

# Trump team plans deep cuts at office that funds recovery from big disasters

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WASHINGTON>> The Trump administration plans to all but eliminate the office that oversees America's recovery from the largest disasters, raising questions about how the United States will rebuild from hurricanes, wildfires and other calamities made worse by climate change.

The Office of Community Planning and Development, part of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, pays to rebuild homes and other recovery efforts after the country's worst disasters, such as Hurricane Helene in North Carolina and Hurricane Milton in Florida.

The administration plans to cut workers in that office by 84%, according to a document obtained by The New York Times. The number of workers would be cut to 150, from 936 when President Donald Trump took office last month.

Those cuts could slow the distribution of recovery money to North Carolina and other recent disasters, depending how quickly they happen.

"HUD is carrying out President Trump's broader efforts to restructure and streamline the federal government to serve the American people at the highest standard," a spokesperson for the department, Kasey Lovett, said in an initial statement.

In an additional statement, Lovett wrote: "Disaster recovery efforts are a top priority and will not be impacted. HUD's mission to serve all communities — especially following tragedies — remains unchanged."

The primary responsibility for rebuilding communities after major disasters falls to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which helps state and local governments pay to repair or rebuild damaged roads, bridges, schools, water treatment plants and other public infrastructure. The agency also provides money to help repair damaged homes.

But some disasters are so big that they exceed FEMA's funding, or the damage doesn't fit neatly within FEMA's programs. When that happens, Congress can choose to provide additional help, through a program at HUD called the Community Development Block Grant — Disaster Recovery.

That extra help from Congress can involve far greater sums than what FEMA can provide. In 2006, for example, Congress provided almost \$17 billion to rebuild the Gulf Coast after hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. After Hurricane Sandy, Congress gave HUD more than \$15 billion to help rebuild the Northeast.

As disasters have grown more frequent and severe, HUD's disaster recovery program has become central to the country's strategy for coping with climate change. During the 1990s, Congress typically gave the program a few hundred million dollars a year. Over the past decade, by contrast, Congress often has provided billions or even tens of billions annually.

HUD's disaster recovery money also comes with fewer strings attached. The money is largely used to rebuild homes that were uninsured or underinsured, which FEMA does not pay for. It also goes toward rebuilding infrastructure that's not covered by FEMA, such as the private roads and bridges that were significantly damaged by Helene in North Carolina.

The money also can be used for job training to help workers whose employers went out of business after a disaster.