

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I know when and where to deploy?

A: DHS SCF members will receive deployment orders through DTS containing that specific information. DHS SCF members must not travel without receiving notification from DTS to deploy.

Q: Will my health insurance work?

A: Your federal healthcare coverage will travel with you; however, if you have a state-managed plan, you may want to check their policy on out of state/out of network providers.

Q: Just how austere are “austere conditions?”

A: The conditions you experience will vary depending on the disaster and your job/location assignment. If you are concerned about accommodations, you should speak to your home agency DHS SCF Coordinator.

Q: What kind of training will I receive?

A: After joining the DHS SCF, you will attend the virtual DHS SCF Orientation. Additional training is always available and free; however, time spent training outside of deployments is not compensated by FEMA. Periodic trainings will be offered for specific disaster positions. Just in time training may be offered at a PMC, JFO, or virtually during an activation.

Q: How do I apply?

A: Each agency has its own specific registration procedures. Please contact your agency DHS SCF POC for more information.

Q: Who pays for the volunteer’s deployments?

A: The home agency will pay the base 80 hours/pay period. FEMA will reimburse documented overtime and approved expenses.

Q: Will I be with other DHS SCF members?

A: Many volunteers will serve alongside other DHS SCF members as well as FEMA staff and FEMA Corps. The Surge Management & Coordination Branch will also assign SCF Crew Leads to serve as a POC during deployments.

Q: How do I request reasonable accommodation?

A: Contact your agency DHS SCF POC as soon as possible to disclose any requests for reasonable accommodations to ensure all needs are met.

Acronyms

DTS – Deployment Tracking System
JFO – Joint Field Office
OFA – Other Federal Agency
PMC – Personnel Mobilization Center
RSOI – Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration
POC – Point of Contact
SCF – Surge Capacity Force

For more information contact us at
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DHS Surge Capacity Force Information Guide

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FEMA

DHS Surge Capacity Force

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA, 2006) authorized the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create a Surge Capacity Force (SCF) of federal employees to augment the response to a catastrophic disaster. FEMA manages the DHS SCF program, and the DHS Secretary will activate the DHS SCF when an incident exceeds the capacity of FEMA's existing disaster workforce to respond. The DHS SCF has been activated several times; in 2012 in response to Hurricane Sandy; in 2017 in response to hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the wildfires in California; in 2021 for the COVID-19 Vaccination Mission and in response to Hurricane Ida; in 2022 in response to hurricanes Fiona and Ian; and in 2023 in response to hurricane Idalia and the Hawaii wildfire.

DHS SCF Deployments

On deployment, SCF Members may serve in a variety of FEMA program areas, including Disaster Survivor Assistance, Individual Assistance/National Processing Service Centers, Logistics, or Hazard Mitigation. The conditions on deployment may be austere, with limited power, water, and housing; members should be prepared for hardship conditions and work that requires significant amounts of walking or standing. However, members may also serve virtually, in a FEMA Joint Field Offices, or other facilities that may be more similar to their regular working environment. SCF asks all members to disclose any requests for reasonable accommodations as soon as possible to ensure all needs are met.

DHS SCF Eligibility

Membership in the DHS SCF is voluntary and subject to approval by the individual's home agency and supervisor. Volunteering for the DHS SCF is a unique opportunity for DHS and other federal employees to develop skills beyond their regular positions by assisting individuals in need during major disasters or emergencies.

Any permanent full-time federal employee GS-15 and below, from any federal executive agency, may volunteer with the DHS SCF.

In order to avoid disruptions to agency operations and ensure volunteers are prepared to serve, applicants must:

- Obtain supervisor approval to sign up as a member (and again before deploying)
- Hold a valid HSPD-12 PIV badge from their home agency
- Hold a government-issued travel card
- Complete the application process as provided by the home agency
- Complete the following trainings:
 - Anti-Harassment Training
 - Records Management Training
 - Insider Threat Training
 - Privacy in DHS (Other Federal Agencies taken at time of deployment at the Personnel Mobilization Center [PMC])
- Attend virtual DHS SCF Orientation after rostering

How to Participate in DHS SCF

—Prior to Activation—

1. Contact home agency DHS SCF Point of Contact (POC) to understand process for joining and requirements
2. Obtain supervisor approval to volunteer
3. Ensure badge and travel card are active and valid for the next six months
4. Complete home agency application process
5. Complete online training requirements and attend DHS SCF Orientation
6. Take ownership of FEMA Deployment Tracking System (DTS) account and ensure all contact information and availability is correct and up-to-date
7. Participate in trainings as offered/eligible
8. Continuously update DTS with contact information and availability

—During an Activation—

1. Confirm supervisor approval to deploy
2. Contact home agency DHS SCF POC to confirm availability
3. Accept a deployment request sent by DTS
4. If travel is required, book travel according to home agency policy/deployment Quick Reference Guide
5. Participate in deployment