



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
EMERGENCY SUPPORT TEAM

9711 Farrar Court, Suite 200, North Chesterfield, Virginia 23236

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HURRICANE HELENE RECOVERY

FAQs

The storm has now ended, and my home or community has damage. What is next?

Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, as are mental and physical well-being. If assistance is available, knowing how to access it makes the process faster and less stressful. Your first concern after a disaster is your family's health and safety. You need to consider possible safety issues and monitor family health and well-being.

If you are returning home following a disaster, know it can be both physically and mentally challenging. Above all, use caution. You may be anxious to see your property, but do not return home before local officials say it is safe to return.

Damage assessments will be scheduled with impacted localities where there is damage to homes, structures, and public infrastructure. This begins after any flood waters have receded and active response to life-safety hazards are completed.

For tips on recovering from a disaster, please visit <https://www.ready.gov/recovering-disaster>

What role does my local government play in my disaster recovery situation?

Local emergency managers work frequently around the year with VDEM staff to understand disaster recovery processes and often participate in state and federal training opportunities. They have pre-established relationships with key stakeholders and meetings are promptly scheduled with local jurisdictions by state officials following a disaster to outline the recovery process as soon as emergency response efforts are completed.

What is a damage assessment? Does this mean we will get state or federal assistance?

The results of the damage assessments will assist in determining if eligibility exists for State or Federal recovery programs. State and federal disaster programs are structured so that certain criteria have to be met to determine eligibility. Damage assessments assist in determining if those criteria are met and what the extent of the damages are from the disaster.

Additional information on the damage assessment process can be found at <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/how-declared>



SAVING LIVES THROUGH EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY.

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My road, home, or business had damages and I have questions. Who can I contact?

Residents should contact their local emergency management office to clarify their local process for reporting any damages.

For roadways, the public should report any concerns such as flooding, downed trees or road hazards to VDOT's 24-hour Customer Service Center by visiting my.vdot.virginia.gov or calling 800-FOR-ROAD (367-7623).

For additional tips, please visit <https://www.ready.gov/recovering-disaster>

My home has been damaged. Can I clean it up or must I wait for the damage assessment?

First, if you have damages following a disaster, contact your local emergency manager. Let your local officials know of any damages you may have, and what immediate assistance you may need. Local officials and voluntary organizations are usually the best options for immediate needs such as food and shelter.

If you have insurance, contact your insurance agent to file a claim.

- Make sure to document all your damages – before you clean up, take photos and make a list.
- Save all your receipts for post-damage repair and clean up.
- If you have insurance and damages, you must file a claim with your insurance company.

If you are returning home following a disaster, know it can be both physically and mentally challenging. Above all, use caution. You may be anxious to see your property, but do not return home before local officials say it is safe to return.

Safety Issues

- Be aware of new safety issues created by the disaster. Watch for washed out roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring and slippery floors.
- Walk carefully around the outside and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Do not enter your damaged home if:
 - You smell gas.
 - Floodwaters remain around the building.
 - Authorities have not declared it safe to enter.
- Inform local authorities about health and safety issues, including chemical spills, downed power lines, washed out roads, smoldering insulation and dead animals.
- Keep a battery-powered radio with you for emergency updates from local officials.



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I am without power. When will it be restored and who can I contact?

Unfortunately, there is always a possibility of long-duration power outages following a storm. To report an outage or for more information on power restoration, residents should contact their local provider (Dominion Energy, electrical cooperative). Dominion lists steps to restoration as:

Step 1: Assess and repair damage to larger transmission towers, power lines and substations.

Step 2: Clear obstructions and repair primary distribution poles and power lines.

Step 3: Inspect and repair secondary service drops in residential neighborhoods.

If you lost power, report outages directly to Dominion Energy, your local electrical provider or cooperative. Remember generator safety. Here are some safety tips for using a portable generator during a power outage:

- Keep the generator outdoors: Always operate it in a well-ventilated area to prevent carbon monoxide buildup.
- Maintain a safe distance: Place the generator at least 20 feet away from your home and any windows or doors.
- Use a transfer switch: Connect your generator to your home's electrical system using a transfer switch to avoid backfeeding, which can endanger utility workers.
- Avoid overloading: Check the generator's wattage capacity and only connect essential appliances to prevent overload.
- Use heavy-duty extension cords: Ensure they are rated for outdoor use and compatible with your generator.
- Keep fuel stored safely: Store fuel in approved containers away from living areas, and never refuel while the generator is running.
- Regularly check for leaks or damage: Inspect the generator before use to ensure it's in good working condition.
- Monitor the generator while in use: Never leave it running unattended.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions: Always adhere to the guidelines provided in the user manual.
- Plan for power restoration: Stay informed about estimated restoration times and be prepared to turn off the generator when power returns.

When will we know what recovery programs are available for me or my community?

This will be announced following the damage assessment process with local governments. Determinations are not a rapid process as the disaster assessments take time to ensure accuracy. Follow reputable sources of public information such as state government websites and social media, and your local government's main information sharing sources (website, social media, etc.) for updates.



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I need help with clean-up at my home. Are there resources that can help me?

Yes, for those who need help with cleanup/debris management you can contact the cleanup hotline for Hurricane Helene at 1-844-965-1386.

You can also contact your local emergency management office and they can potentially assist with connecting you with volunteer organizations in your area that can be a resource.

Here are some tips to return home safely:

- Each year, a significant number of people are injured or killed in the aftermath of a hurricane. As you return home and begin the recovery phase, keep these safety tips in mind:
- Wait to return to your property until local officials have declared that the area is safe.
- Do not wade in floodwaters, which can contain dangerous debris including broken glass, metal, dead animals, sewage, gasoline, oil, and downed power lines.
- Do not enter a building until it has been inspected for damage to the electrical system, gas lines, septic systems, and water lines or wells.
- Avoid drinking tap water until you know it is safe. If uncertain, boil or purify it first.
- Watch for fallen objects and downed electrical wires; Stay at least 30 feet away from downed lines – consider them energized and dangerous; report downed power lines to your local utility provider.

More information can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety/index.html#:~:text=Put%20on%20personal%20protective%20equipment,everything%20with%20mold%20on%20it.>

What does Public Assistance mean to me?

The term Public Assistance can be misleading. This type of disaster assistance is for local, state, tribal governments, and certain private-non-profits, only. This type of assistance is *not* for residents and property owners. Public Assistance provides reimbursement to government entities for the damages incurred and costs of the response and recovery process. Like all disaster assistance avenues, there is a damage assessment and thresholds that must be met at all levels of government as prescribed by law.

Information on FEMA's public assistance can be found at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public>



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What does Individual Assistance mean to me?

Individual Assistance is a disaster recovery avenue that provides direct financial assistance to residents and property owners whose primary residences are damaged or destroyed. This type of disaster assistance may be used for housing costs, repairs to your home, or other needs assistance. If the Commonwealth receives an Individual Assistance Presidential declaration, information will be published explaining how individuals can apply for assistance.

Information on FEMA's individual assistance can be found at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual>

How can I volunteer to help?

Please volunteer through organizations that you trust. You can find several reputable organizations at www.virginiavoad.org. Volunteering with trusted organizations ensures your safety and helps public safety officials focus on meeting affected communities' needs. Let's ensure our efforts are safe and coordinated. Spontaneous volunteers and donations can hinder emergency activities and create complications for those involved in managing the effort.

How do I find my local emergency management office?

Local governments typically have this information on their webpages or social media sites. You can also utilize the local emergency management directory at <https://lemd.vdem.virginia.gov/Public/>. If you cannot locate this information online, you can call the 24 hr. public inquiry line by dialing 211.

Where can I find updates on the recovery effort?

Please visit vaemergency.gov or <https://www.vaemergency.gov/recover/hurricane-helene>



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