

Disaster News Update – April 28 to May 4, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina
- **Earthquake:** Nevada, Illinois
- **Explosion / Structure Fire:** Mississippi (Factory Boiler), New York (House)
- **Fire:** California, New Mexico, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Maine, Iowa (warning), Missouri (warning), Louisiana
- **Hail:** Oklahoma, Michigan, Kansas, South Dakota
- **HazMat:** Michigan (Ammonia Tanker Accident), Louisiana (Ammonia Explosion), Wisconsin (Double Tanker Truck Accident)
- **Heavy Rain:** South Carolina, North Dakota, Louisiana, Minnesota
- **Mudslide:** New Hampshire, California
- **Strong Wind:** Mississippi, Missouri
- **Structure Fire:** Washington (Apartment Fire)
- **Terrorism:** California (Pipe Bomb)
- **Tornado:** Arkansas, Mississippi, Virginia, Oklahoma, Texas

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Ohio](#): Snow (4/24)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(5/1\)](#), [California \(4/27\)](#), [New Mexico \(4/21\)](#), [Texas \(4/16\)](#), [Colorado \(4/16\)](#), [Texas \(4/10\)](#), [Texas \(4/1\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Donations sought as volunteers dig in (The Virginian Pilot, 5/3)

For the first time since Monday's storm, appraisers, contractors and other workers entered tornado-ravaged neighborhoods Friday without a homeowner escort. Police had issued more than 130 renewable day passes at the city's disaster response center in the King's Fork Middle School recreation facility. Otherwise, visitation to the center and the American Red Cross' disaster relief site slowed to a trickle as cleanup continued on the estimated \$28.6 million in damage Monday's twister left behind. United Way of South Hampton Roads has raised about \$400,000 so far for its disaster fund, said development manager Beth Cross. The organization is accepting donations at www.unitedwayshr.org. About 200 volunteers arrived in neighborhoods Friday in an effort to patch up homes before the weekend's forecast thunderstorms, said Jody Herrington, director of U.S. Disaster Relief for Operation Blessing International. Operation Blessing, a relief organization based in Virginia Beach and founded by Pat Robertson, and Samaritan's Purse, another relief group, are coordinating the volunteer work for United Way. More volunteers are expected to begin working today, but organizers are trying to keep the number manageable for the time being, Herrington said. "If we get too many people in there, the way the areas are congested, it could get hazardous," she said. More than 250 volunteers have also assisted the Red Cross with its relief effort. They've provided

counseling, meals and medical help to hundreds of tornado victims, said Pam Wakefield, disaster services manager for the American Red Cross of Southeastern Virginia. The city is planning for a large-scale volunteer day on May 10. A community meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday at King's Fork High School.

Salvation Army, Red Cross sends assistance to storm victims (KS City Star, 5/2)

The Salvation Army and the American Red Cross both sent out help this morning to storm victims. The Salvation Army sent out two mobile feeding units to provide food and beverages to area residents as well as police, fire and other first responders. One canteen was sent out at 3:30 a.m. to Missouri 291 and Interstate 35 and the other was sent at 5 a.m. to Missouri 291 and Stark. Both were dispatched after requests from law enforcement agencies, said Salvation Army spokeswoman Amanda Waters. "We are assessing how else we might be of help this morning," Waters said. "We will see if they need clothing, shelter, hotel vouchers, medicine. Anything that was initially lost or people can't get to we will provide immediately." The Red Cross sent out canteens this morning to locations in Gladstone and Eastern Jackson County, said spokeswoman Almitra Smith. "They are providing refreshments, blankets, canteen kits, change of clothes, blankets, anything to make sure their immediate needs are being helped," Smith said.

Local women help Katrina victims (San Gabriel Valley Tribune (CA), 5/1)

A rotting patio staircase and a couple of chairs are all that Joan Moorman said remained from a home destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Moorman, 57, and Barbara Strout, 63, from Whittier, recently returned from a weeklong trip to Mississippi where they helped rebuild homes for victims of a hurricane that hit in August 2005. Moorman recalls driving past home after home, witnessing the devastation first-hand. "Eighty percent of the homes were gone," she said. Strout and Moorman both applied and were selected as volunteers representing First United Methodist Church of Whittier. The project began through the United Methodist Committee on Relief, a nonprofit organization, or UMCOR. UMCOR has provided disaster relief and humanitarian aid to more than 80 countries including the United States. Currently UMCOR is heading a project to help landowners and victims of Katrina rebuilt their homes in Mississippi. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, more than 100,000 Mississippians were left living in FEMA trailers, and thousands more were displaced. Moorman and Strout flew to Mississippi on April 5. Both women helped build and restore a couple of homes. One of the homes belonged to an elderly woman who Moorman said had no means to rebuild.

Volunteers Prepare to Help Virginia Survivors (Disaster News Network, 4/30)

Two days after tornadoes touched down in southeastern Virginia, ripping a 10 mile swath of destruction between Suffolk and Norfolk, volunteers are waiting to help. While some have rolled up their sleeves to cook and serve meals, others are waiting on the sidelines, oiling their chainsaws, checking their relief kits and studying maps of the area so that they'll be ready to head in as soon as local law enforcement gives them the go-ahead to start their work. Suffolk Fire Chief Mark Outlaw said his city was "blessed" to have had relatively few injuries and no fatalities in the wake of such a strong storm. Reports that his department has compiled so far show that 120 of the city's 80,000 residents were

injured in the storm. Of those, only six were considered serious injuries. Most, he said, were cuts and bruises from flying debris.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Earthquake readiness taught in Mandarin](#) (San Jose Mercury News, 5/4)

Lynn Brown looked at neat rows of Chinese characters projected on a screen, while instructor Wayne Tan elaborated, in Mandarin, to a roomful of Chinese students. Although he does not read or speak Chinese, Brown said with assured confidence, "This one's about earthquakes. This is an introduction." He should know. Brown, Mountain View's coordinator of emergency services, helped design the course in emergency preparedness held Saturday morning in Mountain View for a strictly Chinese audience. It was the city's first Chinese-language emergency preparedness training class - an intensive course for community members known as the Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT. City officials believe it may also be the peninsula's first class of its kind. Only San Francisco has a city-sponsored training like it in Mandarin. During the class, the residents learned about team building during an emergency. They also went over the basics of emergency response, learning how to inspect an injured person from head to toe, and how to put out a small fire. Armed with small, home-sized fire extinguishers, the students dutifully took turns blasting flames on a training lot at Mountain View's Fire Station No. 4. "When the earthquake comes, I don't care whether the person who's going to help me speaks English or not," said Blanca Cinco, community outreach coordinator for Mountain View. "I don't care as long as they know what they're doing."

Local businesses, restaurants help feed disaster volunteers (Suffolk (VA) Sun, 5/4)

Business owners and restaurants in Suffolk joined forces to provide food relief for the volunteer firefighters and workers who worked around the clock to clear debris from downtown Driver since the April 28 tornado. A coordinated effort between Alison Anderson, owner of The Art of Living...Well, and Janice Powell, owner of Powell Home, resulted in the donation of food and beverages for three meals a day for the five days. At the Godwin Boulevard location, the Subway sandwich shop gave away free subs and a drink for those who frequented the store, many of them regular customers who were displaced or had suffered damage to their homes and businesses. "It's so unbelievably humbling to see the commitment and dedication of these hardworking volunteer firefighters," Powell said. "They all go to their regular paying jobs then immediately go to the tornado site to begin round-the-clock cleanup. The least we could do is provide them with nourishment." Breakfast, lunch and dinner meals were delivered to the Driver Fire Department and then transported to the relief site each day through the weekend.

[Only a fraction of Houstonians registered for storm help](#) (Houston Chronicle, 4/29)

With hurricane season fast approaching, only 358 Houston residents have told government officials they need help with transportation during an evacuation - a fraction of the 40,000 from Houston who were assisted in leaving the city during Hurricane Rita in 2005. "It's a very low number," Joe Laud, a spokesman for the Houston Emergency Center, said Monday. He hopes that many more will register before hurricane season

begins June 1. At the start of hurricane season last year, only 500 from Houston had registered for front-door transportation service. That was a sharp drop from the 3,000 who registered in 2006 after the trauma of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Statewide, about 22,000 people have called 211 to register for transportation help, according to statistics provided by the Department of State Health Services. The total number of all people, including family and caregivers, who have requested evacuation assistance is 59,624. The numbers came on the day that top Texas emergency management officials launched a public information campaign about hurricane preparedness. "We recognize it usually takes a catastrophic event to get the public's attention," said Steve McCraw, director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security. "What we must do is encourage all Texans to take action so that when disaster strikes, they will be prepared."

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Survivors search for belongings amid Ark. tornado wreckage (AP, 5/4)

Smoke rose from burning heaps of wreckage Saturday as residents of rural Arkansas cleaned up what was left of their homes after deadly tornadoes scoured a state that has been plagued by severe weather this year. All that remained of Shelia Massey's home were a chimney, a bathroom wall, and a bathtub that was her storm shelter. "God's hand came down and held us there while the rest of the house just blew away," said Massey, 54. "That's all there was to it. The Lord held us there." A child poking through the rubble found a photograph of Massey's husband, who was not at home when the violent weather struck Friday. The storms killed seven people, damaged or destroyed about 400 homes, and knocked out electrical and telephone service for thousands of customers in 18 counties. Altogether, meteorologists said more than 25 tornadoes may have touched down across middle America late Thursday and early Friday, but Arkansas was the hardest hit. Down U.S. 65 from Massey's house, parishioners at Southside Baptist Church salvaged what was left of their old sanctuary and their new church, still under construction. Men backed up pickup trucks to the front door of the old church and loaded up boxes filled with red-leather hymnals. The storm had collapsed the roof of their new sanctuary, bending its steel beams like sipping straws. In the countryside outside Damascus, John Rusin, 62, said he and his wife, Marsha, 60, took shelter in a small room along with two dogs after forecasters broke in on a television show they were watching. Winds almost ripped a mattress out of his arms as he held it over his wife, he said.

Residents Return to Flooded Maine Homes (Disaster News Network, 5/3)

This past winter Aroostook County, Maine, set snowfall records with more than 200-inches, but Thursday new records were set – this time for flooding. As many as 140 homes were flooded and 1000 people evacuated after the St. John River spilled its banks. The International Bridge, which crosses the St. John between Fort Kent and Clair, New Brunswick, was also closed because of the flooding. The river crested Thursday at about 31 feet, about four feet higher than flood stage and the previous record that had been set nearly 30 years ago. But by Friday night, the river level had dropped enough that all of the residents forced from their homes were able to return to begin the job of assessing the damage and cleaning up. Aroostook County is in the most northeastern corner of Maine,

bordering the Province of New Brunswick in Canada. And there are only 74,000 residents in this vast county, the size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. In Fort Kent, James Woodward, pastor of the Christ Church Congregational, which is affiliated with the United Church of Christ, said he expects his congregation will be involved in disaster recovery efforts. Woodward is also a high school teacher and his school, like many others, was closed Thursday as the sun shone brightly. Woodward said the rivers are starting to recede, and he expected it to be a very busy weekend in town when the cleanup starts.

Storms cause damage in Mississippi (Associated Press, 5/3)

The National Weather Service said unconfirmed tornadoes were reported in Alcorn and Union counties Friday, causing damage to at least two dozen homes in Union County. There were no reports of storm-related deaths in Mississippi but that wasn't the case in Arkansas where at least seven people were killed and hundreds of homes damaged due to violent storms Friday. In Mississippi, officials said about 4,500 Northeast Mississippi Electric Power Association customers were without power Saturday and two emergency shelters had opened in Myrtle. On Saturday, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency Director Mike Womack, along with Republican Lt. Governor Phil Bryant, state Sen. Nickey Browning, D-Pontotoc, and local officials toured the damaged areas in Union County, according to a MEMA statement. Storm damage was detailed in the statement as follows: in Coahoma County, one home was destroyed, one business had roof damage and 12 apartments had water damage; in Grenada County, several roads were flooded, but are now cleared; in Panola County, six homes had major damage and downed trees were reported; in Prentiss County, two homes, a business, five agricultural buildings and two roads had minor damage while two mobile homes were damaged; in Union County at least 10 mobile homes, 15 homes, two businesses and 10 agricultural buildings were destroyed and 25 homes suffered major damage. Besides possible twisters, the storm front resulted in 3/4-inch to 1 1/4-inch hail in Marshall, Tunica and DeSoto counties in the northwest. Officials say numerous reports of damaging winds across Mississippi and Louisiana resulted in downed trees, power lines and other damage.

No federal aid for Virginia tornado victims (Associated Press, 5/3)

The damage caused in several Virginia localities by tornadoes Monday was not enough to qualify victims for federal emergency assistance. Virginia Department of Emergency Management spokesman Bob Spieldenner says teams of local, state and federal representatives have determined the damage did not meet the required total uninsured dollar amount to gain such assistance. Department officials say most of the homes and businesses impacted by the 10 confirmed tornadoes had enough insurance to cover their losses. The tornadoes caused an estimated \$32 million in damage. Suffolk was the hardest-hit.

Maine flood recovery under way (Associated Press, 5/3)

Some roads remained impassible and bridges closed on Saturday while damage assessments continued along the St. John River in northern Maine following last week's devastating spring flood. "The focus has been shifted to recovery and getting people back into their homes," Maine Emergency Management Agency spokeswoman Lynette Miller

said as the river remained below flood stage. Closed highways included portions of state Route 11, one of the region's major roads, said the Aroostook Emergency Management Agency's Darren Woods. While damage assessments were being done from the ground, warden pilots photographed 227 homes from the air that have been flooded. Officials said more flood-damaged homes are expected to be catalogued in the days ahead. "We're still sheltering people in three communities Fort Kent, Van Buren and Island Falls," said Woods. Damage-assessment teams from the Federal Emergency Management Agency are expected to arrive in the area early this week. Miller noted that other areas of Maine, including Penobscot County, have also sustained flood damage. MEMA asked those whose homes or businesses were damaged by flooding to call 211 and report their losses. MEMA Director Robert McAleer said the call is not an application for assistance, but to help officials assess what kinds of assistance might be available.

Storms, tornadoes move across Oklahoma (AP, 5/2)

A twister that tore a 9-mile path through rural portions of Rogers and Mayes counties early Friday destroyed one home and damaged about a dozen others as it created a damage path 500 yards wide, state officials reported. Based on damage assessments, the tornado was rated an EF1, with wind speeds estimated at 85 to 95 mph. "We were very lucky that it took a route that went primarily through rural areas," said Michelann Ooten, a spokeswoman for the Department of Emergency Management. The tornado was one of at least three, and possibly more, that touched down in Oklahoma early Friday morning as a powerful storm system raked the state. Storm spotters also reported a large cone tornado near Pawnee and a 100-yard wide multi-vortex tornado near Ralston and Pawhuska, according to the National Weather Service. Another twister was spotted southwest of Glencoe in Payne County by a Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper. A woman in Mayes County who was treated at a Pryor hospital for a broken foot was the worst of the injuries, and high winds destroyed a hotel under construction in Owasso, officials said. About 10,000 electric customers lost power at one point, but most were back on by Friday afternoon. In Owasso, near Tulsa, straight-line winds destroyed the \$4.7 million TownPlace Suites Hotel, authorities said.

The greening of Greensburg, Kansas (USA Today, 5/2)

After a monster tornado devastated Greensburg, Kan., one year ago this Sunday, the city faced tragedy and the daunting task of rebuilding from scratch. It also got an opportunity, Mayor John Janssen says. This rural county seat 109 miles west of Wichita has made "green" its rebuilding mantra, declaring itself a national model for environmentally conscious living -- and winning attention and resources in the process. "The tornado was one of the biggest blessings to hit our town," Janssen says. "We were like every other town in the Rust Belt and the Midwest. We were dying a slow, agonizing death. Suddenly, we don't have a town. So we're rebuilding a new, green town." The decision to rebuild in an environment-friendly manner is not just about feeling good, he says. Environmentally conscious design can cost more upfront, but the costs are made up through energy savings, he says. The city hopes to attract new residents and businesses committed to green living. "We've got green industry that has been looking for a green community to locate into," he says. He didn't go into specifics. "The contacts we've made boggle the imagination." About 1,400 people lived in Greensburg before the twister,

working mostly in agriculture, oil, gas and trucking. After most of the homes and businesses were wiped out, the population fell to about 700, says Kim Alderfer, assistant city administrator. About 140 families live in FEMA trailers, and 141 homes are under construction or completed. The water tower went up in March. Greensburg became the first city in the nation to pledge that all city-owned buildings larger than 4,000 square feet will get the highest rating of the U.S. Green Building Council, called Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum, the council says. The buildings are expected to use 42% less energy than building code standards allow.

Ogle County Added To Illinois Snow Emergency Declaration (FEMA, 5/2)

Federal officials announced today that Ogle County has been added to the list of designated counties for the emergency declaration, following record or near-record snow on Feb. 5 and 6. State officials provided additional information that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) staff carefully reviewed, said Larry Sommers, FEMA's federal coordinating officer for this declaration. Now, federal funds are available to help this county recover some of the expenses it incurred. The original seven counties included in the March 13 emergency declaration are Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lake, McHenry, Stephenson and Winnebago.

More than \$3M approved for WI Snowstorm (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 5/1)

State and federal authorities have approved more than \$3 million in disaster aid for Wisconsin communities pummeled by a record snowstorm in February. But that figure could easily double as some municipalities, including the City of Milwaukee, which could recoup about \$1 million, complete their applications. The Feb. 5-6 storm that dropped up to 19 inches in some parts of the state - shutting down schools, businesses and government offices, and forcing the National Guard to rescue stranded motorists - marked only the second time since the 1970s that a Wisconsin snowstorm has warranted a federal disaster designation. And the reimbursements couldn't come at a better time, said local officials, whose budgets have taken a beating from one of the snowiest winters on record. "It was definitely the worst winter I could recall," said Jeff Mantes, commissioner of Public Works for the City of Milwaukee, whose department exceeded its \$5 million snow and ice removal budget by 80% already this year.

FEMA denies IL aid request for flood victims (Belleview News Democrat, 4/29)

The federal government on Monday denied Illinois' request for federal assistance for people and businesses in 15 Southern Illinois counties affected by severe flooding in March. "It's very disappointing that FEMA failed to recognize the devastating impact this flood had on so many lives in Southern Illinois," said Andrew Velasquez III, director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. "We're going to reach out to emergency managers in each county to determine if any additional damage has been identified since we conducted our damage assessment last month. We hope to find unreported damage that could support a state appeal of this decision." Earlier this month, Gov. Rod Blagojevich requested a federal declaration for Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Marion, Massac, Perry, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, White and Williamson counties. Thirty-nine homes that were destroyed in the flooding, 150 homes received major damage and 374 homes that sustained lesser damage. In addition, 145

businesses were damaged by flood waters. A declaration would have enabled those affected to apply for grants and loans to help with flood-related losses. On March 20, Blagojevich declared 19 Southern Illinois counties state disaster areas due to the flooding. The state disaster declaration made available state assets and personnel to help local officials with response and recovery efforts, including assistance with evacuations, security details, and filling sandbags, as well as equipment and other support.

Maine Governor Declares State of Emergency (States News Service, 4/29)

Governor John E. Baldacci this evening has declared a State of Emergency for Aroostook County. Severe storms, combined with snow on the ground, have created dangerous flooding conditions in Aroostook County, and particularly in the Fort Kent and Wallagrass areas. The National Weather Service is predicting that parts of Aroostook County could be hit by record flooding, Governor Baldacci said. The Maine Emergency Management Agency and my office are monitoring the situation and working closely with local emergency management officials to protect public safety. Resources, including water craft and wardens from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, are being shifted to Aroostook County from other areas of the State to assist local authorities, and the Red Cross has made preparations for shelters in the event evacuation becomes necessary. In addition, Governor Baldacci has given Vernon R. Ouellette, the director of the Aroostook County Emergency Management Agency, the authority to direct and compel evacuation if he determines the action is necessary for the preservation of life or other disaster mitigation, response or recovery. We must do what is necessary to protect the lives of residents of Aroostook County and the lives of emergency personnel who might be called upon during a rescue, Governor Baldacci said. The situation in Aroostook County is changing rapidly, and Director Ouellette is in the best position to determine when an evacuation order should become mandatory. Hopefully, it won't be necessary.

Iowa Governor Declares State of Emergency (Iowa Press Release, 4/28)

Governor Chet Culver has added Jones County to the list of declared disaster areas in Iowa. Earlier, Governor Culver had previously declared Black Hawk, Bremer, and Louisa Counties as disaster areas following heavy rains last week, which pushed rivers and streams over their banks. This action allowed state assets to help move pumps and sandbags provided by the Army Corps of Engineers to aid local responses. I continue to monitor the situation throughout eastern Iowa, said Governor Culver. Though flood waters are slowly working their way downstream, we still consider this a serious event. I have pledged my support to local elected and emergency management officials, and we stand ready to do whatever we can to help the communities affected by flood waters recover as quickly as possible. Starting last Wednesday, Iowa was hit by several severe storms that brought damaging winds and heavy rain, which caused flooding to many communities throughout Eastern Iowa. The emergency declaration is a procedural step that allows state resources to be deployed to local communities affected by the storms.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

W. Roxbury Among First to Offer Student Emergency Preparedness (FEMA, 4/30)

FEMA is initiating a pilot program for New England 4th grade students to teach basic emergency preparedness skills. The Student Tools for Emergency Planning (STEP) program will be offered by participating schools within the region. The William H. Ohrenberger Elementary School in West Roxbury will be one of the first schools in Massachusetts to provide the STEP program to its pupils. "Sharpening emergency preparedness skills is an important project for our students and staff," said Steve Zrike Jr., principal of Ohrenberger Elementary School. "We work very hard at this skill to ensure all of our students know what to do in case of an incident. We are pleased to participate in this training as the lessons learned in school will also help our students in their homes as they share the preparedness tips with their families." In addition to the key lesson plan, students in participating schools will also receive items to make their own 'starter' kit; including a water bottle, snack bar, emergency whistle, mylar blanket and carrying bag. STEP will be taught during the 2008-2009 academic year. A joint effort between state emergency management agencies and FEMA, the program offers a ready-to-teach preparedness lesson that empowers students to encourage their families to make home emergency kits and communications plans.

N. Providence to Offer Student Emergency Preparedness Program (FEMA, 4/30)

"We are looking forward to unveiling the STEP program in our schools," said Dr. Donna Ottaviano, superintendent of North Providence School District. "Our teachers are enthusiastic about the materials they helped to create and we all agree that being prepared is an important message." North Providence 4th grade teachers assisted with the development of the STEP program by participating in a focus group at the end of February with FEMA and Rhode Island Emergency Management representatives. In addition to the key lesson plan, students in participating schools will also receive items to make their own 'starter' kit; including a water bottle, snack bar, emergency whistle, mylar blanket and carrying bag. STEP will be taught during the 2008-2009 academic year. A joint effort between state emergency management agencies and FEMA, the program offers a ready-to-teach preparedness lesson that empowers students to encourage their families to make home emergency kits and communications plans. There are a variety of reasons a family might have to evacuate its home - a fire, a chemicals spill, winter storms, hurricanes or flooding. There may be limited time to react when an evacuation is ordered. Having an emergency kit at the ready is one thing families can do to protect themselves. A communications plan results when a family agrees on an alternate meeting place outside the home, and designates a person to call (often in a different state) if the family is separated in an emergency. Each member of the family carries a card with those important facts, as well as work and school numbers.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

FEMA trailer brings campaign on Katrina aid problems (Birmingham News, 5/2)

A FEMA trailer adorned with slogans including "Today is Day # 976 since Hurricane Katrina" pulled into Birmingham on Thursday night and will be parked at U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby's office today. "We're here to say all is still not well in Louisiana, or Alabama and Mississippi," said Mary Croom-Fontenot, who lived in a Federal

Emergency Management Agency trailer for nine months before returning to her home in the Ninth Ward in New Orleans. "People are suffering." The FEMA demonstration trailer, called the "KatrinaRitaVille Express," will be parked today from 9 a.m. to noon at the Federal Building downtown, at Fifth Avenue North and 18th Street. Despite \$129 billion in federal funding that was supposed to help hurricane victims, tens of thousands of them are still without housing and many still live in the trailers that have tested with dangerous levels of formaldehyde fumes, said Derrick Evans, who towed the trailer into Birmingham from Boston. "The FEMA trailer has become an icon of the multi-layered disaster of government response after the hurricane," said Evans, of Gulfport, Miss. "My mother lived in a FEMA trailer for 18 months before moving back into her house," he said. "It's the volunteers that are rebuilding neighborhoods, one house at a time, while local, state and federal governments do nothing." Zack Carter, an organizer for Alabama Arise, presented a slide show at the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Birmingham on Thursday showing Alabama homes that still need repair.

Katrina Victims Rebuild a Neighborhood (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 5/1)

The Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association, or NENA, is leading the fight to help residents come back to the area of New Orleans hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina. In its short history, NENA has helped 1,200 people apply for disaster assistance, started a design studio to help residents manage the rebuilding process, and engaged several thousand volunteers. "We first started with just my laptop, one table, and a chair," says Ms. Jones. "That's all we had." At the same time that NENA is working to bring back the Lower Ninth Ward, Ms. Jones, a lifelong neighborhood resident, and most of her employees are still trying to put their own lives back together. But Ms. Jones believes that the shared sense of loss and frustration allows employees to connect with the people they serve. Now, she says, is not the time to turn inward and only concentrate on your own problems. "What's that going to do for the community, when everything else is rotting around you?" asks Ms. Jones. "You have to take personal responsibility and see what you can do with your skill set that you already have to help the recovery."

Plaquemines could get La. Cottages (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/30)

Two Plaquemines Parish tracts have been identified as possible sites for long-awaited Louisiana Cottages, potentially adding the housing-starved parish to the list of beneficiaries for a \$74.5 million pilot recovery program. Separately, the Louisiana Recovery Authority, which recently took over the cottage program from the state housing board, is compiling a list of New Orleans Redevelopment Authority properties for an initial distribution of 25 cottages, with the long-term aim of 100 cottages being built on NORA sites around the city. Wil Jacobs, LRA's housing policy director, said the conversations about 30 to 60 units in Plaquemines are "very preliminary." But such an investment would inject new affordable housing opportunities in a market that endured the worst of Hurricane Katrina's wind and surge in late summer 2005. The particular sites also could demonstrate the essence of the Alternative Housing Pilot Program, which Congress authorized as a way for Gulf Coast states to test emergency and recovery housing options other than the Federal Emergency Management Agency's traditional travel trailers. Both Plaquemines parcels -- adjacent to the Diamond Community Center and the Davant trailer park on the Mississippi River's east bank -- now serve as group

trailer sites. FEMA has set May 31 as the deadline to close its remaining group trailer sites around south Louisiana, though local FEMA spokesmen have said the Plaquemines parks may be the hardest to close because residents have few permanent housing options in the local area. FEMA has promised not to evict any trailer residents as the agency attempts to link occupants with affordable housing.