

January 27, 2017
FEMA-4293-DR NR021
State News Desk: (615) 741-0430
FEMA News Desk: (202) 709-0759

News Release

FEMA Grants Will Not Affect Social Security or Other Federal Benefits

SEVIERVILLE, Tenn. — Survivors of the Sevier County wildfires will not lose Social Security benefits, pay additional taxes or give up income-based benefit programs if they accept federal disaster assistance.

This includes homeowners, renters and businesses that were affected by the Nov. 28-Dec. 9 wildfires and registered for disaster assistance.

In most cases, recovery officials say, the Social Security Administration does not count federal disaster aid as income.

A few questions often emerge following a federal disaster declaration:

FEMA Grants

Question: I'm between 62 and 65 years of age, and have chosen to receive Social Security benefits. If my income is more than a certain amount each year, I must reimburse a portion of my Social Security payment. Will FEMA grants add to my income and require me to repay Social Security?

Answer: No. FEMA grants for housing and other disaster assistance are not counted as income.

Taxes

Question: I'm over 65, but if I earn more than a certain amount, I must pay tax on my Social Security income. Will FEMA grants boost my income and require me to pay tax on my Social Security income?

Answer: No. The Internal Revenue Service does not count FEMA grants for housing and other disaster assistance as income.

Other Assistance

Question: Will receiving a grant cause my income to increase to the point that I am no longer eligible for Medicaid, welfare assistance or food stamps?

Answer: No. Grants for housing and other disaster assistance are not counted as income in determining eligibility for income-tested benefit programs that the U.S. government funds.

Federal disaster assistance is available to eligible individuals and households and those who were working in or visiting Sevier County during the wildfires. The deadline to register for disaster assistance is **Monday, Feb. 13.**

Applying for disaster assistance is a two-step process that ensures consideration for all FEMA programs and the U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loans. First, register with FEMA. Then complete and return the SBA loan application, if referred to the SBA. There is no charge to apply for the loan and if approved, no obligation to accept it.

Disaster survivors may register the following ways:

- Online at DisasterAssistance.gov (also in Spanish).
- Download [the FEMA mobile app](#) (also in Spanish).
- Call the FEMA Helpline at **800-621-3362 (FEMA)**. Persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability and use a **TTY** may call **800-462-7585**. Toll-free numbers are open daily from **7 a.m. to 10 p.m.**
- Help is available in most languages.

For updates on Tennessee's wildfire response and recovery, follow [@FEMARegion4](#) on Twitter and visit TNEMA.org/, MountainTough.org/ and fema.gov/disaster/4293.

###

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.