415 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288, as amended).

GENERAL SITUATIONS FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Legal advice is limited to cases that will not produce a fee (i.e., those cases where attorneys are paid part of the settlement, which is awarded by the court). Cases that may generate a fee are turned over to the local lawyer referral service. The assistance that local lawyers provide typically includes:

- Help with insurance claims for doctor and hospital bills, loss of property, loss of life, etc.;
- Drawing up new wills, powers of attorney and other legal documents lost in the disaster;
- Help with home repair contracts and contractors; and,
- Advice on problems with landlords.

CONDITIONS & LIMITATIONS OF DISASTER LEGAL SERVICES

- (1) Presidentially declared major disasters. DLS is for survivors of presidentially declared major disasters *only*.
- (2) Non-discrimination. All forms of FEMA assistance are available to any affected household that meets the conditions of eligibility. No Federal entity or official (or their agent) may discriminate against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or economic status.