

Disaster News Update –May 5 to 11, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Oregon, Nevada, California, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Florida
- **Earthquake:** Virginia
- **Explosion / Structure Fire:** Alabama (Factory Explosion), Texas (Home), Virginia (Shooting Range)
- **Fire:** Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Tennessee, Florida
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** New York (warning), Maryland (warning), Pennsylvania (warning), Ohio (warning)
- **Hail:** North Carolina
- **HazMat:** New Jersey (Tanker Truck Accident), New Jersey (Tanker Train Derail)
- **Heavy Rain:** Washington, DC, Virginia, Maryland, Oklahoma
- **Sinkhole:** Texas, Maryland
- **Strong Wind:** North Carolina
- **Tornado:** Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, Ohio

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Maine:](#) Severe Storms and Flooding (5/9)
- [Oklahoma:](#) Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (5/9)
- [Mississippi:](#) Severe Storms and Flooding (5/8)
- [Oklahoma:](#) Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (5/5)
- [Ohio:](#) Snow (Emergency Declaration - 4/24)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(5/1\)](#), [California \(4/27\)](#), [New Mexico \(4/21\)](#), [Texas \(4/16\)](#), [Colorado \(4/16\)](#), [Texas \(4/10\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Carter work project on Gulf Coast (Deseret Morning News, 5/11)

This week, thousands of hammers, paintbrushes and shovels will rise in concert to build affordable houses across the Gulf Coast during the 2008 Habitat for Humanity Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project. An estimated 2,000 volunteers will work in South Mississippi toward building and rehabilitating about 60 houses in Biloxi, Gulfport, Diamondhead and Pascagoula. The teams also will frame nearly 50 houses to be completed by year's end. Last year, the project focused on housing in Los Angeles. The year before, it was India. Since 1984, the project has traveled the world as part of its mission to house the disadvantaged. Choosing the Mississippi Gulf Coast for its 25th anniversary was no accident. "Even though it's 30 months after the storm, there is still a significant need for affordable housing along the Coast," said Kent Adcock, director of business development and community relations for the Mississippi Gulf Coast chapter of Habitat. "For the last 25 years, President Carter has chosen one place in the world where

he focuses his efforts. The magnitude is overwhelming, not just in terms of the week's impact, but in terms of the post event." Adcock said the project places about \$10 million to \$12 million on the issue of affordable housing along the post-Katrina Coast. About 50 national and local corporate and philanthropic groups are contributing to the effort, including the lead sponsor, the Knight Foundation, along with the NCAA, Habitat for Humanity Romania, Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding and Delta Airlines.

Medical Reserves Corps ready for action (Tulsa World, 5/10)

Volunteers render aid in community disasters, rescue animals and people, and provide relief. Tulsa's Medical Reserve Corps is sort of an invisible army. At more than 1,000 volunteers strong, the corps is ready to respond to any major disaster within 48 hours. Johna Easley, the volunteer coordinator for the Tulsa unit, said, "We are here to bridge the gap between the services people need and those who give it." In Oklahoma, the Tulsa corps is likely to be called into action after tornadoes finish a deadly run through the state. The corps was a medical presence at area shelters during the destructive December ice storm. "You can imagine people with diabetes or high blood pressure being thrown into a stressful situation like that," Easley said. Most recently, the Tulsa corps mobilized to rescue animals stranded in people's homes amid flooding in Mayes County. "We had veterinarians and vet techs rescue and treat the animals," Easley said. One of 13 Medical Reserve Corps units in Oklahoma, the Tulsa corps was formed in late 2002.

State to set up 211 line for volunteers (AR Democrat Gazette, 5/8)

Gov. Mike Beebe on Wednesday announced the start-up of a "211" line that people can call to find out how to volunteer to help others. Public Service Commission Chairman Colette Honorable said Arkansas is the 17th state to set up such a system. Beebe said it will especially help send volunteers to the right place in cases of disasters. The United Way and private donations will fund the system.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Churches Given Response Coordination Training (San Francisco Chronicle, 5/9)

When the next earthquake strikes the Bay Area, the first place to go may be a church. Ensnared in neighborhoods throughout the region, they are situated in prime locations for people to converge to in a crisis. They generally have good reputations and are ideal conduits for providing services in a pinch. But few are prepared. Should a crippling natural disaster strike, not many could handle their own needs, much less the possibility of sheltering victims. There are efforts to change that. Leaders from more than a hundred San Francisco-based churches, synagogues and other places of worship are expected to gather today at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco to learn how to make their spiritual sanctuaries into places of physical refuge. Alameda and Santa Clara counties have made similar efforts. In sessions organized by the San Francisco Interfaith Council, the church leaders will be taught how to create disaster plans for themselves, help congregants prepare their own households and be safety hubs for their neighborhoods in the midst of disaster. "This is not to say we expect congregations ... to conduct a full-scale disaster response," said Alessa Adamo, program director for SFCARD, a nonprofit that trains

faith groups and nonprofits on disaster preparedness. "What we're hoping for is that they're able to take care of their existing client base, help their immediate neighbors and provide a way for volunteers to help." One of the main goals of today's gathering is to create neighborhood-based clusters of sanctuaries so different congregations can learn how to work as teams. "Instead of each congregation doing everything ... everybody brings their resources together," said Rev. James DeLange, vice chair of the San Francisco Interfaith Council.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Mid-Atlantic rain prompts evacuations, outages (Associated Press, 5/11)

Heavy rain drenched the mid-Atlantic region Monday, knocking out power to more than 70,000 customers, flooding roads and forcing evacuations. Up to 4 inches of rain fell across the region from Sunday afternoon into Monday morning, and the National Weather Service extended a flood warning for some areas into the afternoon. Authorities said trees came down due to high winds and saturated soil, cutting power to more than 70,000 homes and businesses. Numerous roads were closed because of high water, and firefighters reported receiving phone calls from stranded motorists who had to be rescued. "(It's) possibly the worst flooding that I've seen since Hurricane Isabel in '03," said Steven Marshall, director of the Department of Emergency Services in Somerset County, Md. A sinkhole up to 30 feet wide and 10 feet deep led to the evacuation of three homes in Camp Springs, said Mark Brady, a Prince George's County fire department spokesman. The porch of one home collapsed into the hole. In Chesapeake Beach, firefighters said a man and a woman were slightly injured when high winds caused a house to collapse into a second home late Sunday. In Delaware, the National Guard and state police helped evacuate several coastal communities because of high tides and heavy rains that had flooded roads, said Allen Metheny, assistant director of emergency management in Kent County. Maryland Emergency Management Agency spokesman Ed McDonough said some areas had two feet of standing water, and another inch of rain was expected before the morning was over.

Tornado death toll climbs to 15 in Missouri (Associated Press, 5/11)

Crews continued searching for survivors and culling through the wreckage of demolished homes Sunday after a killer tornado swept through this sparsely populated countryside, killing 15 people. Search crews with dogs combed debris-strewn fields, while a helicopter circled over the 12-mile-long path of the tornado and residents picked through the mounds of debris of homes and businesses. Between 8,000 and 9,000 people were reported without power, which is expected to take at least a week to restore. Susan Roberts, 61, stared at the smashed remains of her classic 1985 Cadillac sitting on her living room floor the only thing left of her home. A woman who had apparently sought shelter in the car died there, she said. "That is what is tearing me up," Roberts said, adding she had warned the woman who had stopped to change a tire about the nearby tornado. Roberts said she left her rental house just six minutes before the tornado hit about 6 p.m. Saturday, taking her 13-year-old grandson with her because he is afraid of tornados. A storm spotter stopped to warn her of the tornado as she was leaving. "I'm

from Kansas. I grew up watching storms," she said as she walked through the debris. "If I didn't have my grandson with me, I probably wouldn't have left." The same storm system started in Oklahoma, where it killed six people before moving into southwest Missouri. On Sunday, storms in Georgia killed at least one person there.

At least 22 dead in Central US in new round of tornadoes (Associated Press, 5/11)
Salvage was the word of the day for residents of this once-bustling lead and zinc mining town as they tried to pick up the pieces from Oklahoma's deadliest tornado in nine years, one that killed at least six people. The town's population, once 20,000, had dwindled to about 800 as residents accepted buyout offers from the government to move elsewhere. Some holdouts acknowledged Sunday they likely had no choice but to leave Picher after the storm. "I have a lot of junk," said Sue Sigle, who has taught for almost four decades at Picher's elementary school. "I guess it's time to clean up and see what I need." Besides the deaths in Oklahoma on Saturday, at least 14 others were killed when the same storm system produced a tornado in neighboring Missouri. Two additional storm-related deaths were reported in Georgia. Gov. Brad Henry flew over the damaged section of Picher on Sunday and marveled at the destruction, which included uprooted trees, debris piles that used to be houses and smashed vehicles that had been picked up and tossed by the tornado's fierce winds. Looking at a vehicle mangled so badly it was difficult to tell if it was a car or a pickup truck, Henry said quietly, "I don't know how they'll ever get this cleaned up." In a more upbeat moment as he greeted rescue workers, Henry answered his own question. "There are certainly real challenges in the days and months ahead but we Oklahomans are excellent at responding to challenge, to adversity, to disaster," Henry said. "We come together. We help each other out."

FEMA Works with States Following Severe Storms and Tornadoes (FEMA, 5/11)
FEMA is working closely with states impacted from the recent severe storms and tornadoes as they assess damages. DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff has spoken with the governors of OK and MO, and both he and FEMA Administrator David Paulison are expected to travel to impacted areas on Tuesday, May 13. State and local resources currently are addressing the most immediate needs as federal resources support their efforts.

FEDERAL ACTIONS

FEMA Region IV:

- The Region IV Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC) in Thomasville, Ga. is active.
- Regional officials have been in touch with the states of AL, GA, MS, KY, TN, NC and SC about the recent storms to discuss any damages and needs.
- There have been no requests to the region at this time for any federal support.

FEMA Region VI:

- FEMA Region VI in Denton, TX is in contact with emergency management officials in both OK and AR.
- Existing federal/state Joint Field Offices (JFOs) are open in both states with FEMA staff already on-site.
- The RRCC is activated at a level III in order to closely monitor the situation. Communications and logistics personnel are standing by in the RRCC.

- The State of Oklahoma has requested FEMA Region VI participation for Individual Assistance (IA) Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs) for Ottawa County, which are scheduled to begin tomorrow.
- The region is monitoring weather and maintaining contact with their states to determine needs.

FEMA Region VII:

- The FEMA Region VII RRCC in Kansas City, MO, is activated to receive request for federal resources and technical support and has been in touch with MO and KS.
- A FEMA State Liaison is on-site at the MO State Emergency Management Agency's (SEMA) Emergency Operations Center.
- Two FEMA Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) teams deployed with MO SEMA today to Newton and Barry counties to assess immediate needs.
- FEMA Region VII has PDA teams ready if needed and requested.
- Existing federal/state JFOs are open in both Missouri and in KS with FEMA staff already on-site.
- Both the RRCC and JFO are monitoring/participating in conference calls between state and affected counties and receiving reports from RNA teams.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

- EPA is sending staff to assess possible damage to the Superfund site located near the Town of Picher in OK.

Health and Human Services (HHS):

- HHS Regions coordinated with affected states health departments, with nothing negative to report.

National Guard Bureau (NGB):

- Conducting security operations in the States of MO, OK, and AR.
- JET Team on standby.
- 50 personnel in Stuttgart, AR.
- 16 personnel in Newton County, MO.
- 25 personnel in Picher, OK.
- 3 personnel and 1 UH-60 for helicopter over flight operations for the adjutant general and governor of Oklahoma.
- 4 personnel in KY, as well as 1 in State EOC, with 1 helicopter on standby.

FEMA cautions individuals to be prepared and to listen to weather forecasts and their local and state officials. The strong storm system that was responsible for hundreds of reports of severe weather on Saturday, May 10, will continue to move east on Sunday. Ongoing strong to severe thunderstorms over the Southeast are expected to continue through Sunday night.

1 dead in Georgia storms (Associated Press, 5/11)

Authorities say one person is dead after severe storms cut a swath through Georgia, downing trees and damaging homes and businesses in at least 19 counties. Lisa Janak with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency said other minor injuries have been reported after the early Sunday morning storms. Authorities have not yet identified the fatality, who was found in a the rubble of a mobile home in Laurens County, said Bryan Rogers, the county administrator. A second person found in the mobile home who state and local authorities had reported as dead is actually hospitalized in critical condition,

Janak said. Two children were also found in the wreckage but they were unharmed, Rogers said. Gov. Sonny Perdue signed an executive order Sunday afternoon declaring a state of emergency in six counties affected by the storms Bibb, Carroll, Douglas, Jefferson, Johnson and Laurens. It allows state resources to be available for response and recovery activities. The violent storm system that ripped through Georgia on Mother's Day left at least 21 people dead and hundreds more injured in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri on Saturday as it tore across the middle of the country. Weather officials have not yet confirmed if any of the Georgia storms produced tornadoes. Teams from the National Weather Service were preparing Sunday morning to survey the damage and determine whether twisters hit the state, said Brian Lynn with the weather service station in Peachtree City. Counties along the Georgia's southern coast were still under tornado warnings and watches late Sunday morning as the storm system worked its way across the state. Only minor damage had been reported along the coast as of early Sunday afternoon, Janak said. In Johnson County about 170 miles southeast of Atlanta, the small town of Kite was destroyed by what the storm, said Caroline Pope, a communications officer with the Johnson County Sheriff's Department. She said close to 1,000 people live in Kite.

Indiana Winter flood cleanup continues upstate (AP, 5/11)

Many residents are still trying to get their lives back in order three months after winter floodwaters inundated homes across a large swath of northern Indiana. The flooding that began Jan. 7 damaged more than 800 homes and caused more than \$33 million in damage stretching from Lafayette to South Bend to Fort Wayne. Federal disaster aid was eventually approved for 21 counties in that region. "People don't realize it, but there are a lot of folks with a lot of needs out there," said Alan Welch, director of Disaster Assistance for Northwest Indiana, a long-term recovery agency formed in response to the January and February floods. Starting Monday, teams from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee Disaster Response program, often called "green shirts" because of their attire, will go door to door in flood-damaged areas of Monticello and Remington and along the Tippecanoe River in Carroll County. They'll interview residents about their situation and identify their needs. And on Thursday, walk-in centers will be open so that people can get specifics answers. "We will ask people about three areas: construction, household and personal," said Garry Den Besten, an assessment team leader who will conduct surveys. Welch's group, also known as DANI, will examine the results and prioritize the needs, which could include replacing furniture, offering mental health counseling or helping with construction. More than 1,300 people applied for Federal Emergency Management Agency grants in DANI's eight-county area of focus, Welch said. Of those, he expects 130 individuals and families will need additional aid.

President Declares Major Disaster for Oklahoma (FEMA, 5/10)

FEMA announced that the President declared a major disaster exists in the state of Oklahoma and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding during the period of April 9-28, 2008. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said that the President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement

of facilities damaged by severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Adair, Caddo, Coal, Delaware, Haskell, Hughes, Johnston, Latimer, Logan, Love, Mayes, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Ottawa, Pawnee, Pittsburg, Pushmataha, Rogers, Seminole, Sequoyah, Tillman, and Wagoner counties. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide. Paulison named Justin A. Dombrowski as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Dombrowski said that damage surveys are continuing in other areas, and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are fully completed.

President Declares Major Disaster for Maine (FEMA, 5/9)

FEMA today announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Maine to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding beginning on April 28, 2008, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. Paulison said that the President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Aroostook County. The assistance, to be coordinated by FEMA, can include grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. Low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration also will be available to cover residential and business losses not fully compensated by insurance. Federal funding also is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties within the state. Paulison named Phillip E. Parr as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Parr said that additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

NM Residents Go Home, Assess Fire Damage (Albuquerque Journal, 5/8)

As of Wednesday morning the Trigo Fire, which began on April 15, had burned a total of 13,680 acres and was 60 percent contained. The cause of the fire is under investigation. The Sherwood Forest subdivision remained closed until Tuesday afternoon due to continued fire activity, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Karen Takai, a fire information officer for the Sandia Ranger District, said it isn't likely the firefighters could have contained the fire, given the conditions they were facing. Torrance County Emergency Manager John Cordova was on hand at a fire update meeting on Monday at the Estancia Community Center, a shelter for the American Red Cross since May 1. "We're looking at other grants to see if we can help people out," Cordova said. There were 59 homes destroyed in the fire, according fire information officer Francisco Lueras. But Cordova said FEMA will not likely help those whose homes were destroyed because only 12 to 15 of those were primary residences, with the rest most likely being vacation homes. "It doesn't fit into the category that FEMA will help," Cordova said. He said he is working on creating a disaster relief organization to help people rebuild.

President Declares Major Disaster For Mississippi (5/8)

FEMA today announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Mississippi to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding beginning on March 20, 2008, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David

Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. Paulison said that the President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Bolivar, Warren, Washington, and Wilkinson counties. The assistance, to be coordinated by FEMA, can include grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. Low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration also will be available to cover residential and business losses not fully compensated by insurance. Federal funding also is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties within the state. Paulison named Michael L. Parker as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Parker said that additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

Desha County Added to AR Presidential Declaration (FEMA, 5/8)

The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and FEMA announce that Desha County is now eligible for Public Assistance (PA) as a result of the severe storms, flooding and tornadoes that occurred from March 18 through April 28. Desha joins the previously declared counties of Arkansas, Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Clay, Clark, Cleburne, Conway, Craighead, Crawford, Cross, Franklin, Fulton, Garland, Greene, Hempstead, Hot Spring, Howard, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Lee, Little River, Logan, Lonoke, Madison, Marion, Miller, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Perry, Phillips, Pike, Pope, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, St. Francis, Saline, Scott, Searcy, Sebastian, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, Washington, White, Woodruff, and Yell. These 55 counties are all eligible for categories A-G, with Faulkner County eligible for category B only.

9 tornadoes hit arkansas, Beebe tours damage (Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 5/6)

Gov. Mike Beebe toured storm damage Monday as the National Weather Service confirmed that at least nine tornadoes struck the state Friday, continuing a deadly weather pattern that's becoming too familiar for emergency officials. "A tornado's destruction is something to behold," Beebe said in Earle while walking past the rubble of the Earle Baptist Church. "You never get used to it." A 10th tornado may have been part of the system that struck Damascus and Greers Ferry, said John Lewis, a senior forecaster for the weather service in North Little Rock. Meteorologists have not yet determined if the towns were struck by one tornado or two that followed a continuous path about 45 miles, Lewis said. "This is very unusual," Lewis said of the series of storms, tornadoes and floods that have devastated the state at least once a month this year. "The last time we've had any storms like this was in 1982," Lewis said. "Add in the [March 3 and 6] snowstorms and this is a 50-year event type of thing." In Friday's storms, seven died and at least 23 were injured. On Monday, Conway County Coroner Richard Neal identified two killed as Dan McNair Sr. and his son Michael McNair, both of Center Ridge. Neal did not know their ages. McNair's stepson, Austin Reid, 17, of Center Ridge was in serious condition at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences hospital in Little Rock on Monday afternoon, a spokesman at the hospital said. Eliana Chacon, 15, of Siloam Springs died Friday when straight-line winds of 70 mph toppled a tree onto her mobile home while she was sleeping. Authorities first believed a tornado struck the

Benton County town but revised that finding Monday. "There was debris north and northeast of Siloam Springs and no convergence of damage," said Pete Snyder, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Tulsa. "It indicated there was no rotation of the winds." Beebe toured Greers Ferry, Earle and Carlisle by helicopter Monday and walked through the harder hit areas of the towns. Later, Beebe and Arkansas Department of Emergency Management Director David Maxwell drove through Carlisle and inspected the destruction. The governor quickly rebuffed the idea that federal and state assistance for residents affected by this year's storms could be depleted since there have been so many.

President Declares Major Disaster For Oklahoma (FEMA, 5/5)

FEMA announced that the President declared a major disaster exists in the state of Oklahoma and ordered Federal aid to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding during the period of March 17-23, 2008. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said that the President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Adair, Haskell, Hughes, Latimer, Mayes, McCurtain, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Pittsburg, Pushmataha, and Sequoyah counties. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide. Paulison named Justin A. Dombrowski as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

CA Gov. Orders Wildfire Preparedness (Government Technology, 5/9)

With California's fire season off to an early start, Governor Schwarzenegger took action today to boost the state's preparedness, raise public awareness and mobilize the state's firefighting personnel and resources by signing an Executive Order at the State Capitol in Sacramento. While the state's response to last year's devastating fires in Lake Tahoe and across Southern California showed why the state's emergency response system and emergency responders are among the nation's strongest, the state has a responsibility to aggressively prepare for the next, inevitable round of wildfires. Today's action ensures that with rising temperatures, high winds and dry vegetation threatening California, we will be ready to respond. Today's Executive Order follows last week's letter to the President requesting that federal Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) capabilities be made available for this wildfire season. Earlier this week, the Governor issued a proclamation declaring May 4-10, 2008 "Wildfire Awareness Week." The Governor's Executive Order mobilizes critical firefighting resources and personnel to save lives and homes statewide.

Senate says no to wind addition (Mobile (AL) Register, 5/8)

Despite pleas from some Gulf Coast lawmakers Wednesday, the U.S. Senate swamped an attempt to add optional windstorm coverage to the federally backed National Flood

Insurance Program. The amendment's sponsor, U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., had touted it as a financially responsible way of dealing with the "wind versus water" insurance disputes that spawned numerous lawsuits after Hurricane Katrina. But the 74-19 turndown came one day after a congressional watchdog agency cautioned that a combined wind and flood insurance program could shift a considerable amount of risk from insurance companies and state insurance pools to the federal government. Wednesday's Senate vote came in the course of a debate over a broader overhaul of the flood insurance program. The House overwhelmingly approved optional wind coverage in its own flood insurance bill passed in the fall. The proposal's fate will hinge on how strongly House members continue to push it when they huddle with senators to hammer out differences between the two bills, said David Conrad, a flood insurance expert with the National Wildlife Federation, a Virginia-based environmental organization that believes optional wind coverage would encourage risky development. Unlike their counterparts in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Georgia, U.S. Sens. Jeff Sessions, R-Mobile, and Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, both voted against Wicker's amendment. Shelby, the top Republican on the Senate banking committee, has objected that it could mean added costs for a program already staggering under some \$17 billion in debt related to claims from Katrina and other 2005 storms. Sessions' office did not respond Wednesday to a request for comment on the reason for his vote.

Ark. governor urges schools to install tornado-safe rooms (AP, 5/6)

Just before the tornado sirens sounded, school superintendent Floyd Marshall got the warning from police a twister was coming right for the town's elementary and high school. But Marshall had a weapon of his own: Unlike most other schools in Arkansas, the two Carlisle schools have specially designed interior hallways dubbed tornado-safe rooms where 750 students cowered until the storms passed by Friday. "You may never need it, but that one time that you do that you don't have it, it's something you can't recover from," Marshall said. The tornado eventually veered away from the shared campus of the schools at the last moment, but Gov. Mike Beebe acknowledged the importance of the rooms on a visit to the city Monday. "I'd like to see them everywhere. I'd like to see them as much as possible," Beebe said. "But at this juncture, we're not in a position to mandate them everywhere, unless you have the money to be able to give them to everybody." Julie Thompson, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Education, acknowledged that many schools throughout the state do not have the safe rooms. She said officials do not keep a count of how many schools have them. State law requires schools to hold tornado drills no less than four times per year during the months of September, October, January and February. However, state laws only suggest building the safe rooms. But the state Legislature has set aside \$456 million for a program to build and repair crumbling schools across Arkansas. Beebe said districts in line for the funding likely could use that money, or money set aside in federal government grants, to build the safe rooms. "It doesn't take a lot of encouragement because most of the school officials have been really conscious and proactive about building either safe rooms or hardened areas of their school buildings," Beebe said.

AT&T Web Seminar to Help Educators Develop Response Plans (PR Newswire, 5/6)

To help students stay safe during an emergency, AT&T Inc. has announced a free one-hour Web seminar highlighting some "best practices" in school district emergency response and school safety planning. As part of an ongoing series of instructional webinars and training courses available on the AT&T education Web site -- <http://www.att.com/edu> -- the May 14 webinar, "An Overview of Disaster Planning and Safety Best Practices for K - 12 Schools," will be held from 1 to 2 p.m. EDT. The AT&T webinar will be presented by Robert Gravina, the chief technology officer of Poway School District in San Diego, and Nancy Campbell, assistant superintendent of Berkley School District in Berkley, Mich. In the session, Gravina will review how Poway School District was able to maintain network continuity during the Southern California wildfires that affected San Diego County in 2007. Campbell will review how Berkley School District was able to obtain Department of Homeland Security grants to support school safety initiatives. Participants can register and receive instructions to tune in to the event at <http://www.att.com/edu>. "All school districts would benefit from taking part in this," said Donna Scott, executive director of Marketing Management with AT&T. "You never know when a disaster -- either natural or man-made -- will strike. This webinar will give educators practical firsthand knowledge and tools needed to develop and execute potentially lifesaving plans and procedures."

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Can New Orleans live with post-katrina housing designs? (Phil. Enquirer, 5/11)

The style wars between the modernists, the traditionalists, and the free-thinking blobists were the farthest thing from Vernessa Rogers' mind when she was asked to choose from a group of sleek house designs commissioned by actor/architecture buff Brad Pitt. She just wanted her scattered brood reunited in a high-and-dry home on its old block in New Orleans' flood-ravaged Lower Ninth Ward. Rogers, a single mother of seven, knew picking the right house would be the most momentous decision of her 45 years, so she took her mother and sister along for counsel. They spent hours poring over renderings and floor plans that 13 of the world's top architects had prepared for Pitt's Make It Right Foundation. When they compared notes, the women agreed that an edgy update on the traditional shotgun house by Philadelphia's KieranTimberlake Associates worked best. It was a daring choice, but made for a most prosaic reason: This house had the most space. Rogers' practical decision will surely give no comfort to the design world's opposing camps, which have traded verbal spitballs over the form the new Gulf Coast architecture should take, modern or traditional. Nor is she likely to appease New Orleans' planning gurus, who question the wisdom of rebuilding low-lying areas such as the Ninth Ward. Her sole focus is getting her family out of its \$2,000-a-month New Orleans rental and back to the property she owns at 1714 Tennessee St. When Pitt conceived Make It Right last year, he saw it as a marriage of social responsibility and design - a way to redress the neglect of New Orleans' storied African American Ninth Ward after Hurricane Katrina while showcasing cutting-edge architecture. But avant-garde designers will be chagrined to learn that most participating residents have gravitated to familiar-looking styles with peaked roofs and pastel exteriors.

Recovery groups still helping out (Sun Herald, 5/11)

As the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina approaches, displaced property owners and tenants are still turning to recovery groups for help. The Harrison County Longterm Coalition has opened 400 new cases in the past three months, program director Mary Wimberly said this week. She said the need for help with rebuilding continues as funding alternatives shrink. Hancock and Jackson counties also have long-term recovery groups still at work. "We are the last resort and there are people coming in constantly," Wimberly said. "It's just amazing how long it's been and these folks are just now coming to say, 'I can't do it by myself. Please help.'" The coalition coordinates recovery efforts through a small office staff who work with nonprofit groups that provide funding, volunteer construction crews and case managers. "The synergy of these various agencies working in partnership brings about tremendous result for the community," Wimberly said. A case manager works with each family to determine eligibility and needs. Wimberly said 375 cases are awaiting assignment to case managers. About one-quarter of applicants are homeowners; the others are renters. The coalition, she said, still averages 110 to 125 new applications each month from people with nowhere else to turn.

Coastians still lack housing: Insurance, rent increases hit hard (Sun Herald, 5/11)

Locals say the thousands of volunteers expected to pour into the area to build single-family homes this week are sorely needed, because, though it has been almost three years since Hurricane Katrina, housing is still a major issue. About 33 months ago, Katrina and its record storm surge pummeled the area like no other storm before it. But the curious who live in areas of the country where Katrina has fallen off the radar like to ask if the Gulf Coast is back to normal. Locals know better. The volunteers with the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project, a Habitat for Humanity effort, will see that first-hand as they lend their muscle and sweat on building many new homes. As the June 1 deadline for residents to vacate FEMA trailer parks approaches, many are looking to find more permanent homes, but find few affordable options. After five months of searching for a rental house, Tamecca Carter, 37, succeeded and began moving out of her trailer in a north Biloxi FEMA park last week. Carter is moving back to hard-hit east Biloxi, which still faces a long recovery. She'll live on the same street she lived on before the storm. "Even though there's not much over there, it's still good to be back in the old neighborhood," Carter said. Carter will pay \$900 monthly, which is roughly double the rent she paid before the storm, and she isn't sure how long she can afford the new place on the salary she earns doing laundry at a local hotel. She supports a 16-year-old son and a disabled mother and she'll depend on the FEMA rental assistance, which will expire in March unless the program is extended. FEMA will pay renters up to 120 percent of the fair market rate for a rental unit. For example, a family of four in Biloxi would receive \$1,057 per month for a three-bedroom unit.

State still needs money to fix Katrina housing damage (Mobile Register, 5/9)

Alabama needs upward of another \$100 million to replace housing damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, a top Riley administration official told a congressional panel Thursday in printed testimony. While the state is well under way with its disaster recovery program, "much remains to be done," Bill Johnson, director of the Alabama

Department of Economic and Community Affairs, said in his prepared statement to the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity. He reckoned the extra price tag at between \$100 million and \$110 million. Johnson did not mention money needs in his shorter spoken remarks during the hearing. But his statement appears to be the first public admission by a state official that more federal aid may be required to help Mobile County residents repair and rebuild their homes. "It's an acknowledgment that we are short," said Craig Baab, a Montgomery lawyer who works on Katrina issues with the Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, Inc., a nonpartisan legal policy center. Johnson and Baab were among a dozen witnesses to testify on how Gulf Coast states have been using billions of rebuilding dollars from the federal Community Development Block Grant program since Katrina and several other storms ravaged the region in 2005. Out of almost \$20 billion set aside by Congress, Alabama has received about \$95.6 million, according to Johnson, although much of that money has been used for debris removal, sewer repairs and other needs. More than three-quarters remains unspent, a fact that Johnson attributed to the time needed to comply with federally required environmental reviews and other mandates.

CDC Finds Increase In Respiratory Illness In Katrina Children (Frontrunner, 5/9)

The Washington Post (5/9, A2, Hsu, 723K) reports a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report released yesterday found that "Hurricane Katrina provoked increased complaints to doctors of pneumonia, bronchitis and other lower respiratory illnesses among 144 children studied in Mississippi," though "researchers said they could not determine the reason. They reported finding no difference in the patterns of visits to doctors by children who lived in disaster housing provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and those who did not." The researchers said their "findings could not be generalized beyond the small sample," and the report's "limited conclusions did not resolve broader concerns raised by health officials and pediatricians, who previously reported heightened complaints of breathing problems among children on the Gulf Coast after Katrina."

New Orleans mayor pushing residents to leave FEMA trailers (Associated Press, 5/7)

Lingering fears about formaldehyde fumes inside federally issued trailers and the impending hurricane season have Mayor Ray Nagin pushing to empty thousands of the structures, intended as temporary housing after Katrina. With the third anniversary of Katrina coming up Aug. 29, the push is the first for the city, where most of the remaining trailers sit on private property as residents continue to rebuild their homes. "We need to get everybody out," Nagin said. "We need to find out if anybody's health has been harmed and how do we deal with that, and find the housing that's necessary so these people can get their lives together." Nearly 5,700 trailers remain in New Orleans, most on the private property of residents who lost their homes to Katrina. "I want to be gone as much as anybody," said KC King, whose home was heavily damaged by Katrina and later demolished. He said he has been dealing with a series of contractor delays in rebuilding. Federal, state and local efforts are under way to assist families with housing needs. It's probable that some families now in trailers will end up in hotels or apartments, at least temporarily. But Nagin, in an interview late last week, said he has no choice but to push an end to use of the trailers, given health concerns and the June 1 start of the

hurricane season. The tough stance is a post-Katrina departure for Nagin. Until now, he has refused to pressure residents in trailers because of issues including a lack of affordable housing and problems with them getting timely rebuilding grants or enough money to finish building their homes.

Cottages could become permanent on coast (Associated Press, 5/7)

Cottages erected after Hurricane Katrina could become a permanent fixture in Jackson County as officials try to overcome a shortage of affordable housing nearly three years after the deadly storm. The Jackson County Board of Supervisors is considering allowing some residents in the homes, known as MEMA cottages, to remain permanently in what was intended as temporary housing. Mike Womack, director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, told the board Monday that permitting residents to keep the cottages in certain areas could reduce the demand for affordable, permanent housing. If approved by the board, the cottages would likely be allowed to stay only in county areas zoned for mobile homes and located on private property. Womack said all MEMA cottages are supposed to be removed by March 2009. The cottage program will likely stop with about 3,100 units. The agency received a \$280 million grant to see if the state could come up with a better alternative to FEMA trailers. If the homes were left permanently, MEMA would secure the house to a concrete slab and possibly raise the elevation of the structures in flood zones. Supervisor John McKay wanted the units in Gulf Park Estates in St. Martin added to the list of homes that could remain. However, Womack said those homes are in trailer parks and he did not want MEMA cottages on commercially owned property. McKay said the area is not a traditional mobile home park and the land is privately owned. There are 139 cottages on privately owned property that could be affected, Womack said, adding that 69 cottages are on land owned by residents and 61 are on land owned by family members of residents.