

requirements for State, tribal, and local mitigation plans necessary for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) project funding. On October 1, 2002, FEMA published a change to that rule at 67 FR 61512, extending the date that the planning requirements take effect. This rule stated that for disasters declared on or after November 1, 2004, State Mitigation Plans will be required in order to receive non-emergency Stafford Act assistance, and local mitigation plans will be required in order to receive HMGP project grants.

However, the date that local mitigation plans will be required for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation program as a condition of project grant funding was left at November 1, 2003. The intent was to make grants and technical assistance available in fiscal year 2003 to assist State and local governments to develop mitigation plans and implement mitigation projects during the first year of the competitive grant program. However, because the application period for the competitive PDM program will not close until October 6, 2003, the project grants will not be awarded until after November 1, 2003. The intent of this rule change is to clarify that the November 1, 2003 effective date for the planning requirement will apply only to PDM grant funds awarded under any Notice of funding opportunity issued after that date. Essentially, for PDM grant funds made available in fiscal year 2004 and beyond, local governments must have an approved mitigation plan in order to receive a project grant under the PDM program.

In addition, this rule updates the planning requirement identified in 44 CFR part 204, Fire Management Assistance Grant Program as well as part 206, subpart H, Public Assistance Eligibility. The changes bring these sections into conformity with the existing planning rule, 44 CFR part 201.

FEMA received many thoughtful comments, and intends to address them all prior to finalizing the rule. However, in the interest of expediting these minor clarifying and conforming changes, FEMA is issuing another interim final rule. FEMA encourages comments on this interim final rule, and will make every effort to involve all interested parties, including those who commented on the original interim final planning rules, prior to the development of the Final Rule.

#### **Administrative Procedure Act Statement.**

In general, FEMA publishes a rule for public comment before issuing a final rule, under the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. 533 and 44 CFR

1.12. The Administrative Procedure Act, however, provides an exception from that general rule where the agency for good cause finds the procedures for comment and response contrary to the public interest.

This interim final rule clarifies the date that local governments, as well as a tribe applying as a sub-applicant, must have a mitigation plan as a condition of receiving FEMA PDM project grant assistance. This interim final rule clarifies that the plan requirement applies only to PDM project grants awarded under any Notice of funding opportunity issued after November 1, 2003. The Notice of Availability of Funding (NOFA) for the fiscal year 2003 PDM program was not published until July 7, 2003, making it difficult to make grant awards by November 1, 2003. In order to make timely awards for the fiscal year 2003 PDM program, it is essential that the clarification of the effective date of the planning requirement be made effective as soon as possible.

In addition, this rule brings the mitigation planning requirements for the Fire Management Assistance Grant Program, and FEMA's Public Assistance Program into conformity with 44 CFR part 201. FEMA believes it is contrary to the public interest to delay the benefits of this rule. In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), we find good cause for the interim final rule to take effect immediately upon publication in the **Federal Register** in order to meet the needs of States, tribes, and communities by clarifying the effective date for planning requirements under 44 CFR part 201. Therefore, FEMA finds that prior notice and comment on this rule would not further the public interest. FEMA actively encourages, solicits, and will consider comments on this interim final rule from interested parties, as well as those submitted on the original interim final planning rule, in preparing the final rule. For these reasons, FEMA believes there is good cause to publish an interim final rule.

#### **National Environmental Policy Act**

44 CFR 10.8(d)(2)(ii) excludes this rule from the preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, where the rule relates to actions that qualify for categorical exclusion under 44 CFR 10.8(d)(2)(iii), such as the development of plans under this section.

#### **Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review**

FEMA has prepared and reviewed this rule under the provisions of Executive

Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review. Under Executive Order 12866, 58 FR 51735, Oct. 4, 1993, a significant regulatory action is subject to OMB review and the requirements of the Executive Order. The Executive Order defines "significant regulatory action" as one that is likely to result in a rule that may:

(1) Have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities;

(2) Create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency;

(3) Materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or

(4) Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President's priorities, or the principles set forth in the Executive Order.

The purpose of this rule is to clarify the date by which State, tribal, and local governments have to prepare or update their plans to meet the criteria identified in 44 CFR part 201. This interim final rule clarifies that local governments must have a mitigation plan approved in order to receive a project grant through the PDM program under any Notice of funding opportunity issued after November 1, 2003, in fiscal year 2004 and beyond. As such, the rule itself will not have an effect on the economy of more than \$100,000,000.

Therefore, this rule is not a significant regulatory action and is not an economically significant rule under Executive Order 12866. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has reviewed this rule under Executive Order 12866.

#### **Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice**

Environmental Justice is incorporated into policies and programs under Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, 59 FR 7629, Feb. 16, 1994. The Executive Order requires each Federal agency to conduct its programs, policies, and activities that substantially affect human health or the environment, in a manner that ensures that those programs, policies, and activities do not have the effect of excluding persons from program participation, denying persons program benefits, or subjecting persons to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin.