

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Presents Disaster Relief Funds to Victims of Tropical Storm Floyd; Administration Acts Swiftly to Help those Most in Need

Governor Christie Whitman today distributed the first state grants to Tropical Storm Floyd victims at the Office of Emergency Management's Disaster Field Office in Piscataway.

"When I signed the Emergency Disaster Relief Act just two weeks ago, I said we would do everything we could to get help to the people who need it most, as quickly as possible," said Gov. Whitman. "Today we are delivering on that promise. The people who are here today to receive their checks have suffered terribly from the effects of Tropical Storm Floyd."

The bill appropriates \$50 million from the state's Surplus Revenue Fund for disaster relief to Floyd victims. Among its first beneficiaries today were Kathryn Zaleskie of Rochelle Park, who was presented with a check for \$15,000; Eleanor Matus, who received \$9,825, and John Hann, \$9,970, both of Manville; and Denise Baldicanas of Teaneck, who obtained \$6,938.

"I like to say that New Jersey is many faces, but one family. I'm pleased that again, New Jerseyans pulled together as a family to help those affected by Floyd," the Governor said.

Gov. Whitman was joined by state and federal officials, whom she commended for their hard work in the disaster relief efforts. While the federal government - through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - has responded in giving New Jerseyans all the help for which they were qualified under federal guidelines, the Governor explained that this help is not always enough.

"That's where the State is stepping in - to help close the gap, to help people rebuild their lives. The grants, distributed today, range from almost \$7,000 up to the maximum of \$15,000. These grants reflect the fact that our neighbors needed more help than the federal government could provide," Gov. Whitman said, despite praising both FEMA and the Small Business Administration for their involvement.

The Governor explained that each of the people receiving grants today have already received the maximum assistance available through FEMA's Individual and Family Grant program - more than \$13,000 per person. Because the state's program was created to supplement the federal government's efforts, none of these recipients had to file a separate application or complete any additional paperwork.

Again, Gov. Whitman urged Floyd victims to register with FEMA at 1-800-462-9029 by December 16th and commended FEMA for its response to the state's request to extend the deadline by one month.

The Emergency Relief Act of 1999, signed by Gov. Whitman, appropriates \$50 million from the state's Surplus Revenue Fund for disaster relief victims of Tropical Storm Floyd. The funds are slated for the nine counties declared disaster areas by President Clinton - Bergen, Essex, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset and Union.

The bill appropriates \$20 million in the form of grants to those individuals in the nine counties, whose homes were either destroyed or suffered major damage. The grants are available in amounts up to \$15,000, depending on the severity of the damage suffered and remaining unmet needs, and are being administered by the Department of Human Services. To be eligible, a person must register for assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and must apply for all aid provided by the federal government.

In addition, the disaster relief legislation includes \$20 million to be distributed as block grants to the counties, enabling those with the greatest need to receive a larger proportion of the grant money. Counties will be able to use these funds to meet unmet county and municipal government needs, as well as to assist businesses with their recovery. The Department of Community Affairs will review and approve county plans and disburse the funds.

There is also \$10 million in the bill to cover flood mitigation and other uses that might not yet have been brought to the attention of the state. Mitigation can run from raising furnaces and hot water heaters up from basement floors to elevating an entire home.

"This program is the result of the bill passed by the Legislature on October 25th and I'm pleased that some of those responsible for this bill are with us today. I want to commend them for getting that bill passed as swiftly as they did," said Gov. Whitman.

