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# SHOT/CHASER: Kristi Noem Gutted Disaster Response, Then Turned to FEMA for Political Cover During Winter Storm Fern

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*One FEMA official told CNN: “I was shocked she showed up after all the sh\*t we’ve been put through and what she’s said.”*

Washington, DC – Under Kristi Noem’s leadership, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has gutted FEMA and our national disaster response infrastructure. Noem has called to **eliminate FEMA**, **delayed** critical search and rescue missions which could have saved lives after the Texas floods, and is personally responsible for holding up **billions of dollars** in disaster aid to states. But, last week, during Winter Storm Fern and amidst **growing backlash** against her for allowing ICE to murder Americans and terrorize communities, Noem **turned to FEMA** for political cover.

**SHOT:** CNN: **Kristi Noem treated FEMA as an adversary. Then came a massive winter storm**

**CHASER:** Noem has gutted FEMA, personally delayed and denied disaster relief for communities across the country, redirected FEMA funds to ICE, and left people more vulnerable to extreme weather.

Noem redirected **over \$600 million** from FEMA to build migrant detention centers and **forcibly reassigned** dozens of key FEMA staff to work for ICE on deportations, putting communities at risk from extreme weather.

Under Noem's leadership, FEMA has repeatedly **blocked** and **delayed** critical aid to disaster survivors.

Noem **required** her signoff on FEMA spending over \$100,000, which led to **delays** in aid and recovery for **Texas** after deadly flooding and **North Carolina** after Hurricane Helene. While FEMA blocked and delayed aid to disaster survivors, DHS **spent** \$200 million on two private jets for Noem.

Noem's scrutiny of FEMA aid to states created a **\$17 billion bottleneck**, slowing assistance to disaster-struck communities.

Noem **said** that she planned to eliminate FEMA, and under Noem, FEMA lost roughly **20%** of the staff responsible for mitigating and responding to disasters ahead of hurricane season. In December 2025, Noem **cut** dozens more disaster response and recovery staff at FEMA, with potential cuts to **thousands more** response staff. FEMA employees were told to prepare for the agency to cut its staff by **more than 50%**.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) **found** that Trump and Noem's FEMA cuts could "exacerbate existing challenges and impact the federal government's readiness to respond to future disasters."

More than 180 FEMA officials and experts **sent a letter** to Congress saying that FEMA leadership, including Kristi Noem, was unqualified and hindered the agency's ability to effectively manage emergencies.