

Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Food Stamp Program Policy as of September 14, 2005

Background

As a result of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina that occurred in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, disaster victims evacuated their residences. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) wants to empower states to act quickly with a goal of ensuring all evacuees have a full month's food stamp benefits as expeditiously as possible. Our expectation is same day or next day service for these disaster evacuees. Benefits should be available within one day, not 7-days. To better serve these evacuees there was a need to minimize the length and complexity of the application process. FNS developed two new Food Stamp policies; the **National Enhanced Policy** for the first month of application and the **Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy** for additional months. States may design an application form for these two processes or may use a standard food stamp application. States that use separate application forms may accept both applications at the same time and conduct one interview.

National Enhanced Policy

For applications received through October 31, 2005, this policy allows for a one-month maximum food stamp allotment for evacuees. The allotment is issued based on household size and evacuee status, no other criteria need be considered. The September 14, 2005 FNS policy guidance should be used. The guidance is available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm#stamps>

The National Enhanced Policy process in brief is:

- Verify identification of the applicant (may include self-declaration),
- Confirm the applicant resided in a disaster area on 8/29/05,
- Issue a maximum allotment for the household size for one month,
- Report benefits issued to FNS using the 292 Report form (attached),
- If the household received a prorated or lesser allotment for the month supplement to the maximum allotment amount,
- If the household was denied benefits for the first month, attempt to locate the household and provide benefits under this policy,
- Certify as a separate household.

The following circumstances would make a household ineligible under the one-month Enhanced Policy:

- The household did not apply by October 31, 2005 in a state or territory
- The household was not a resident of a disaster area on August 29, 2005
- The household already received the one-month Enhanced benefit

No other eligibility criteria are considered for this first month of application. For QC purposes, these cases are not subject to review.

Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy

For processing of *additional months* of food stamp benefit assistance follow the **Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy**. This policy is for applications received through October 31, 2005. The September 14, 2005 FNS policy guidance should be used. The guidance is available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm#stamps>

The process in brief:

- Process these application under expedited service rules,
- Certify these cases up through December, 2005,
- Postpone verification through December, 2005,
- Suspend household composition rules through December, 2005,
- Certify evacuees as separate households,
- Exempt from work registration and E&T rules through December, 2005,
- Exempt from ABAWD requirements through December, 2005,
- Report weekly the benefits issued under the Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy to FNS using the report form that was provided by FNS (not on the 292),
- Notify disaster state of any case needing to be closed in the disaster state.

The special handling of these cases ends December 2005. For January 2006 issuances, households that were certified under the Expanded Disaster Evacuee policy will need to:

- Satisfy the verification requirements for the information that was postponed through December, 2005,
- Comply with work registration and E&T rules,
- Comply with applicable ABAWD requirements,
- Be certified following household composition rules.

QC will have special handling for these identified cases and states will be held harmless from errors through December, 2005.

For applications received November 1, 2005 or later follow normal Food Stamp rules.

EBT Replacements

For anyone who may have lost their EBT card issued from a disaster state and wants a replacement card, there are relaxed EBT procedures. The relaxed EBT

procedures allow persons to access EBT benefits by key-entering their EBT transactions. The evacuee can manually enter the EBT card number and PIN to access benefits. These relaxed procedures are in effect through September 30, 2005. The following numbers have been provided to assist in obtaining EBT replacement cards and information needed for key-entered transactions.

Alabama: 1-866-465-2285

Mississippi: 1-866-449-9488

Louisiana: 1-866-334-8304; 1-888-997-1117; or 1-888-524-3578

The guidance on the relaxed EBT procedures is available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm#stamps>

under the title, "EBT purchase without card"

Contacting Disaster States

In addition to the EBT numbers provided above, we offer the following contacts:

Alabama

To obtain information on FSP certification status: 1-866-465-2285 or via email at fs@dhrstate.al.us

Mississippi

To obtain information on FSP certification status: 1-800-948-4060 or via email at mdhsdisaster@mdhs.state.ms.us

Louisiana

To obtain information on FSP certification status: 1-888-524-3578

Additional Resources

The FNS public website also has questions and answers related to the Hurricane Disaster policy. These Q & A's are available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm#stamps>

The affected disaster areas are found at the above site in the National Evacuee Policy document, though this may not be an all inclusive list.

State Reporting

The benefits issued to evacuees under the National Enhanced and Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policies must be reported to FNS weekly, no later than each Friday. The special one month benefits issued under the National Enhanced Policy must also be reported on the FNS 292 "Report of Coupon Issuance and Commodity Distribution for Disaster Relief" form. A copy of the form is attached for your convenience. The 292 report should be submitted by December 15, 2005. FNS also

recommends states collect data on the costs of processing these evacuee applications, including denials, as that information may be requested in the future.