

Preliminary Damage Assessment Guide

2020 Summary of Changes

On May 8, 2020, FEMA released its [Preliminary Damage Assessment Guide](#) (PDA Guide), the update to the 2016 Damage Assessment Operations Manual. The purpose of the PDA Guide and its accompanying [PDA Pocket Guide](#) is to define a standard national-level framework for how state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments and FEMA staff collect and validate the cause, location, and details of damage following a disaster. Guidance in the PDA Guide will go into effect on June 8, 2020. This document highlights key changes between the process laid out in the PDA Guide compared to the earlier guidance.

Background

A Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) is the mechanism SLTT governments and FEMA use to determine the impact and magnitude of damage following a disaster and the resulting unmet needs to individuals, businesses, the public sector, and communities. The primary objective of the PDA is to collect information, conduct analysis, and provide situational awareness to state, territorial, or tribal government leaders to determine whether the impacts of a disaster warrant a disaster declaration request under the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 5121 *et seq.*).

Summary of Changes

1. Inclusion of Desktop Assessments as a Possible Methodology for Public Assistance PDAs

Visual confirmation of damage by FEMA does not necessarily need to be in-person. When a SLTT government has the capability to participate in a desktop assessment, it can submit Initial Damage Assessments (IDAs) to FEMA with documentation, including photographs, that allow FEMA to validate information remotely. The concept of operations for these desktop assessment PDAs will differ slightly from the normal process. For example, there will be more coordination between the SLTT PDA Coordinator and the FEMA PDA Coordinator on verified PDA information submitted by SLTTs to FEMA for review (remote validation) by a PDA Validator and team.

2. Changes to the Definitions of Degrees of Damage for Individual Assistance

Changes to the degree of damage definitions primarily add greater clarity and specificity to the 2016 standards for both manufactured and conventionally built homes and expand on information related to basements. See specific changes to the definitions of degrees of damage in the table below:



Home Damage	Old Guidance (2016)	New Guidance (2020)
<i>Flooding</i> Manufactured Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water touching the floor system = Major Damage - Damage to skirting = Minor Damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water touching the floor system = Minor Damage - Water covering floor system, in living space = Major Damage - Water at the roofline = Destroyed Damage - Damage to skirting = Affected Damage
<i>Non-Flooding</i> Manufactured Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Damage to skirting = Minor Damage - Missing roof covering = Destroyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Damage to skirting = Affected Damage - Compromised roof frame = Destroyed Damage - 50% or more of non-structural components = Major Damage
<i>Flooding</i> Conventionally built home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18" Standard: waterline under 18" = Minor Damage - Waterline above 18" = Major Damage* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waterline in unfinished basement = Affected Damage - Waterline in finished basement = Minor Damage - Waterline damages mechanical components = Minor Damage - Waterline in an essential living space = normal 18" major/minor standard. - Basement full, with water on first floor = Major Damage

* The 18" standard remains the same as the 2016 standard in all cases unless additional information (e.g., height of the outlets, duration of the flood waters, contaminants in the flood waters, number of essential living spaces with damage) can be validated by FEMA staff. In these circumstances, a waterline between 3" and 18" may be categorized as either Minor Damage or Major Damage.

3. Development of a Tribal-Specific Considerations Appendix

The Tribal-Specific Considerations Appendix mirrors the main document structure and explains the differences in the Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA) PDA processes for tribes. The appendix accounts for cultural, geographic, and legal nuances specific to tribes, and contains links to FEMA IA, PA, declarations guidance, and PDA resources for tribes.

4. Removal of "Soft-Costs" from Public Assistance Estimates

"Soft costs" are estimates of potential expenses that may be eligible for reimbursement under the PA Program, but do not reflect the immediate impact to the community or the community's capacity to respond to a disaster. Examples of these types of costs include the following: management or administrative costs; additional costs to mitigate risk; additional costs for updating building codes and standards, and architectural and engineering costs. Soft costs will no longer be included in PA estimates, bringing guidance into alignment with FEMA's current practice. Inclusion of soft costs does not align with the purpose of a PDA to rapidly assess a SLTT's capacity to recover.