

1.10 Disaster Policy and Coordination

POLICY:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the Local Agency in responding to disaster situations. It also outlines WIC's role regarding coordination and planning for natural disasters.

PROCEDURE:

A. Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in Disaster Response

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) responds to disasters through providing immediate needs of disaster victims through the Food Stamp Program and the commodity programs as the primary food assistance resources.

1. The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to mobilize these Federal food assistance resources to disaster victims upon request from the State.
2. The first food assistance provided is the distribution of commodities to congregate feeding sites provided by voluntary relief organizations.
3. Permission to operate the Disaster Food Stamp Program may be given if commercial channels of trade remain operable or have been restored.
4. When commodities are not available in sufficient quantities and upon request from the appropriate State disaster relief office, the Department is authorized to purchase food items, such as ready-to-feed infant formula.

B. Role of WIC in Disaster Response

WIC is a limited grant supplemental food Program that serves a specific population with special nutritional needs.

1. WIC is not designed or funded to meet the basic nutritional needs of disaster victims who would not otherwise be eligible for the Program.
 - a) There is no legislatively mandated role for WIC in disaster relief, nor is there legislative authority for using WIC food funds for purposes other than providing allowable food benefits to categorically eligible participants.
 - b) No additional WIC funds are designated by law for WIC disaster relief, and WIC must operate in disaster situations within its current Program context and funding.
 - c) WIC is not to be considered a first-line defense to respond to the nutritional needs for disaster victims, including the provision of infant formula.

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2. There are important ways that the State Agency and Local Agency can contribute to a disaster relief effort including:
 - < Continued benefit delivery to participants and outreach to potentially eligible individuals
 - < Counseling participants on food preparation and safety under disaster conditions
 - < Coordinated assistance effort through continued communication with disaster relief agencies with pre-disaster planning and during a disaster

C. Disaster Coordination and Planning

1. State Agency Disaster Coordinator
 - a) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and planning WIC disaster relief and communicating with the West Virginia Office of Emergency Services and the FNS Regional Office.
 - b) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator will establish a working relationship with the State agency responsible for coordinating and planning disaster relief to do the following:
 - < Discuss ways they could contribute to a relief effort, such as sharing expertise about the nutritional needs of the WIC eligible population
 - < Learn how the State plans to provide food to the general population to determine how the WIC Program can appropriately assist the State in response to disasters or emergencies
2. The **WV WIC Emergency Operations Plan** will be used by the Local Agency as a guide for the continued operations by instituting alternate procedures as necessary through the following during a disaster:
 - < Certification procedures that increase flexibility in required documentation
 - < Food Delivery procedures that deviate from standard food packages
 - < Increased outreach to potentially eligible individuals affected by disaster
3. Regular staff meetings conducted on alternate procedures, training drills and test exercises will assist in successful WIC Program operation during a disaster.

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D. WIC Program Management during Disaster Situations

1. Disasters may affect caseload management and could result in priority restrictions, the use of waiting lists, shifting of caseload assignments and the need to refer applicants to other sources of food assistance because of the following factors:
 - < Many people may suddenly become eligible because of loss of income; and
 - < Food package adjustments, such as the issuance of ready-to-feed infant formula because of unsafe drinking water, increase food costs affecting the number of people that can be served.
2. The Local Agency will take reasonable measures to continue providing food benefits to WIC participants in disaster situations.
3. The Local Agency operating in a disaster situation will actively promote the WIC Program to potentially eligible individuals, while operating within its capacity to actually serve newly eligible persons.
4. Certain situations may be so devastating to WIC operations that benefits must temporarily be suspended and participants referred to other programs or congregate feeding sites.
 - a) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator will contact the State disaster relief agency and the FNS Regional Office for assistance and information when the Local Agency must decide whether to suspend WIC operations in a disaster area.
 - b) Factors that determine how well a WIC clinic can operate in a disaster situation include:
 - < The extent of damage on the delivery infrastructure; and
 - < The extent that the Local Agency has planned and prepared for disaster situations.

E. Certification Procedures during Disaster Situations

1. Income eligibility determination may deviate from the usual WIC Program operation in disaster situations.
 - a) During subsequent certification, participants who express that their income documentation was lost because of a disaster will be considered as income eligible.

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- b) It must take place within a reasonable time period (approximately 1 month) following a disaster during which they have not had time to acquire documentation
 - c) The documentation will be verbally verified as similar to that documented during the previous certification.
 - d) A note will be placed in the **Comments** area in the **STORC Demographics Screen** with the date and the statement: "Income Documentation Lost in Disaster".
 - e) An applicant who has a loss of income because their place of employment was completely destroyed and is likely to be out of work for an extended period of time will have income assessed based on the previous month.
 - f) An applicant who has a temporary loss of income because a business that sustained some damage or a temporary loss of utilities will have income calculated on a twelve (12) month basis.
 - g) An applicant who has not been on WIC in the past or is not currently an active WIC participant will provide documentation for income eligibility.
2. While temporary shelters and tent cities in which disaster victims may stay meet the definition of a "homeless facility", residence in such facilities does not automatically make such persons eligible for WIC. Homeless applicants must qualify through the certification process to receive WIC benefits.
3. WIC Program employees who are WIC participants or proxies will not be responsible for issuing food instruments or **WIC Identification Folders (FD-10)** to themselves or members of their immediate family or conducting any aspect of the eligibility process for themselves or members of their immediate family during disasters (**see Policy 1.18, Separation of Duties**).

F. Food Delivery Procedures During Disaster Situations

1. The requirement for proof of damage for replacement of food instruments may deviate from the usual WIC Program operation in disaster situations.
- a) In the case of a natural disaster affecting large numbers of people in a regional or State nature where emergency declarations initiate action by Federal and State public and private disaster assistance providers, participants are not required to provide proof of disaster for food instrument replacement.

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- b) In the case of isolated personal misfortunes where one or a few households have been affected by some destructive incident such as a gas line explosion, water main break or house fire, participants must provide proof of disaster for food instrument replacement (**see Policy 3.07, Lost, Stolen and Damaged Food Instruments**).
- 2. Food instruments may be replaced once the State Agency verifies that the original food instruments were not redeemed. A **Lost or Stolen Food Instrument Report (WIC-04)** will be completed for each payee who reports food instruments as damaged.
- 3. Identification will be verified when WIC Identification Folders are destroyed. Because there is a possibility that all identification has been destroyed, verbal identification, such as social security number or children's birth dates, will be verified.
- 4. Upon food instrument issuance, participants will be notified that area grocery stores may not be open, or may not have sufficient stock to provide the full food package.

G. Outreach Procedures during Disaster Situations

The Local Agency operating in a disaster situation will increase outreach efforts to actively promote the WIC Program to potentially eligible individuals affected by disaster, while operating within its capacity to actually serve newly eligible persons.

REFERENCES:

- 1. SFP 93-012, WIC Income Eligibility and Natural Disasters
- 2. SFP 95-067, WIC Disaster Policy and Coordination
- 3. SFP 96-035, Revision of WIC Disaster Policy
- 4. SFP 96-042, Addition of Cross Reference to SFP 96-035

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1. West Virginia WIC Emergency Operations Plan