

Questions and Answers concerning DoD volunteers and workers' compensation coverage

Q: Are DoD employees who volunteer to assist in recovery efforts from Hurricane Katrina, and who sustain job-related injuries or illnesses while engaged in such work, covered for workers' compensation purposes?

A: It depends. DoD employees who received official approval to volunteer in recovery efforts, and who are granted administrative leave during such time, are generally covered under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) for all activities related to those recovery efforts, including not only injuries sustained during these efforts but occupational diseases that may be incurred as a result of exposure to hazardous substances. DoD employees who volunteer to assist in recovery efforts but who do not receive official DoD approval for such work would be covered under FECA only if they perform work for a Federal agency that has the authority to accept the services of volunteers (the Department of Veterans Affairs, for example).

Q: What benefits are available for DoD volunteers who sustain job-related injury or illness while engaged in recovery efforts from Hurricane Katrina?

A: With a few exceptions, the full range of benefits payable under FECA are available to volunteers, including wage loss benefits, medical treatment, schedule awards, rehabilitation, *etc.* Volunteers are not eligible for Continuation of Pay, a benefit under FECA by which Federal employees receive their regular salary for up to 45 days following a traumatic injury. Wage loss benefits for volunteers are paid at a rate determined by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), which may vary significantly from the employee's salary.

Q: Are private citizens who volunteer their services to DoD agencies covered under workers' compensation?

A: Yes, they are covered for all activities related to the services that they perform, including not only injuries sustained during these efforts but occupational diseases that may be incurred as a result of exposure to hazardous substances. Because they are volunteers, they would not receive Continuation of Pay, but are eligible for other FECA benefits, including medical benefits as well as wage loss at a rate determined by OWCP. Such costs would be billed back to the DoD agency that accepted the services of this individual.