



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly presents \$1.38 million reimbursement check to NTUA



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly presented a \$1.38 million reimbursement check to NTUA on Wednesday. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— It was the fastest processing for a FEMA reimbursement check by a tribal nation.

On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly presented Navajo Tribal Utility Authority with a \$1.38 million reimbursement check for costs associated with Operation Winter Freeze in early 2013.

Winter Freeze was the first tribal disaster declaration made by the Navajo Nation in accordance with amendments to the Stafford Act.

“Congratulations to the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management for their work with NTUA and FEMA to get this reimbursement processed quickly,” President Shelly said. “Great things happen when

tribal entities work together.”

President Shelly plans to submit a proposal for the creation of an escrow account to address unforeseen natural disasters that may arise in the future. This way, tribal entities can be repaid right away while the reimbursement process takes place.

Rose Whitehair, director of NNDEM, commended NTUA for their thorough accountability.

“They had 100 percent of their documentation and that made all the difference in the world,” she said. “We could not have done it without assistance from the Department of Justice and Office of the Controller.”

Most FEMA reimbursements take three to

five years after the emergency declaration to be processed. Operation Winter Freeze was completed in one year.

“We do have a computerized system and we went through a bit of trouble to get through the billing,” said Rex Koontz, deputy general manager for NTUA.

He said the tribal entity’s investment in the system paid dividends, especially when they were able to extrapolate data on the work committed, equipment used, labor hours and more.

“FEMA has their own reporting process that requires certain data. Our system automatically gave them the data and that made (the reimbursement) very quick,” Koontz said. “The Navajo

Nation did very good. It unprecedented in getting these dollars back.”

Whitehair said NNDEM also financially closed out the tribe’s oldest disaster, Operation Hastlish, which was on the books since Dec. 28, 2004. OOC is submitting the final financial status report.

“President Shelly’s administration developed a new FEMA policy and procedures to streamline reimbursements. This was done with collaboration with NNDEM, DOJ, and OOC,” she said.

In preparation for the upcoming monsoon season, NNDEM has scheduled a sandbag training session on June 27 at the Navajo Nation Zoo, beginning at 10 a.m.