

FEMA staff shifted to immigration hiring duties amid peak hurricane season

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The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reassigned about 100 employees from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for 90-day assignments, according to DHS officials. The employees, primarily from FEMA's human resources and security offices, are being sent to ICE headquarters in Washington, DC, and various field offices to assist with a major hiring initiative.

On August 5 and 6, FEMA staff received emails from DHS informing them they'd be detailed to ICE immediately. The order landed with all the subtlety of a hurricane warning: report or face termination.

The personnel reassigned are not front-line disaster responders, but HR specialists, security officers, and administrative personnel, people who, during a hurricane or wildfire, handle background checks, contract vetting, and hiring surges for local recovery workers. Unlike in previous cases where FEMA staff have been reassigned under voluntary inter-agency details, this time the Department issued a compulsory re-deployment.

DHS says the unprecedented mid-hurricane-season shift will accelerate the hiring of thousands of new ICE agents under the "One Big Beautiful Bill" signed by President Donald Trump on July 4, a budget bill that gutted social spending while showering tax cuts on the wealthiest individuals and corporations.

Department spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said, "DHS is adopting an all-hands-on-deck strategy to recruit 10,000 new ICE agents. To support this effort, select FEMA employees will temporarily be detailed to ICE for 90 days to assist with hiring and vetting." McLaughlin claimed the "deployment will NOT disrupt FEMA's critical operations."

Trump's bill triples ICE's budget for the next four

years to \$75 billion. To offset this spending, the budget bill cut or eliminated programs across DHS, including FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, a signature grant pool for pre-disaster mitigation.

The future of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program is now tied up in federal court after a judge issued a temporary block. In the meantime, President Trump has openly stated his desire to devolve disaster relief from the federal government to the states and has mused about dismantling FEMA entirely.

Critics note the reassignment comes during the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season, when FEMA typically operates at its highest capacity. The two months of August and September are FEMA's busiest months, with seasonal hurricanes, wildfires and inland flooding across large portions of the US.

The agency is already short roughly 2,000 employees due to attrition and earlier firings this year. In the wake of disasters, the HR and security staff now being redeployed to ICE positions play key roles, including hiring temporary local workers, securing facilities and approving contracts. Their work allows FEMA to onboard local staff in days instead of weeks, secure field facilities, and rapidly approve contracts for debris removal and shelter operations.

The redeployment of these workers comes as ICE falls further behind its hiring goals. DHS maintains that FEMA's experienced HR personnel can streamline this process, especially the vetting of thousands of applications, background checks, and onboarding paperwork.

Despite claims from the Trump administration that the decision will not impact FEMA readiness, the reassessments have alarmed governors and emergency

managers in hurricane-prone states.

The move is emblematic of a broader shift in federal priorities—away from any vestiges of social programs that have provided relief, albeit limited, uneven and bureaucratic, to the working class, and toward the building of a repressive police and military state, armed to the teeth and ready to crack down on any social opposition that emerges to the policies and interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

In 2025 alone, ICE plans to double its official detention capacity to over 100,000 people. This involves the construction, reopening or repurposing and expansion of detention facilities all over the country, with names like “Deportation Depot” and “Lonestar Lockup.”

Some, like “Deportation Depot” in Florida, are former state prisons, while “Lonestar Lockup” at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, and the infamous new facility “Alligator Alcatraz” in the Florida Everglades, are little more than tent camps rapidly deployed and operated by private prison companies such as GEO Group and CoreCivic.

Health risks in these facilities become especially critical during the summer months. Hurricanes can not only knock out electricity for days at a time, disabling air conditioning and ventilation in brick-and-mortar facilities. “Alligator Alcatraz” and “Deportation Depot” are both located in highly hurricane-prone areas, posing a risk of flooding and isolation from first responders.

Earlier this month, a Venezuelan national, Luis Manuel Rivas Velasquez, was denied medical attention at “Alligator Alcatraz” amid a viral outbreak at the facility. He survived, but at least 12 people have died in ICE facilities in 2025 so far, kept in inhumane conditions and subjected to abominable abuses by guards.



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