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Disaster-Struck Cities Fight for Aid as FEMA Runs Low.

- **FEMA is stretched thin as number of big disasters pile up**
- **Massachusetts mayor warns others to 'lower those expectations'**

A once in 200-years storm dumped 11 inches of rain over four hours on the central Massachusetts town of Leominster in September, washing away culverts, creating a sinkhole that swallowed cars at a dealership and flooding the city council chambers with sewage.

Damages to public infrastructure in Leominster exceeded $24 million, but the federal government denied a request for reimbursement to fix everything from dams to sanitation mains, and rejected Governor Maura Healey's bid for a major disaster declaration for impacted counties in the center of her state. And last month, Healey said the US Federal Emergency Management Agency turned down her appeal.

"The perception of most is FEMA is there when you get into large scale events — they are going to help you," said Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella, who is now weighing how to pay for both a new elementary school that was planned before storms hit and the damage they caused. "Practice self reliance. If you are waiting for the federal government to help, lower those expectations."

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