



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

May 17, 2013

**Re: Unified Federal Review Process for Disaster Recovery Projects**

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council on Environmental Quality, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This letter is to inform you of our collective efforts to guide the development of the Unified Federal Review Process for the environmental and historic preservation review of disaster recovery projects.

The Disaster Relief Appropriations Act and Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013, enacted in January, calls for an interagency effort by the CEQ, the ACHP, DHS, and FEMA. We are leading the development of the Unified Federal Review Process that is due in July 2014. Our goal is to develop a process for disaster recovery activities that benefits applicants and project proponents, supports good decision making by Federal agencies, and accomplishes the intent of Congress. A copy of the statute and a list of Frequently Asked Questions are attached for your information.

We have begun our work by asking the Federal agencies that support disaster recovery for their views on developing a Unified Federal Review Process that will improve the partnership between the Federal government and tribes, states, and local communities. For example, we have asked the Federal agencies that engage in disaster recovery activities to provide us their views on the following areas:

- Identifying obstacles in the environmental and historic preservation review of services, grants, and other assistance in disaster recovery;
- Identifying tools or other resources that could improve the ability to assist with or participate in environmental and historic preservation reviews for disaster recovery projects;
- Recommending how the environmental and historic preservation review process could be made more efficient and effective for disaster recovery projects;
- Identifying prior or ongoing efforts to improve the environmental and historic preservation review process efficiency and effectiveness; and
- Providing examples of best practices and lessons learned that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental and historic preservation reviews.

We welcome your thoughts and perspectives on these topics, and any others, that you would like to share for our consideration as we move forward. We have established an e-mailbox that we ask that you use when communicating with us about this process ([Federal-unified-review@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:Federal-unified-review@fema.dhs.gov)) and are developing a public website to keep you informed and share information as we develop the unified review process.



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Thank you in advance for your time and attention. We look forward to hearing your questions, perspectives, and suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Horst G. Greezmiel", is written over the printed name.

Horst G. Greezmiel  
Associate Director for NEPA Oversight

Attached:

- (1) Section 429
- (2) FAQs



## Unified Federal Review

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### Frequently Asked Questions:

Expedited and Unified Interagency Review Process for Compliance with Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation requirements under Federal Law (Unified Federal Review)

**Q:** What is the Unified Federal Review Process and under what authority was it created?

**A:** The Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 (SRIA) added Section 429 to the Stafford Act which directs the President to establish an expedited and unified interagency review process by July 29, 2014. The Unified Federal Review Process is focused on compliance with environmental and historic preservation requirements for disaster recovery projects.

**Q:** What disaster recovery projects will be included in the Unified Federal Review Process?

**A:** The Unified Federal Review Process will consider disaster recovery projects to encompass Federal activities, assistance, and projects that begin after the initial stabilization of the incident and reestablish the capabilities necessary to assist communities affected by an incident to recover effectively, including, but not limited to, rebuilding infrastructure systems; providing adequate interim and long-term housing for survivors; restoring health, social, and community services; promoting economic development; and restoring natural and cultural resources. The Federal activities end when the funds appropriated for the recovery have been obligated. This is consistent with the National Disaster Recovery Framework and the Emergency Management Institute's use of the term.

**Q:** What is the purpose of a Unified Federal Review Process?

**A:** A Unified Federal Review can enhance the ability of the Federal environmental and historic preservation review process to inform and expedite disaster recovery decisions for grant applicants and other potential beneficiaries of disaster assistance, enhance consistency in the review processed across Federal agencies, and assist agencies in better leveraging their resources and tools.

**Q:** Who is leading the development of the Unified Federal Review Process?

**A:** A Steering Group consisting of the Council on Environmental Quality, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency will be leading the development of the Unified Federal Review Process.



Frequently Asked Questions *continued*:

**Q:** Who else will be involved?

**A:** The Steering Group will bring together a broader group of Federal agencies that have various roles in disaster recovery to assist in developing the review process. This group of Federal agencies includes those who provide Federal assistance and permitting during post-disaster recovery and Federal agencies with a regulatory or consultation role in the reviews. In addition to consulting with their Federal agency counterparts, the Steering Group will seek the views of other stakeholders including Tribal, State, and local governments, and the public.

**Q:** How can stakeholders and the public make their views and suggestions on improving disaster recovery efforts known?

**A:** The Steering Group will announce the Unified Federal Review Process and provide points of contact and a web-based comment system for stakeholders and the public.

**Q:** How long will it take to complete the development of the Unified Federal Review Process?

**A:** The Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 (SRIA) includes the requirement to complete the Unified Federal Review Process 18 months of enactment SRIA. On January 29, 2013, President Obama signed SRIA into law (P.L. 113-2).

**Q:** How will the Unified Federal Review Process impact Sandy recovery efforts?

**A:** The Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, led by HUD Secretary Donovan, is addressing environmental and historic preservation review as part of their overall work to expedite and facilitate Federal assistance to advance long term rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Sandy. The Unified Federal Review Steering Group plans to support and learn from the Sandy recovery effort.

**Q:** Will the development of the Unified Federal Review Process impact other on-going disaster recovery activities?

**A:** The Unified Federal Review Process will develop new and compile existing procedures and methods to improve the timely and efficient review of Federal disaster recovery activities. Those procedures and methods will be highlighted and disseminated as they become available. We expect they will be used on an on-going basis.



AUTHORITY: Disaster Relief Appropriations Act and Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 amended Title IV of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to add Sec. 429 Unified Federal Review:

“(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this section, and in consultation with the Council on Environmental Quality and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the President shall establish an expedited and unified interagency review process to ensure compliance with environmental and historic requirements under Federal law relating to disaster recovery projects, in order to expedite the recovery process, consistent with applicable law.

(b) CONTENTS.—The review process established under this section shall include mechanisms to expeditiously address delays that may occur during the recovery from a major disaster and be updated, as appropriate, consistent with applicable law.”