



**THE ADMINISTRATOR**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

November 14, 2024

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman, Chair, and Ranking Members:

Millions of Americans have been impacted by the recent Hurricanes Milton and Helene and communities across the Southeast are still reeling from these deadly and devastating storms. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency remains a committed partner to these communities, and I write to you today to share how the EPA is assisting in the crucial response and recovery efforts, such as management of environmental hazards, cleaning up the damage, and improving community and infrastructure resilience. The road to recovery and stronger communities will be long and will require a steady commitment and additional resources from the federal government. My leadership team and I have been heavily engaged with state and local officials to identify needs on the ground and hear directly from those impacted. While the EPA continues to work with our partners to address water emergencies and other environmental damage from these devastating storms, I write to highlight the urgent need for your partnership in delivering critical support through supplemental appropriations.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton were extremely destructive events. Tragically, over 200 people lost their lives due to Hurricane Helene, and at least 23 people died from Hurricane Milton. In my own travels to the affected areas like Asheville, North Carolina, I witnessed firsthand both the destruction and the hard work that is already being undertaken to rebuild. Damages are still being tabulated, but government and private experts estimate the storms caused tens of billions of dollars of damage, which is in line with Hurricanes Katrina, Harvey, and Superstorm Sandy. For example, damages to water infrastructure in the City of Asheville continue to impact residents' daily lives:

- as of late October, residents remain under a boil water advisory;
- two of Asheville's three water treatment plants are not fully operational due to severe flooding caused by Hurricane Helene;
- for many, the faucet water is brown or sediment filled.

Congress has often provided targeted appropriations to the EPA in the aftermath of hurricanes because of the agency's expertise, statutory authorities, and capabilities to quickly mobilize on-the-ground support to protect public health and accelerate progress towards community recovery and resiliency. After Superstorm Sandy, Congress appropriated \$600 million to the water State Revolving Fund programs for New York and New Jersey to reduce flood damage risk and vulnerability and to enhance resilience to rapid hydrologic change or a natural disaster at wastewater and drinking water treatment systems. These projects included flood-proofing critical water treatment systems, correcting significant problems to reduce the likelihood of sewer backups or flooding of a treatment facility, and upgrading and hardening pump stations to ensure peak flow capacity during a storm event. Congress similarly responded after devastating storms over the last decade, including Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, Florence, and Michael, Fiona, and Ian, as well as Typhoon Yutu. These funds provided essential resources primarily to the water SRF programs, as well as for other work not covered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton similarly have large resource needs, given the scale of the destruction to infrastructure. The EPA estimates impacted water system costs based on water system damage reporting from states and average mitigation project costs for different sized utilities. Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia will all need to invest to strengthen the resiliency of their water infrastructure. Most of these water infrastructure needs can be addressed through the SRF programs. Resiliency is a key aspect of any supplemental funding request to mitigate more destruction from future disasters.

The agency has expertise on the potential health impacts of natural disasters and direct responsibilities to protect those impacted. The EPA's statutory authorities, when coupled with additional resources, are crucial to protect public health and accelerate progress towards community recovery and resiliency. For example, under the Safe Drinking Water Act, the EPA can provide states and localities the support and resources necessary to protect public drinking water and ensure communities impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton have access to potable water. This SDWA authority could be used to support operations and maintenance and engineering design services for public water systems coincident with the termination of the FEMA Public Assistance Support. The EPA received \$150 million in supplemental appropriations under SDWA Section 1442(b) in 2022 to provide emergency grant funding and technical assistance to drinking water systems to support Jackson, Mississippi. Based on the number of non-operational systems across the affected region that may need sustained support, similar supplemental funding could now support drinking water and wastewater systems in areas impacted by Helene and Milton.

Additional funding could be used under the Clean Water Act to assist centralized wastewater and septic systems affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The areas affected by these disasters have a

high percentage of households served by individual septic systems that may have been damaged by the flooding. Funding could be used to improve the resilience of rebuilt systems to address flooding, to assess potential to connect households to centralized wastewater systems, and to fund connections.

There also are needs outside of water infrastructure. In support of the Clean Air Act, the nation's ambient air quality monitoring network, an essential element of the agency's environmental infrastructure, serves as the foundation for air quality management and control programs. Multiple air monitors have been damaged by Hurricane Helene and Milton. Additional State and Tribal Assistance Grants funding under the Clean Air Act would help ensure the collection and reporting of critical air quality data. Further, the EPA and our state partners may need supplemental resources related to managing debris, indoor air quality, hazardous materials, watersheds, and underground storage tanks.

My team is available to provide additional information to support the work of Congress on disaster supplemental appropriations. The EPA and the Administration look forward to working with Congress to deliver much needed investment to rebuild communities affected by these natural disasters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael S. Regan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Michael S. Regan