

## Draft News Release Signature Approval

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**DRAFT**

### DISASTER UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

**JACKSON, MS** -- Residents of 35 Mississippi counties declared major disaster areas following severe storms on Feb. 16 and 24 may be eligible for federal disaster unemployment benefits if they lost their income as a direct result of the violent weather.

Federally funded disaster unemployment benefits for eligible individuals are administered by the state in the same manner as the regular unemployment program. Applicants will need to take their Social Security numbers and documentation of pre-disaster employment and earnings to their local unemployment office to apply.

“The disaster unemployment assistance program is designed to help people make ends meet until they can get back to work or resume their customary self-employment,” said Leon Shaifer, head of recovery operations for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA).

John Hannah of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the official responsible for coordinating federal assistance programs with the state, said the benefits apply only to persons who are otherwise ineligible for state unemployment compensation, such as self-employed people, agricultural workers and those on salary.

Hannah and Shaifer reminded citizens who suffered uninsured losses that disaster assistance is available only to those who register by making a making a brief call to FEMA’s toll-free line, **1-800-462-9029**. The number for persons with hearing or speech impairments is **1-800-462-7585**).

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