
Preliminary Damage Assessment

The Corps' first major tasking from FEMA was to provide preliminary damage assessments for the seven-county disaster area. Officials in Washington needed reliable information to discuss with the President's staff whether or not to declare a disaster and what counties to include. Initially, the Corps received verbal taskings from FEMA followed by mission assignment letters (MALs). Corps officials actually wrote the mission assignment letters for FEMA because the agency lacked enough clerical help. The verbal tasking on 18 October for preliminary damage assessment was later confirmed in Mission Assignment Letter # 1. FEMA requested that the Corps provide inspectors to perform preliminary damage assessments in conjunction with the state of California. Reimbursement for expenses related to this request was not to exceed \$17,000. FEMA would not reimburse expenses over this limit unless the FEMA regional director amended the MAL.⁴⁹

On the afternoon of 18 October, General Sobke sent Colonel Yanagihara south to set up a field office in a motel in Monterey for preliminary damage assessment. Twelve preliminary damage assessment teams, under the Sacramento District's direction, headed to Monterey that same day. Each team was augmented by an engineer from the California Office of Emergency Services. Colonel Yanagihara briefed California Congressman Leon E. Panetta on their activities when the latter visited the operations center in Monterey. Initial inspections included roadways, bridges, and other public facilities, as well as general damage to commercial and residential areas. By 22 October, the teams had completed general damage assessments of Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties.⁵⁰