

# Fire Recovery Guide

## Mendocino Complex Fires



**The Office of Congressman Mike Thompson**  
**California's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District**



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●●● A NOTE FROM CONGRESSMAN MIKE THOMPSON ●●●

Our region has experienced the worst fire in California's history. These fires forced thousands of people to evacuate their communities, destroyed hundreds of homes, and left many families with nothing.

The Ranch and River fires, commonly referred to as the Mendocino Complex fires, started on July 27, 2018 and burned more than 378,000 acres. The fire has damaged or destroyed more than 300 structures, many of which are homes.

Funds from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may be available to help individuals rebuild, repair and replace housing and other personal property not covered by insurance.

**Individuals who were impacted by the fires should apply for FEMA assistance. You can apply in the following ways:**

- Online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov); [www.disasterassistance.gov/es](http://www.disasterassistance.gov/es) (Spanish)
- Via smartphone at [m.fema.gov](http://m.fema.gov); [www.fema.gov/es](http://www.fema.gov/es) (Spanish)
- Constituents may call the registration phone number at 1-800-621-3362; those who have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY, should call 1-800-462-7585 directly; for those who use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 1-800-621-3362.

Small Business Administration (SBA) loans may also be available to individuals and businesses to repair or replace disaster-damaged property, inventory, and supplies. Homeowners and renters may also be eligible for SBA loans to repair or replace disaster-related damages to homes or personal property.

**After registering with FEMA, businesses and homeowners that would like to apply for SBA loans can do so online at: <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/Index>**

**You can also call my [offices](#) if you have problems with a federal agency and need additional assistance.**

Our recovery is only just beginning. Please know I am committed to working with our local, state and federal officials to ensure that the federal government provides all necessary resources to support our community in this time of recovery. I stand ready to help expedite any support and resources that our communities need to rebuild and repair our homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

Our district pulls together in tough times. We've overcome challenges before by working together, and we will do so again. Should you need anything, my staff and I are here to help.

Sincerely,



**MIKE THOMPSON**  
**Member of Congress**

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••• QUICK GUIDE •••

**FEMA:** The Administration has approved a major disaster declaration for the Mendocino Complex in Lake County for Individual Assistance. The declaration provides programs to assist individuals, households and businesses, along with assistance for public agencies and selected non-profits that have participated in response efforts. **Anyone in Lake County impacted by the fires** - families, volunteers, employers or employees facing challenges as a result of the Mendocino Complex Fires - **should register with FEMA** by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**, visiting [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov), or visiting a Disaster Recovery Center as soon as possible.

**Small Business Administration (SBA):** The Administration also approved U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans for homeowners, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The SBA loans are to help businesses repair or replace disaster-damaged property, inventory, and supplies. Homeowners and renters may also be eligible for SBA loans to repair or replace disaster-related damages to homes or personal property. Businesses and homeowners can apply for SBA loans online at: <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/Index>

**Unemployment assistance:** People who are out of work due to the fires may be eligible for unemployment benefits. You can file for benefits at [https://www.edd.ca.gov/Unemployment/UI\\_Online.htm](https://www.edd.ca.gov/Unemployment/UI_Online.htm). You can also file by phone, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 12:00 pm by calling:

- English: 1-800-300-5616
- Spanish: 1-800-326-8937
- Chinese: 1-800-547-3506 (Cantonese), 1-866-303-0706 (Mandarin)
- Vietnamese: 1-800-547-2058

**California Department of Insurance:** People who need to file insurance claims with the state can call the consumer hotline at 1-800-927-4357 (HELP) or visit their website at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/WildfireResources.cfm>.

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For assistance, please contact any of Congressman Thompson’s offices, or visit his website at [www.mikethompson.house.gov](http://www.mikethompson.house.gov)

**Napa Office:**

2751 Napa Valley Corporate Drive  
Napa, CA 94558  
Phone: (707) 226-9898

**Santa Rosa Office:**

2300 County Center Dr. Suite A100  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403  
Phone: (707) 542-7182

**Vallejo Office:**

420 Virginia St., Suite 1C  
Vallejo, CA 94590  
Phone: (707) 645-1888

Fax: (707) 251-9800  
Hours: M-F 9-5:30pm

Fax: (707) 542-2745  
Hours: M-F 9-5:30pm

Fax: (707) 645-1870  
Hours: M-F 9-5:30pm

**●●● FEMA DISASTER ASSISTANCE ●●●**

**All individuals who were impacted by the Mendocino Complex Fires should apply for FEMA assistance. Please call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), go online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or visit a Disaster Recovery Center as soon as possible.**

The Administration has issued a major disaster declaration for Lake County for Individual Assistance as a result of the Mendocino Complex Fires, ordering federal aid to supplement state and local recovery efforts to areas, which has displaced many families and destroyed homes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the primary federal agency tasked with helping individuals, businesses, and public entities recover after a disaster. All individuals impacted by the fires should register through FEMA at [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov).

FEMA individual assistance allows homeowners to qualify for grant money and services to people in the declared disaster area whose property has been damaged or destroyed and whose losses are underinsured or not covered by insurance.

## ●●● HOW TO APPLY FOR FEMA DISASTER ASSISTANCE ●●●

**All individuals who were impacted by the Mendocino Complex Fires should apply for FEMA assistance. Please call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), go online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or visit a Disaster Recovery Center as soon as possible.**

Individuals who may be eligible for individual assistance should apply through one of the following options:

- Apply by phone to FEMA: **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**. Disaster assistance applicants, who have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY, should call 1-800-462-7585 directly; for those who use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 1-800-621-3362. The toll-free telephone numbers will operate from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time seven days a week until further notice.
- You can also apply online anytime at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov).
- By smartphone or tablet, use [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).

Please have the following information available when you call:

- A phone number and a reliable alternate in case FEMA needs to call you back;
- Address of the damaged property;
- Social Security number;
- Bank account information (or direct deposit information);
- Insurance information (if you have insurance);
- Brief description of damages;
- Current mailing address; and
- Pen and paper to write down your registration number.

Government disaster assistance only covers basic needs and usually will not compensate you for your entire loss. If you have insurance, the government may help pay for basic needs not covered under your insurance policy.

Disaster-related assistance may include:

- Rental payments for temporary housing for those whose homes are unlivable;
- Grants for home repairs and replacement of essential household items;
- Unemployment payments for workers who temporarily lost jobs because of the disaster and do not qualify for state benefits (self-employed);
- Low-interest loans to cover residential losses not fully compensated by insurance;
- Crisis counseling for those traumatized by the disaster; or
- Advisory assistance for legal veterans' benefits and Social Security matters.

## ●●● FAQs ABOUT FEMA ASSISTANCE ●●●

**All individuals who were impacted by the Mendocino Complex Fires should apply for FEMA assistance. Please call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), go online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or visit a Disaster Recovery Center as soon as possible.**

**Do I have to register with FEMA to get help?** Yes, with very few exceptions, if you want federal assistance you must register with FEMA, either by telephone (1-800-621-FEMA (3362)) or online ([www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov)). You will need your FEMA registration number for future reference.

**What is the difference between FEMA and the SBA?** FEMA coordinates the Federal Government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters. SBA, on the other hand, is the Federal Government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses, and non-profit organizations repair or replace real estate, personal property, machinery and equipment, inventory, and business assets that have been damaged or destroyed in a declared disaster. These disaster loans cover uninsured and uncompensated losses and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations. For information about SBA programs, applicants may call 1-800-659-2955 (TTY 1-800-877-8339).

**Where can I find updated information from FEMA?** For a three-step Disaster Assistance Process and recent news on disaster response and recovery, please visit <http://www.fema.gov/apply-assistance>. If you are looking for the nearest Disaster Recovery Center, go to <http://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers>.



## ●●● DISASTER RECOVERY CENTER ●●●

A Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) is open in Lake County to help community members impacted by the fire.

### **Disaster Recovery Center Contact Information:**

#### **Location:**

9470 Main Street  
Upper Lake, CA, 95485

#### **Hours of Operation:**

As of August 27, 2018: 9am – 6pm, Monday through Saturday.

## ●●● SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DISASTER LOANS ●●●

The Administration also approved U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans for homeowners, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The SBA loans are to help businesses repair or replace disaster-damaged property, inventory, and supplies. Homeowners and renters may also be eligible for SBA loans to repair or replace disaster-related damages to homes or personal property.

### **What You Need To Do**

Begin by registering with FEMA if you haven't already done so by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**.

Homeowners and renters should submit their SBA disaster loan application, even if they are not sure if they will need or want a loan. If SBA cannot approve your application, in most cases they refer you to FEMA's Other Needs Assistance (ONA) program for possible additional assistance.

### **Three Ways to Apply to SBA**

1. Apply online using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via SBA's secure website: <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/Index>
2. Apply in person at the Local Assistance Center and receive personal, one-on-one help from an SBA representative.
3. Apply by mail: complete a paper application and mail it to the U.S. Small Business Administration Processing and Disbursement Center at: 14925 Kingsport Rd., Ft. Worth, TX 76155-2243.

### **Additional Information**

For more information, applicants may contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center by calling (800) 659-2955, emailing [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov), or visiting SBA's Web site at [www.sba.gov/disaster](http://www.sba.gov/disaster).

Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call (800)877-8339. Applicants may also apply online using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via SBA's secure Web site at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela>.

## ••• TAX RELIEF & IRS ASSISTANCE •••

Following recent disaster declarations for individual assistance issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the IRS announced that affected taxpayers impacted by the fire will be eligible for tax relief.

The declaration permits the IRS to postpone certain deadlines for taxpayers who reside or have a business in the disaster area. Filing deadlines for certain individual and business taxes have been extended to November 30, 2018. Call the IRS disaster hotline at 866-562-5227 for more information on which filings qualify.

If an affected taxpayer receives a penalty notice from the IRS, the taxpayer should call the telephone number on the notice to have the IRS abate any interest and any late filing or late payment penalties that would otherwise apply. Penalties or interest will be abated only for taxpayers who have an original or extended filing, payment or deposit due date, including an extended filing or payment due date, that falls within the postponement period.

The IRS automatically identifies taxpayers located in the covered disaster area and applies automatic filing and payment relief. But affected taxpayers who reside or have a business located outside the covered disaster area must call the IRS disaster hotline at 866-562-5227 to request this tax relief.

In addition, TTB will consider waiving late filing, payment, or deposit penalties on a case-by-case basis for wineries and other businesses whose operations were affected by the fires. To qualify for such a waiver, a taxpayer must:

- Demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the appropriate TTB officer, that the fires directly affected your ability to timely file, pay, or deposit; and
- Contact the TTB National Revenue Center (NRC) at:  
550 Main Street, Suite 8002  
Cincinnati, OH 45202-5215  
Toll-free: 877-882-3277  
E-mail: [TTBInternetQuestions@ttb.gov](mailto:TTBInternetQuestions@ttb.gov)

Businesses (retailers, wholesalers, importers, export warehouse proprietors, and manufacturers of beverage alcohol and tobacco products) may file claims with the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) for the payment (refund or allowance of credit) of Federal excise taxes paid on beverage alcohol or tobacco products lost, rendered unmarketable, or condemned by a duly authorized official where the President has declared a major disaster. You must file your claim(s) using [TTB Form 5620.8 Claim - Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Taxes](#), and mail the form to the address above.

## **Casualty Losses**

Affected taxpayers in a federally declared disaster area have the option of claiming disaster-related casualty losses on their federal income tax return for either this year or last year. Claiming the loss on an original or amended return for last year will get the taxpayer an earlier refund, but waiting to claim the loss on this year's return could result in a greater tax saving, depending on other income factors.

Individuals may deduct personal property losses that are not covered by insurance or other reimbursements. For details, see [Form 4684](#) and its [instructions](#).

Affected taxpayers claiming the disaster loss on last year's return should put the Disaster Designation "California, Wildfires and High Winds" at the top of the form so that the IRS can expedite the processing of the refund.

## **Other Relief**

The IRS will waive the usual fees and expedite requests for copies of previously filed tax returns for affected taxpayers. Taxpayers should put the assigned Disaster Designation in red ink at the top of [Form 4506](#), Request for Copy of Tax Return, or [Form 4506-T](#), Request for Transcript of Tax Return, as appropriate, and submit it to the IRS.

Affected taxpayers who are contacted by the IRS on a collection or examination matter should explain how the disaster impacts them so that the IRS can provide appropriate consideration to their case.

Taxpayers may download forms and publications from the official IRS website, [irs.gov](http://irs.gov), or order them by calling 800-829-3676. The IRS toll-free number for general tax questions is 800-829-1040.

## ••• AVOIDING WILDFIRE-RELATED FRAUD AND SCAMS •••

As survivors work to recover, there is always the risk that bad actors try to take advantage of those looking for support and those looking to donate to charities helping survivors. Everyone should remain vigilant for these scam artists.

The Department of Justice has a National Center for Disaster Fraud set up to detect these scams, prosecute fraudulent activity, and keep you and your family safe from these bad actors. You can always call the hotline at 866-720-5721, email the Center at [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov) or visit Center's website at [www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud](http://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud). You can also report any suspicious activity to local and county law enforcement agencies.

The Center has issued the following guidance you should follow to protect you and your family from fraud:

- If you are unsure or uncomfortable with anyone you encounter claiming to be an emergency management official or charity worker, do not give out personal information, and report the incident. You can always call the hotline at 866-720-5721, email the Center at [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov) or visit Center's website at [www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud](http://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud).
- If you are approached via phone, email or in person by someone claiming to represent a charity helping disaster survivors, ask for the charity's exact name, street address, phone number, and web address, then contact the charity directly and confirm that the person asking for funds is an employee or volunteer. You can always call the hotline at 866-720-5721, email the Center at [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov) or visit Center's website at [www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud](http://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud).

## ●●● STATE INSURANCE CLAIMS ●●●

The California Department of Insurance is available to help residents with insurance related issues and to help you achieve a settlement consistent with your coverage. You can call their hotline at 1-800-927-4357 (HELP) or visit their website online at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/WildfireResources.cfm>.

The Department has issued the following tips for fire survivors looking to make insurance claims.

- Obtain a complete copy of your residential homeowner's insurance policy, including your declarations page. The law requires your insurance company to provide this to you free of charge within 30 days of your request. Ask your agent or insurer representative to explain how much coverage you have (1) to rebuild or repair your home, (2) for your personal belongings, and (3) for living expenses. This should include an explanation of Extended Replacement Cost and Building Code Upgrade coverages if applicable. Ask how to most effectively claim your coverage benefits.
- Take note of your Additional Living Expense (ALE) limits and manage your ALE expenses in recognition of a long rebuilding process. Your time to collect ALE after a declared catastrophe is extended to 24 months even if your policy says otherwise; however your amount of coverage.
- Track all of your additional expenses that arise from having to live in another location away from your home. Note: your ALE reimbursement may be offset by your normal cost of living before the fire (i.e., ALE does not pay for your mortgage or expenses you would normally incur) but you are entitled to the same standard of living you had before the fire. ALE will pay for temporary rent, additional mileage, etc.
- Document all of your conversations with your insurer/adjuster about your claim and policy limitations in a dedicated "claim diary." If your adjuster says something is excluded, limited, or subject to certain conditions, ask the adjuster to point out the specific provision in your policy being cited.
- Get at least one licensed contractor's estimate or bid on the cost to rebuild your home just to get a reasonable sense of the actual cost as compared to your coverage limits (for more considerations on contractors, view the CDI's electronic brochure Don't Get Burned After a Disaster and check the website for California's Contractors State License Board.) While your insurance company may provide its own estimate, it may contain errors or fail to

reflect local conditions or demand surge. Demand surge reflects price increases following a major disaster when contractors and materials are in short supply.

- Call the Department of Insurance Hotline for help at (800) 927-4357. You can also file a complaint at: <http://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/101-help/>. Consider insights from consumer advocates.
- Understand you can purchase or rebuild at another location, and still receive full replacement cost benefits including Building Code Upgrade and Extended Replacement Cost benefits if those were included on your policy and necessary to rebuild the insured dwelling. You also have the right to rebuild using the contractor of your choosing. In order to reduce the cost of rebuilding, you might also consider a community-wide development approach utilizing a common builder.
- Assess your situation, do not rush into any decision about contractors, lawyers or public adjusters - consider your mortgage/employment/financial situation, your age, children's schools, your willingness to deal with construction issues (no matter who your contractor is). The insurance process is a series of important decisions over a long period of time, but few, if any, need to be made today. Of course, move forward if you have obtained multiple bids from reputable licensed contractors, are certain you want to rebuild, are sure of the rebuilding costs and your insurance limits and want to be sure you are a priority for your selected contractor to start the rebuild. The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) has publications that can help you identify and avoid problems before they occur. Contact CSLB at 1-800-321-2752 to obtain a free copy of their publications and/or verify the licensing status of a contractor.
- Do not assume you have inadequate coverage based on general information you are hearing about building costs or other general comments. The adequacy of your limits needs to be addressed on a case specific basis to determine how much it will cost to rebuild your home and whether your limits, including extended replacement cost coverage if applicable, are adequate. But if you determine you are underinsured, gather relevant documentation and contact the Department of Insurance for help.
- Evaluate whether you will need a public adjuster or attorney to help you with your claim. If rebuilding will take a long time you are likely to use your entire ALE limits. If you are also reimbursed by your insurer for your entire personal property loss or your full personal property limits, you may not need a public adjuster or attorney to help you obtain full settlements for either of these coverages. Public adjusters typically require a

percentage of the claim settlement for their services. Make sure you understand what they charge and the services you are paying for before you sign a public adjuster contract. Some public adjusters may insist on a contract that includes payment to the public adjuster based upon the entire amount paid to the policyholder by the insurer, including amounts paid to the policyholder before the public adjuster contract was signed. A public adjuster should not charge a fee on payments you received from your insurer before the public adjuster contract was signed. A fee should only be charged on additional monies the public adjuster gets for you. Contact the Department if this issue arises in your contract.