

# Feds spend more on cleanup than preparing for disasters

By Neela Banerjee, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – Federal spending on community preparedness for extreme weather events is a fraction of the amount paid to clean up damage from storms, tornadoes and drought, according to an analysis of federal data.

The report by the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning Washington think tank, estimated that from 2011 to 2013 the federal government spent about \$136 billion on weather-related disaster relief and recovery, compared with \$22.4 billion on 43 preparedness programs.

A growing body of climate science indicates that the warming atmosphere increases the likelihood of extreme weather-related events. In January, the draft National Climate Assessment, issued every four years by a federal advisory group, predicted more of the heavier rains in the Northeast, Midwest and Plains that have overwhelmed storm drains and led to flooding and erosion; sea level rise that has battered coastal communities around the United States; and drought that has turned much of the West into a tinderbox.

Some states and localities have launched their own efforts to reduce the impact of weather-related disasters. This month, New York City announced a \$20-billion plan to protect against severe storms, including protecting the shoreline, buildings and the electricity infrastructure. Forty-five localities including Atlanta, El Paso and Dubuque, Iowa, launched Resilient Communities for America, in which they share practices and resources to better adapt to such disasters.

New York and New Jersey will be able to rely in great part on federal disaster funds allocated after Superstorm Sandy. But

other places have to scramble for much of their funding, local leaders and the Center for American Progress say.

Preparing for disasters is costly, the report notes. For instance, the town of Edna, Texas, built a hurricane shelter big enough to protect its 5,500 residents from 300-mph winds. The project cost \$2.5 million, 75% of it provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which plans to invest about \$680 million to build similar facilities in 18 other states.

The report found that of the \$22.4 billion set aside for 43 federal programs aimed at building disaster resiliency, \$12 billion went to Agriculture Department programs that foster sustainable agriculture and protect water resources from drought and floods. The remainder went to departments including Defense, Commerce, Homeland Security and Interior.

Funding for two Interior Department wildfire management efforts were cut for fiscal years 2011 through 2013. The study found that during those years funding for preparedness programs not in the Agriculture Department fell about \$160 million.

The report recommends that a comprehensive assessment be undertaken to get a picture of local preparedness needs. It also recommends that a dedicated fund be created to support community resiliency projects, financed by a small increase in the royalty rate that companies pay for extracting fossil fuels from federal lands and waters.