



News Release

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SBA Deputy Director Tours Buffalo Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center; Supports its Mission

WASHINGTON – U.S. Small Business Administration Deputy Administrator Jovita Carranza today visited the SBA Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center in Buffalo, N.Y. and pledged the agency's total support to the center's operations as it prepares to handle thousands of calls in the wake of Hurricane Gustav. In the aftermath of that storm, 34 New Orleans parishes have been declared disaster areas.

Deputy Carranza toured the facility, reviewed workforce operations and discussed training programs with center managers in preparation for the potential increased disaster activity posed by tropical storms Hanna, Ike and Josephine brewing in the Atlantic. She also met with the staff and encouraged them to keep up the outstanding work they do in helping homeowners, renters and businesses recover in the aftermath of a disaster.

In the days following Hurricane Gustav's landfall, call activity has increased to upwards of 1,000 calls per day.

"When disaster strikes, it is important that disaster survivors know their calls for assistance will be handled immediately and effectively; that's the role of the Customer Service Center and I applaud its dedicated staff for the outstanding work they do," said Deputy Carranza. "SBA is the lead agency when it comes to long-term disaster recovery, and the Buffalo Customer Service Center is our frontline. Disaster survivors deserve and receive top-notch service; the Customer Service Center delivers that and makes us proud."

The Buffalo Disaster Customer Service Center is at the frontline of SBA's disaster recovery operations. After a Presidential disaster declaration is made, the center handles telephone registration referrals from FEMA and provides customer support via telephone and e-mail to disaster survivors as they begin the disaster loan application process. At the height of the Hurricane Katrina response in 2005, the Customer Service Center responded to over 10,000 calls per day. As a result of the recent hiring and systems upgrades, the center now has the capacity to handle 20,000 phone calls per day.

The SBA makes low-interest loans to homeowners, renters and non-farm businesses of all sizes. Homeowners may borrow up to \$200,000 to repair or replace damaged real estate. Renters and homeowners may borrow up to \$40,000 to cover losses to personal property.

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Recent changes to SBA's disaster loan program include an increase in the loan limits for business disaster loans. Businesses of all sizes and private non-profit organizations of all sizes may now borrow up to \$2 million for property losses not fully covered by insurance. Small businesses and private non-profit organizations of all sizes may apply for a working capital loan up to \$2 million to alleviate economic injury caused by the disaster. The business disaster loans for physical damage and economic injury combined have a \$2 million limit.

In addition, disaster survivors may now apply for disaster loans from SBA's secure Web site at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/>.

Interest rates are as low as 2.874 percent for homeowners and renters, and 4 percent for businesses, with terms up to 30 years. Loan amounts and terms are set by the SBA and are based upon each applicant's financial condition.

For more information about the disaster loan application process, call SBA's Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 (1-800-877-8339 for the hearing impaired), or e-mail the center at disastercustomerservice@sba.gov

To learn more about the SBA's disaster assistance program, visit the Web site at www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance.

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