

What is ESF #4?

Wildland fire agencies respond to more types of emergencies than only wildland fire, and structural fire departments respond to more than only structure fires. In addition to day-to-day emergencies of all types within their areas of protection, these emergency responders also deal with hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, terrorist attacks—any type of natural or human-caused disaster or emergency could result in a request to the Federal government for wildland or structural fire resources.

Coordination of resources can be complicated during a Presidential declaration of emergency or major disaster; however, a process exists to guide such multiagency interactions. In these cases, the response is coordinated under the National Response Framework (NRF). The NRF identifies the roles and structures of Federal agencies to provide support to States or other agencies through Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). A list of the ESFs and their Coordinating Agencies are included later in this document. The NRF identifies ESF #4 as the coordinator for wildland, rural, urban, and suburban firefighting support; and under the NRF, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) serves as Primary Agency for ESF #4. During all types of disasters and major emergencies, ESF #4 is the primary link between the Federal wildland and structural fire communities and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The USFS coordinates and staffs ESF #4 with the support of the Department of the Interior (DOI), and serves as the face of wildland and structural firefighting resources to FEMA and other involved agencies.

There are six departments or agencies identified as support agencies to ESF #4 to provide technical support, assistance, and expertise in specific areas related to firefighting operations. In addition to DOI, these support agencies are the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), the National Weather Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Defense, and Department of State. Their roles related to ESF #4 are identified in the ESF #4 Annex of the NRF.

Emergency Support Function #4

The purpose of ESF #4 is to provide Federal support for the detection and suppression of wildland, rural, and urban fires resulting from, or occurring coincidentally with, an all hazard incident requiring a coordinated Federal response and assistance. Under the NRF, ESF #4 manages and coordinates Federal firefighting activities by mobilizing firefighting resources in support of State, tribal, and local wildland, rural, and urban firefighting agencies. In addition, these resources are often mobilized to support Federal or State entities with situations that do not involve wildland fire.

USFS Washington Office Fire & Aviation Management, All Hazard & International Fire Support Branch is the day-to-day link to DHS/FEMA and provides the National ESF #4 coordinator. Each USFS region/area has a designated Regional/Area ESF coordinator to work with their FEMA region(s). As support agencies, DOI Office of Wildland Fire and USFA each have an ESF #4 coordinator to maintain a close working relationship with the National ESF #4 coordinator.

During a disaster or emergency, ESF #4 may be staffed at all levels of FEMA operations:

- The National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) at FEMA headquarters in Washington, DC;
- A Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC) in any of the 10 FEMA regions;

- A FEMA Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) – an advance team that deploys at the onset of an emergency to provide Federal liaison capabilities with the affected State(s) and set up an Interim Operating Facility (IOF) or Joint Field Office (JFO), if necessary.
- A JFO established in any State affected by a disaster or major emergency;
- A State Emergency Operations Center (EOC); or
- A Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC);
- The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC).

The ESF #4 positions at FEMA facilities are referred to as “Fire Unit Leader” and “Fire Specialist.”

ESF #4 Position Qualifications

ESF #4 is staffed by qualified personnel from USFS, DOI, and the USFA. The ESF #4 Primary Leader (ESFL) is always an USFS employee as the agency is the Executive Agent to FEMA for firefighting support under the Stafford Act and the National Response Framework. The Fire Unit Leader at a FEMA facility will always be a qualified ESFL. USFS and DOI employees can be qualified as ESF #4 Support–Wildland (ESFW); USFA employees can be qualified as ESF #4 Support–Structure (ESFS) to provide expertise on structural and urban firefighting. Employees of any of the agencies may be qualified as ESF #4–Administrative Support (ESFA). ESF #4 personnel, other than the Fire Unit Leader, working at FEMA facilities are referred to as Fire Specialists.

The official qualifications for all of the ESF #4 positions are identified in the Federal Wildland Fire Qualifications Supplement to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group PMS 310-1, Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide.

When activated, ESF #4 staff at the NRCC serve as the link between USFS and DOI leadership and FEMA leadership. Similarly, ESF #4 staff at the RRCC or JFO serves as the link between USFS and DOI regions or State offices and FEMA regions. In addition to being the conduit linking the resource ordering process to FEMA funding mechanisms, ESF #4 staff gathers ongoing intelligence for the ESF #4 agencies and FEMA about emerging details regarding the incident.

Tactical and Logistical Support

ESF #4 is the link between the wildland fire resource ordering process and FEMA funding mechanisms during a disaster response. Upon request for firefighting resource support from a State, FEMA provides ESF #4 with a mission assignment. ESF #4 places the order with the appropriate Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC). As with wildland fires, the GACC mobilizes and coordinates firefighting resources at the geographic area level.

In addition to the primary ESF #4 mission, USFS and DOI are also identified as support agencies to other ESFs. These agencies may be sub-tasked by any of these ESFs to provide support identified in the NRF. For example, under these support missions, USFS may be asked to provide:

- Saw-capable personnel for emergency road clearing;
- Command and control assets (single resource or IMTs);
- Transportation assets, such as aircraft;
- Radio communications systems and support personnel;
- Engineering and contracting/procurement personnel and equipment to assist in emergency removal of debris;
- Resources and supplies for evacuation shelters;

- Staff for establishing logistics facilities such as incident support bases or Federal staging areas;
- Personnel, equipment, and supplies to support Federal health and medical teams;
- Cache equipment and supplies to support Federal urban search and rescue task forces;
- Technical assistance and logistical support at oil and hazardous materials spills; and
- Law enforcement and investigation personnel.

Additionally, FEMA can issue a direct mission assignment (MA) to USFS or DOI through ESF #4 to provide support outside of that specifically identified in the NRF. Any requests for assistance outside of the primary or support missions identified in the NRF are closely scrutinized by ESF #4 staff. When possible, we provide advisory services, guidance, and training to the requesting agency to help them build capacity rather than performing the task for them.

ESF #4 activations do not always result in mobilization of response assets such as IMTs or crews. In fact, the majority of activations require USFS to staff the ESF #4 desk at an RRCC with one or two people for a few days – nothing more. However, there are incidents – Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma in 2005, the California fire sieges in 2007 and 2008, Hurricane Irene in 2011, Superstorm Sandy in 2012, the Colorado Floods in 2013, and Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in 2017 – where dozens of ESF #4 staff and hundreds of responders are mobilized.

More information about ESF #4 can be found at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/ibp/all-hazard>

Examples of Notable ESF #4 Assignments

2009

American Samoa Tsunami and Typhoon Melor – Following a major earthquake, a tsunami seriously impacted American Samoa. An ESFL and ESF #4 Wildland Support staff member accompanied a FEMA Incident Management Assistance Team to American Samoa to identify potential support that could be provided through ESF #4. During that response, Typhoon Melor was poised to strike Saipan and Guam. An incident management team was mobilized to assist FEMA in providing life-saving and life-sustaining supplies to the islands; however, the storm’s last-minute change of course spared the islands from significant impacts.

2010

Arizona Winter Storms – A series of major winter storms swept through Arizona in January creating heavy snow accumulations in the northeast part of the state which blocked access routes to and from some areas left many people stranded or without the means to provide the basic necessities of life. Following a FEMA emergency declaration on January 24th, Forest Service equipment and personnel worked in coordination with the Arizona State Type 2 incident management team in supplying food, water, charcoal, and fuel wood to residents most affected in the aftermath of this weather event. Forest Service equipment including dozers and snowmobiles were used to clear roads and ferry supplies to residents in areas that were inaccessible.

2011

Northern Rockies/Rocky Mountain Flooding – Flooding and mudslides caused by Spring rains and warm temperatures melting an excessive snow pack occurred throughout the Northern Rocky Mountains in May. FEMA activated ESF #4 regionally, and the Forest Service provided ESF #4 staff and an incident management team to coordinate State and local response to flooding in Wyoming.

Hurricane Irene – This Category 3 storm in late August made landfall in Puerto Rico, then made landfall three times on the U.S. East Coast -- at Cape Lookout, North Carolina; Little Egg Inlet, New Jersey; and New York City. Coastal areas in the Mid-Atlantic States sustained the brunt of the damage from the initial landfall; Irene then battered much of the Northeast with record rainfall and major flooding. ESF #4 staff operated nationally and in four FEMA regions. Three incident management teams and 11 hand crews were mobilized to New York and Massachusetts following Hurricane Irene to assist with emergency road clearing and coordination of distribution of water and other commodities. Communications equipment, communications technicians, and aviation specialists were also mobilized to assist FEMA in two FEMA regions.

Texas Wildfires – Extreme drought resulted in a critical fire situation throughout much of Texas. In September, several serious wildfires consumed over 1,000 homes. A Presidential Declaration of Emergency was issued, and FEMA activated ESF #4 to provide technical support and advice to FEMA personnel working with the State of Texas. Firefighting resources continued to be coordinated through the national wildland fire mobilization system, funded primarily through Fire Management Assistance Grants rather than mission assignments.

2012

Hurricane Sandy – Hurricane Sandy was the second-largest Atlantic storm on record, affecting the East Coast from Florida to Maine, and states as far west as Indiana. Making landfall as a post-tropical cyclone in southern New Jersey on October 29, Sandy battered the densely populated New York and New Jersey region with heavy rains, strong winds, and record storm surges. On the western side of the storm, blizzard conditions paralyzed parts of the central Appalachians, including much of West Virginia. The storm's effects were extensive, resulting in a massive Federal response. ESF #4 coordinated the mobilization of 10 IMTs, 50 hand crews, and various other resources. At the height of the response, 1,200 responders were deployed to New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and West Virginia. In addition, qualified ESF #4 and support personnel were working with FEMA at JFOs, RRCCs, State EOCs, and the NRCC, and in support of the operations at the Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry offices, the Eastern Area Coordination Center, and the USFS Washington Office.

2013

Colorado Flash Floods – In September 2013, a significant rain event resulted in serious flash flooding in the Colorado Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. Following an Emergency Declaration by the President, FEMA issued a Mission Assignment through ESF #4 for command/control/coordination and aviation support for all-hazard emergency operations in the areas affected by the floods. During the two week response, ESF #4 had ordered two IMTs, 11 hand crews, seven helicopters and modules, five air tactical platforms, and associated overhead personnel (approximately 490 individuals total). These resources provided support for missions that had a significant impact on the outcome of the incident: rescue of approximately 1500 people and over 700 animals, and hauling of 114,800 lbs. of cargo to remote areas and stranded communities.

2014

Oso Slide – A major landslide occurred near the town of Oso, Washington, in March. Mud and debris cover a 1.3 square mile span, at a depth of 60 feet in places; 43 people were killed by the slide. The search effort continued for more than a month. FEMA activated ESF #4 regionally, and the Forest Service provided ESF #4 staff and a Type 2 incident management team to coordinate response operations, which involved over 200 responders at the height of the response.

2017

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria – Three major hurricanes made landfall in three different parts of the country (Texas/Louisiana, Florida/Georgia, and Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands) within weeks of each other, all while the National Preparedness Level was at the highest P.L. 5. ESF #4 coordinated the ordering for FEMA from across all Federal and State organizations 27 interagency Incident Management Teams, seven 20-person crews, 26 two-person saw modules, and miscellaneous overhead personnel between August 26 and November 19. Missions included managing Federal staging areas, providing logistical support to law enforcement personnel, performing emergency road clearing, managing logistics facilities, and supporting local emergency operations centers.

2018

Super Typhoon Yutu – In late October, Super Typhoon Yutu hit the Northern Mariana Islands as a Category 5 storm. With winds up to 180-mph, the storm destroyed several hundred structures including homes, schools, and businesses. Over a period of 31 days, ESF #4 worked with IMTs and a local hand crew on Saipan and Tinian to coordinate the efforts of multiple agencies in distributing and setting up temporary emergency shelters to disaster survivors. More than 1,100 households received shelters through this effort.

2019

Hurricane Dorian – the projected path of this slow-moving major hurricane confounded forecasters, complicating efforts to pre-positioning resources from many different agencies. ESF #4 was activated in two FEMA regions and at the NRCC to coordinate the pre-positioning of three IMTs and six Type 1 crews, along with miscellaneous overhead, to be able to perform emergency road clearing immediately after the storm passed to provide access for search and rescue crews.

2020

COVID-19 Planning Support – Beginning in March, 2020, ESF #4 responded to the initial stages of the pandemic by providing incident management personnel to various federal, state, and local Emergency Operations Centers to assist those organizations with strategic and operational planning related to the response to the COVID-19 emergency. This phase of the response lasted until June 2020.

California Wildfires and Oregon Wildfires – ESF#4 was activated separately in California and Oregon to support FEMA's non-suppression response roles by monitoring wildfire activity, gathering information and briefing FEMA for situational awareness. ESF #4 also supported an Erosion Threat Team in Oregon.

2021

National COVID-19 Vaccination Vaccine – Through ESF #4, Forest Service provided Emergency Medical Service personnel to serve as vaccinators, screeners, and medical observers at federally supported vaccination centers. Forest Service also provided incident management personnel to assist Federal, State, and local agencies with vaccination distribution planning and vaccination site management, logistics, planning, operations and supervision. Vaccinators mobilized through Forest Service administered a total of 1,910,132 doses of vaccine during the 2021 National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign. Between January 20 and June 23, a total of 1,929 interagency personnel were mobilized through ESF #4; of these, 979 were USDA Forest Service employees.

Acronyms

As with any administrative function, FEMA has its own shorthand that all ESFs must learn and use. The following are some commonly used acronyms that can help speed communication during ESF activations.

DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOI	Department of the Interior
EOC or SOC	Emergency Operations Center or State Operations Center
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GACC	Geographic Area Coordination Center
IMAT	Incident Management Assistance Team
IOF	Interim Operating Facility
JFO	Joint Field Office
MA	Mission Assignment
NICC	National Interagency Coordination Center
NRCC	National Response Coordination Center
NRF	National Response Framework
RRCC	Regional Response Coordination Center
USFA	U.S. Fire Administration
USFS	U.S. Forest Service

Emergency Support Functions and ESF Coordinators

ESF #1 – Transportation

ESF Coordinator: Department of Transportation

Coordinates the support of management of transportation systems and infrastructure, the regulation of transportation, management of the Nation's airspace, and ensuring the safety and security of the national transportation system. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Transportation modes management and control;
- Transportation safety;
- Stabilization and reestablishment of transportation infrastructure;
- Movement restrictions; and
- Damage and impact assessment.

ESF #2 – Communications

ESF Coordinator: DHS/ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Coordinates government and industry efforts for the reestablishment and provision of critical communications infrastructure and services, facilitates the stabilization of systems and applications from malicious activity (e.g., cyber), and coordinates communications support to response efforts (e.g., emergency communication services and emergency alerts and telecommunications). Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Coordination with telecommunications and information technology industries;
- Coordination of the reestablishment and provision of critical communications infrastructure;
- Protection, reestablishment, and sustainment of national cyber and information technology resources;
- Oversight of communications within the federal response structures; and
- Facilitation of the stabilization of systems and applications from cyber events.

ESF #3 – Public Works and Engineering

ESF Coordinator: DOD/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Coordinates the capabilities and resources to facilitate the delivery of services, technical assistance, engineering expertise, construction management, and other support to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster or an incident. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Infrastructure protection and emergency repair;
- Critical infrastructure reestablishment;
- Engineering services and construction management; and
- Emergency contracting support for life-saving and life-sustaining services.

ESF #4 – Firefighting

ESF Coordinator: USDA/U.S. Forest Service and DHS/FEMA/U.S. Fire Administration

Coordinates the support for the detection and suppression of fires. Functions include but are not limited to supporting wildland, rural, and urban firefighting operations.

ESF #5 – Information and Planning

ESF Coordinator: DHS/FEMA

Supports and facilitates multiagency planning and coordination for operations involving incidents requiring federal coordination. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Deliberate and crisis action planning; and
- Information collection, analysis, visualization and dissemination.

ESF #6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing, and Human Services

ESF Coordinator: DHS/FEMA

Coordinates the delivery of mass care and emergency assistance. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Mass care;
- Emergency assistance;
- Temporary housing; and
- Human services.

ESF #7 – Logistics

ESF Coordinator: General Services Administration and DHS/FEMA

Coordinates comprehensive incident resource planning, management, and sustainment capability to meet the needs of disaster survivors and responders. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Comprehensive national incident logistics planning, management, and sustainment capability; and
- Resource support (e.g., facility space, office equipment and supplies, and contracting services).

ESF #8 – Public Health and Medical Services

ESF Coordinator: Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Coordinates the mechanisms for assistance in response to an actual or potential public health and medical disaster or incident. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Public health;
- Medical surge support, including patient movement;
- Behavioral health services;
- Mass fatality management; and
- Veterinary, medical, and public health services.

ESF #9 – Search and Rescue

ESF Coordinator: DHS/FEMA

Coordinates the rapid deployment of search and rescue resources to provide specialized life-saving assistance. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Structural collapse (urban) search and rescue;
- Maritime/coastal/waterborne search and rescue; and
- Land search and rescue.

ESF #10 – Oil and Hazardous Materials Response

ESF Coordinator: Environmental Protection Agency

Coordinates support in response to an actual or potential discharge and/or release of oil or hazardous materials. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Environmental assessment of the nature and extent of oil and hazardous materials contamination; and
- Environmental decontamination and cleanup, including buildings/structures and management of contaminated waste.

ESF #11 – Agriculture and Natural Resources
ESF Coordinator: Department of Agriculture

Coordinates a variety of functions designed to protect the Nation's food supply, respond to pest and disease incidents impacting agriculture, and protect natural and cultural resources. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Nutrition assistance;
- Agricultural disease and pest response;
- Technical expertise, coordination, and support of animal and agricultural emergency management;
- Meat, poultry, and processed egg products safety and defense; and
- Natural and cultural resources and historic properties protection.

ESF #12 – Energy

ESF Coordinator: Department of Energy

Facilitates the reestablishment of damaged energy systems and components, and provides technical expertise during an incident involving radiological/nuclear materials. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Energy infrastructure assessment, repair, and reestablishment;
- Energy industry utilities coordination; and
- Energy forecast.

ESF #13 – Public Safety and Security

ESF Coordinator: Department of Justice/Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives

Coordinates the integration of public safety and security capabilities and resources to support the full range of incident management activities. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Facility and resource security;
- Security planning and technical resource assistance;
- Public safety and security support; and
- Support to access, traffic, and crowd control.

ESF #14 – Cross-Sector Business and Infrastructure

ESF Coordinator: DHS/Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Coordinates cross-sector operations with infrastructure owners and operators, businesses, and their government partners, with particular focus on actions taken by businesses and infrastructure owners and operators in one sector to assist other sectors to better prevent or mitigate cascading failures between them. Focuses particularly on those sectors not currently aligned to other ESFs (e.g., the Financial Services Sector). Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Assessment, analysis, and situational awareness of cross-sector challenges; and
- Facilitates operational coordination with critical infrastructure sectors.

ESF #15 – External Affairs

ESF Coordinator: DHS

Coordinates the release of accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible public information to affected audiences, including the government, media, NGOs, and the private sector. Works closely with state and local officials to ensure outreach to the whole community. Functions include but are not limited to the following:

- Public affairs and the Joint Information Center;
- Intergovernmental (local, state, tribal, territorial, nongovernmental, and private sector) affairs; and
- Congressional affairs.