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Navajo Nation's 110 Chapters encouraged to utilize funds in preparation for possible emergencies

WINDOW ROCK – The Navajo Nation's 110 chapters are encouraged to finalize emergency response plans and to utilize chapter funds in preparation for winter weather conditions that may impact roads, livestock, and access to heating, food, and water.

At last week's Naabik'iyátí' Committee meeting, legislative branch Chief of Staff Arbin Mitchell, explained that policies were amended a few years ago that created more flexibility for chapters to utilize funds to prepare in advance for emergencies that result from winter weather conditions.

Mitchell also explained that emergency funds at the chapter level may be used under four different categories that include: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

"It is flexible and can be used by chapters to prepare for winter conditions such as to purchase fire wood if needed for community members," added Mitchell, who formerly served as the executive director for the Division of Community Development, which oversees the 110 chapters.

At a Naabik'iyátí' Committee meeting held on Dec. 3, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) recommended that committee members urge their chapters to finalize emergency preparation for the winter season by collaborating with other Navajo Nation programs.

"Our main concern is the elderly – such as fuel, heat, and livestock management. Let's encourage each chapter to be prepared and offer aid, if possible. Utilize the declaration of emergency for funding to ensure a quick response to emergencies," said Delegate Begay.

On Dec. 8, Delegate Begay hosted a meeting at the Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter, in which the discussion focused on maintaining paved and unpaved roads in inclement weather, as well as other emergency response plans for Navajo communities.

Delegate Begay said that each chapter should identify roads that would potentially have the most hazardous conditions in the winter, so community members and public safety officials can access homes or businesses during emergency situations. He said it is important to illustrate this need to the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah as well.

“It would be beneficial for Navajo Nation, county, and state officials to come together to evaluate current policies and amend them, especially at the state level,” said Delegate Begay. “The states need to see how urgently we need our roads maintained due to harsh weather conditions, and advocate on our behalf for funding because over 80-percent of our roads are not paved or maintained.”

At the meeting, officials identified areas that they will begin addressing in a collaborative effort to aid chapters in their winter weather preparation and emergency plans, such as resource accessibility, equipment, command centers, local chapter alerts, work with the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management, and increasing communication between all entities effectively.

“Winter weather preparation for Navajo communities will allow businesses and schools to operate efficiently and safely. The Nation needs to remain proactive in ensuring safety for its Navajo citizens, and working together will further these goals,” said Delegate Begay.

The chapters may expend such funds in accordance with each chapter’s emergency response plans. All plans must be consistent with applicable Navajo Nation laws as well.

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