

# PERMIT TECHNICIAN

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE GUIDELINES

In case of a natural disaster, a Permit Technician can play a very important role in the recovery process. Damage Assessors are necessary to determine the extent of damage to a structure. A disaster may include natural or human-caused events such as hurricane, tornado, earthquake, flood, wild fires, terrorist attacks, riots or other events that create destruction to an area.

So where does the role of the Permit Technician come into play?

### **Basic Process of Where It All Starts**

#### **What Is Damage Assessment?**

Damage assessment is a process to determine the severity and magnitude of a hazard event. It helps provide information to the community about the extent of the damage. Damage assessment response teams are dispatched throughout the community to efficiently and accurately quantify the damage and estimate repair costs and impact on the community. The information collected is used to determine where to direct resources, and to determine if local resources will be sufficient to respond to and recover from the event or if State or Federal assistance will be needed.

Jurisdictions will contact state emergency management agencies to request assessors. Your area Building Officials ICC Chapter may be contacted to provide assessors. Assessors must be certified or otherwise trained on how to perform an assessment of property. Check your state requirements.

Area Permit Technicians may be asked to travel to perform data entry. The best procedure would be to ask your Building Officials Chapter who may be responding to the disaster to see if they could use data entry assistance in that area.

### **Permit Technician Potential Duties**

- **Become a Point of Contact** – You may be asked to become a point of contact in many ways. If you are tasked with finding assessors, create a list of approved assessors by obtaining names, certification type, cell phone, email and availability. Typically an email will be sent out to Building Inspectors, architects and others in the industry seeking qualified assessors. Local jurisdictions may contact you for assistance or to provide assistance. Know the procedures of who they contact for assessment help. Know what type of certifications are required to perform assessments.
- **Local Housing For Assessors** – In some cases you may be asked to help locate housing for the assessors. Depending on the extent of damage, no housing may be found in the area. Contact hotels, churches, community centers, vacation rentals, AirBnB's and other facilities in and around the area. Be sure they did not receive any damage, have utilities, ask for discounts for assessors, how many can sleep in a room, how many vehicles can be parked onsite, etc. Assign

housing to assessors with instructions on where they will sleep, when to check in/out. In other situations, no housing may be available. Ask assessors to always bring sleeping bag, pillow, campers, tents or vehicles they may be able to sleep in.

- **Transportation** – Assessors are the main subjects that need to travel. Ask for volunteers to commute together to reduce number of vehicles. Unnecessary people may be in the way.
- **Supplies** – Provide each assessor with a copy of recommended items to bring. Always bring bottled water and non-perishable food items as basic necessities are not always available during disasters. The lead assessor should provide them with permanent markers, colored card stock for tagging doors and sometimes red or green tags for electrical meters. Bring multiple notebooks, pens, tape, scanner if available, highlighters, markers, etc.
- **Entering Data** – This is the most important role of the Permit Technician. If the internet connections are not available, hand written forms will be filled out by assessors. This information, known by FEMA as PDA's (Preliminary Damage Assessments), must be sent to FEMA. You may have to remotely enter data into a system such as Google Forms. Any jurisdiction may reach out to you or the assessment team to seek assistance. Forms must be filled out completely by the assessor. Be sure to ask for any missing information or non-legible information. It is extremely important to enter all data as it is reviewed by FEMA and other agencies to assist in the recovery efforts. The data you enter belongs to the jurisdiction you are entering for, do not give out any information to anyone unless instructed such as the local city manager or building official. This is private information. Refer all inquiries for information to the person in charge. Much of this information will be received at the end of each day. Late working hours should be expected as this is time sensitive information. Remember you may be working at another jurisdiction where the employees may have lost their homes. They may also be sleeping in their offices. Do not overstep your boundaries.
- **Verify the spelling** of street names prior to entering the address. Do not attempt to answer any questions about an assessment but rather refer them to the point of contact for the assessment team or other local person assigned to address the questions.
- **Track Time** – Assessors and Permit Technicians may be required to keep a log of hours worked. Be sure there is a sign in and sign out sheet for everyone and that it is required for everyone to sign. Local jurisdictions may have waivers for volunteers to sign. FEMA may require the logged hours of volunteers to be reported.
- **How To Recruit Data Entry Assistance** - Determine how many reports could be received, how to enter them and create a data entry team. If you have more work than you can complete each day and have a way to scan the documents, contact the ICC Permit Technician Chapter for your state or you may also contact PermitTechNation ICC Chapter for assistance. The website is [www.permittechnation.org](http://www.permittechnation.org). You may want to have contacts in your phone for immediate access. PTN will then sent out requests to its members and other ICC Permit Tech Chapters to create of list of volunteers that can do data entry. The list will contain name, email, phone number, days and times available to enter data. A Dropbox account will be created to load scanned documents that can then be assigned by the local PT and then emailed to volunteers. Create a list of which files you sent and who you sent them to containing date and time.

Request the volunteer contacts you when the documents are entered. Each volunteer must be informed of any deadlines to have the documents entered. Typically a 12 hour turnaround would be the most allowed. Once all of the assessments are completed, you will be expected to stay until all documents are entered into the system. Create a storage container, preferably waterproof, to store completed documents. If there is a local volunteer, ask them to sort the documents by street name to assist the local jurisdiction in the future. They will keep these forms for later reference.

- **Remote Data Entry** – With the volume of work you may encounter, having access to a scanner and internet service may be necessary. Take a laptop, two or more USB's and possible means of connecting to the internet in case service is not available. As PDA's begin to come in, enter the data as set up by the disaster team. An example is creating a Google Forms system to enter the data and create reports. Scan 20-25 assessments at a time and load to the USB. Then load each group of forms to a computer or web-based system such as Dropbox. You can then assign and email forms to volunteers. Keep track of which file you sent to each person, date and time. Have them reply in email or phone that they received the document, provide a time to have the reports entered and be sure they respond when completed so you can mark it off. Some volunteers cannot access the files or programs and should they have any issues, make sure they notify you immediately so you can pass along their file to someone else. Assign one file at a time. Use a system for labeling and assigning that works for you. It can be as simple as File 1, 2, 3 or M1 for Monday 1<sup>st</sup> file. Once they are completed you can send additional files as time allows. Remember you may be working late hours but have volunteers in multiple time zones to enter the data. Be sure they have files sent to them prior to their availability times.

## What to Expect

Expect the unexpected. You do not know what conditions you will encounter so always be cautious. Be prepared to leave as soon as possible. Remember when working at another location that others may be extremely emotional and under a lot of stress and pressure. Just work and stay out of their way. Assist as requested.

Be Prepared. Collect items such as card stock in red, yellow and green, permanent markers, pens, paper, red/green tags, duct tape, notebooks, paper permit applications and any other pertinent items and place in a heavy, waterproof container to store in your office. Check markers and pens often so they do not dry out.

Work locations can vary. Maybe your office was hit and not accessible. A mobile unit such as a converted camper, another jurisdiction's office or office space not affected by the disaster is your temporary location.

If a particular area has been heavily damaged, suggest putting a mobile location in that area for residents and contractors to easily obtain permits. Suggest extending your office hours including weekends to be more accessible to those requiring permits. Determine what permits will be required during the recovery stages. Will you require permits for everything or no permits if replacing like for

like? Examples might include replacing the fence exactly as it was prior to the disaster. Be sure to inquire on demolition permits as county assessors will continue taxing a property if they are not notified of a total loss. Will fees be charged if it is determined that property was damaged? Not all of these items are your responsibility but your emergency management team or building official may not think of all items immediately.

Use jurisdiction websites, television stations, social media such as Facebook, postings on business doors, etc. to notify the public of permits required, locations to obtain permits and other procedures put in place.

Keep track of all permits issued in the disaster area. If the system does not allow that particular type of report you may need to create a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet will help to determine the number of properties affected, what extent of damage, permits issued to the property and the status of inspections. Your department may be asked for this information throughout the entire recovery process.

Seek volunteers from demolition companies, contractors, churches and other agencies that may be able to provide relief efforts such as demolishing a house for an uninsured or elderly resident. Seek volunteers to help with cleanup on a residential property that cannot do it themselves.

## **Collecting and Entering Data - Links**

The following are editable Google forms that can be tailored to the specific disaster situation.

Copy of Data Entry Volunteer Request Google Form (this is an editable link). It quickly captures information necessary to create a spreadsheet of information for the availability of volunteers to do data entry.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MrowOF\\_hZFK\\_dC0Fu1ukdERPZ0w3UjS023aGAlwJbv/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MrowOF_hZFK_dC0Fu1ukdERPZ0w3UjS023aGAlwJbv/edit?usp=sharing)

Copy of ATC-45 Google Form (this is an editable link and this is modeled after the form on the ATC website and not the one used by BOAT in TX). The forms can be changed to capture the information necessary for the particular situation.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qUkvMDJa3OfJJAG45GMVCHTdf-h4WQWDZv42\\_VQqW18/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qUkvMDJa3OfJJAG45GMVCHTdf-h4WQWDZv42_VQqW18/edit?usp=sharing)

## **Recommended Packing List for Assessors and Permit Technicians**

- Bottled Water – At least one case
- Breakfast bars, granola bars, non-perishable foods
- Sleeping bag, pillow, tent, mosquito nets
- Bug spray, bug spray and more bug spray
- Sunblock, hats, towel, wash cloth
- Toilet paper
- Protective gear – hard hat, steel toed shoes, safety vest, eye protectors, gloves, mask
- Personal hygiene items in zip lock bags – toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, deodorant, soap, shampoo, medications, allergy/pain medications, chap stick, shower shoes
- Flashlights, batteries, solar powered battery packs for phones
- Cash – dollar bills and coins
- Multiple changes of clothes and socks, rain gear
- Approved gas containers with gas – gas may not be available at first
- Do not overload but remember there may not be any stores open to buy food or personal items.

## **Additional Tips –**

- Be accurate – Assessments determine the amount of assistance provided to recover
- Gas lines – these can continue to shift and cause explosions or leaks
- Electrical – May have been underwater – verify inspection and able to release for power
- Debris In Roads – May cause vehicle/tire damage. Local tire repair shops may need to be onsite at the Disaster Command Center or available to repair assessors flat tires
- Debris On Properties – Keep scrappers out of the piles! Amount of debris is included in the loss to report to FEMA for reimbursement and insurance agencies
- Create a Lost and Found website or location – especially for lost pictures
- Know how to report scammers such as contract scammers. Zero tolerance. Police may issue citations. Make it known to public to verify contractors prior to hiring/paying
- Create a badge system for assessors. They need to show these while in the field. Contractors should also have a badge issued to show they are registered/authorized contractors to work in the jurisdiction.
- Track organizations stating they are doing fundraisers to make sure it's really going to the city or organization as stated. Watch for scams.
- Do NOT speak to news reporters. Find out who is the spokesperson for the jurisdiction and direct all callers to them.
- Use spray paint to mark address numbers of properties no longer identifiable.
- Locate a generator for jurisdiction use to continue operations

### **Tips from FEMA -**

- An emergency or disaster may overwhelm the capabilities of the community and outlying areas and hinder prompt and accurate damage assessments.
- Communications may be sporadic (internal and external) and may be hampered by damage or destruction.
- Public and private critical facilities, infrastructure, businesses, schools, and equipment may be severely damaged or destroyed.
- Debris may make avenues of entry and exit impassable. The movement of emergency relief supplies and resources will be impeded or delayed.
- Damage assessment and recovery operations may commence while some emergency response activities are still underway.
- There will be tremendous pressure from media organizations to provide updated information regarding damage and or casualties.
- The city will have to meet numerous deadlines to provide information to Federal, State and local entities as well as the City's insurance provider.

### **FEMA Courses –**

If you have interest in additional training, please check FEMA's website for courses. Many are free. Below is a link to a Local Damage Assessment Course to give you knowledge of the procedures a jurisdiction is tasked with performing.

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-559>