

# Christmas 2024 Looked a Lot Different to People in North Carolina after Hurricane Helene

**J**anuary 24th marks the fourth month anniversary Helene crippled major parts of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. Homes and entire towns were flattened, slammed by mudslides and simply washed away, leaving absolute and total destruction behind. It was ten days before FEMA had any presence in the area, and then the absolute ineptness of our federal government was on full display. Hundreds of people whose homes were destroyed are still living in campers and tents amid cold temperatures. As a long hard winter sets in, many residents are still struggling to gain some forward momentum.

Early December delivered snow and biting cold temperatures. And recovery efforts have slowed to a snail's pace in most of the heaviest affected areas. We reached out to FEMA, and as of Thanksgiving FEMA had only delivered 13 mobile homes for all of western North Carolina. By the time of this printing it is just above 50 delivered for all of western North Carolina.

One video, taken by a resident in Asheville, North Carolina, showed a single FEMA truck in the rear of a parking lot and this person interviewed the FEMA employees there. One man had a single sheet of paper with instructions for people as to how to obtain aid. Not copies to hand out — just one piece of paper that people were supposed to take photos of with their cell phones, and then apply for aid from FEMA via the internet.



First of all, those survivors (if they could even FIND FEMA in the back of this parking lot) were left with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They had no cell phones; not even a pen or a piece of paper. And then, with no electricity, cell phone or internet service, how did FEMA expect people to “apply” for their aid? And of course, the “aid” was supposed to be \$750 per person. (I guess, perhaps due to “inflation,” they increased that from the \$700 the victims of the fires in Lahaina were to receive last year). However, as happened in Lahaina, Hawaii very few received even that amount of money... there was always a reason why they didn't qualify.

One person, who had lost her home — and her family — was told she was only eligible for a one-time \$300 payment to help with immediate needs. And early on in this debacle, FEMA announced it was broke — no more money left in the hurricane relief fund, because the money had been spent helping illegal migrants. Incidentally, that same week, our government sent another enormous check to Ukraine. They'd like us to forget that, but they absolutely did make that announcement. Congress quickly allocated more funds for disaster relief. 🇺🇸

## HURRICANE HELENE

Here are the latest numbers from the FEMA website which was last checked on Christmas Day but per FEMA hasn't been updated since Oct 17, 2024: FEMA has spent \$102 million dollars in North Carolina. They've registered more than 5,000 survivors and six Disaster Recovery Centers have served more than 2,500 people. They also claim over 14,000 home inspections.

These numbers may sound large, but it's a mere drop in the bucket compared to the overwhelming need. I understand logistics and trying to reach people where there are no longer any roadways, bridges or other infrastructure. But the big question on the ground, from everyone I've spoken with there is, “where is FEMA?” They appear to be very hard to find.

Meanwhile, Christian ministries, other organizations and individuals have stepped up to help. People helping people, directly, without government involvement seems to be much more effective than the federal or state government. The current need now is for shelter, as thousands continue to live in tents, and winter is here. Once again, individuals are coming forward to build temporary shelters with heat and electricity for families who have nothing. But the need is enormous, and it appears FEMA is just endless “red tape.” Countless thousands have lost everything, including their loved ones, who will never be found. One cannot comprehend the sheer devastation of this disaster unless you see it with your own eyes.

Please note that Amish and others have built tiny homes for survivors to keep warm and safe over the winter as temperatures in the mountains drop to below freezing. Dec 11, the North

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**Appalachia needs help. This is real.**

Carolina State Fire Marshal Brian Taylor announced the release of emergency rules aimed at aiding Hurricane Helene survivors to utilize temporary housing situations; however, “The Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) requires all homes built with electrical must be built with permits and be inspected to be approved for use. As a result, despite there being no alternative shelters, there have been stories of families ordered to leave their tiny homes because they have not been inspected, failed an inspection or were built without permits. This means families have been told to endure the elements in the great outdoors, in freezing temperatures, as a “safer” alternative than to stay in a tiny home that has not been inspected, failed an inspection or was not permitted correctly. The emphasis is on the lack of alternative shelters for these survivors and their families.

Additionally, the mud that now covers everything is highly toxic, contaminated with “forever chemicals”

that have been stirred into the mix from chemical plants and factories that were destroyed. Some have called it “East Palestine, Ohio “times” a thousand.” Cadaver dogs, and horses used to reach those trapped in the mountains are dying from the poisonous mud. One person described how her rubber boots were dissolving in the mud because of the toxic sludge. The water is unsafe. People are suffering beyond belief and will soon be freezing to death. This is in the United States of America. Appalachia needs help. This is real.

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