

## **Disaster News Update –July 21 to 27, 2007**

### **RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)**

- **Drought:** Maryland, Montana, Idaho, California, Arizona, Oregon, Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota, Michigan, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, Hawaii
- **Fire:** Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, California, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Florida
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** New York
- **Technological Accident:** Texas (explosions)
- **Tornado:** New York

### **CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)**

- [Nebraska](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/24)
- [North Dakota](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/17)
- [Oklahoma](#): Severe Storms, Flooding, and Tornadoes (7/7)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [New York](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [Texas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (6/29)
- Fire Declarations: [South Dakota \(7/21\)](#), [Utah \(7/21\)](#), [Washington \(7/16\)](#), [Nevada \(7/16\)](#), [Oregon \(7/12\)](#), [Washington \(7/8\)](#), [South Dakota \(7/8\)](#), [Nevada \(7/8\)](#), [California \(7/8\)](#), [Utah \(7/7\)](#), [California \(7/7\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#), [Utah \(6/30\)](#), [California \(6/29\)](#), [Hawaii \(6/28\)](#), [California \(6/24\)](#), [Alaska \(6/22\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Proposed Bill Protects Rights of Volunteers** (KFVS12, 7/27)

Would you favor a new law protecting people from losing their jobs, if they volunteered to help clean up after a major disaster? That's exactly what would happen if a Homeland Security Bill, now making it's way through the Senate, becomes law. A local man hopes it passes because he says he knows exactly what can happen otherwise. Wayne Harris will never forget the devastation he saw in Caruthersville after last year's tornado. He was part of a first responder volunteer team sent to the area. "On the way down there, I called my supervisor and left a message. I got a phone call the next day, to see if I was at work. I said no. He says 'Well we don't have a job for you,'" Harris said. At the time, Harris worked for Tipton Linen, delivering linen to hotels and restaurants. "I actually thought that he would have a heart. He would actually be supportive in having one of employees helping out a community in need," Harris said.

#### **Volunteers needed for a tragic job** (Everett, WA Herald, 7/26)

It's a job that would make most everyone blanch. But if a disaster strikes in Snohomish County, such as an airliner crashing or a huge earthquake, county workers say they can't do it alone. County emergency managers are in talks over how to recruit people to carry bodies in the event of a disaster that caused mass casualties. "It's a very morbid issue to discuss, but a very important one," said John Pennington, director of the county's

Department of Emergency Management. "We know who the morticians are, but we need to have volunteers who can handle trauma themselves while moving the bodies of the deceased. If they think they can move bodies in a crisis situation, we need them." Pennington last week launched talks with the county medical examiner's office to help bolster its mass fatality plans. The office needs volunteers who can help carry bodies in a disaster, as well as photograph and document remains under the supervision of a professional medical examiner.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

**Local seniors get helpful information on preparedness** (N.O. Times Picayune, 7/26)  
Katrina was about survival; the future is about being prepared. That's the message representatives of COAST, formerly the Council on Aging St. Tammany, brought to more than 150 people from throughout the north shore who gathered last week for a hurricane preparedness seminar presented at Slidell Municipal Auditorium. Among the information shared were stacks of Senior Evacuation Notification System information forms for seniors 60 and older; pamphlets detailing what a person would want to take with them in case of an evacuation; tips tied to the care of people with special needs; and the American Red Cross "Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Be Informed" flier. Need an explanation of the National Weather Service terminology related to tropical storm and hurricane warnings? They got it. Need to know what foods should be discarded following a power outage? They got it.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

**Firefighters Make Gains on Wildfires** (Disaster News Network, 7/26)  
Firefighters across the West continued Wednesday to reign in wildfires, reporting growing containment figures for blazes which in some cases have been burning for weeks. The largest fire in the nation, the nearly 650,000-acre Murphy Complex blaze in Idaho and Nevada, was 37 percent contained. It was being fought by about 730 firefighters. Full containment was expected Aug. 4. The Winecup Complex fire burning about two miles from the Idaho-Nevada border remained at 153,970 acres, according to reports and was 60 percent contained. More than 500 firefighters were battling the blaze which began July 17. No date was given for when the fire would be fully contained. Evacuation orders remained in the Utah communities of Oaker Hills, Indian Ridge, Elk Ridge and Mt. Baldy Estates, which were threatened by the Salt Creek fire. The fire, about 75 miles south of Salt Lake City, grew to 23,644 acres and was 35 percent contained.

**Public Assistance Expanded to 8 Additional TX Counties** (FEMA, 5/25)  
Public Assistance to repair damaged infrastructure is available in eight additional Texas counties. Communities in Hunt, Kaufman, Lamar, McCulloch, Menard, Stephens, Victoria and Williamson counties may apply for assistance to recover from severe storms, tornadoes and flooding beginning June 16 and continuing. PA funds are now

available to 34 Texas counties. "FEMA will help both individuals and communities recover from this disaster," said Federal Coordinating Officer Kenneth Clark. "Public Assistance helps restore vibrant communities all across Texas." "This is good news for affected counties," said Joan Haun, state coordinating officer. "With this declaration, it is important for local governments to apply for federal assistance to repair publicly-owned property that was damaged by the flood."

**OK Town In Need After Flood** (Disaster News Network, 7/25)

Housing, volunteers for cleanup and funding are all urgent needs in Miami weeks after severe flooding hit the area. Hundreds of homes in the region were damaged when rivers left their banks in late June and early July. As more homes are condemned in the northeast Oklahoma town, responders are worried about what's next for the affected residents. "They were letting some people back in to fix their homes, but now the city is saying they can't do that," said the Rev. Phil Shyers of Apostolic Assembly Church in Miami. "There will be a housing shortage. There are hundreds of families that will need housing." Sam Porter, director of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief in Oklahoma, said 250 to 300 homes in Miami have been condemned. More than 600 were damaged.

**President Declares Major Disaster for Nebraska** (FEMA, 7/24)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for Nebraska to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding during the period of May 28 to June 2, 2007. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said federal funding is 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 and flooding. Areas covered by the declaration include Buffalo, Custer, Dawson, Frontier, Greeley, Hayes, Hitchcock, Howard, Kearney, Lincoln, Logan, Loup, Madison, Valley, and Wheeler counties. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Lee H. Rosenberg the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Rosenberg said additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

**10 Additional OK Counties Declared Eligible For Public Assistance** (FEMA, 7/24)

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) and FEMA announced today that 10 additional Oklahoma counties that sustained severe weather damage in early May have now been declared for Public Assistance (PA). The newly declared counties of Canadian, Cotton, Grady, Grant, Hughes, Logan, McClain, McIntosh, Pawnee, and Tillman counties have been approved to receive public assistance under a Presidential disaster declaration originally issued June 7. The declaration covers storms that occurred May 4-11. Under a disaster declaration for public assistance, local governments are eligible to receive aid for repairs of public infrastructure and other costs incurred in responding to the storms.

**Housing Woes Beset KS Recovery** (Disaster News Network, 7/23)

A lack of housing for flood-affected residents is posing a major problem in the recovery from early July flooding in Kansas. "Our housing needs for lower- and middle-income families are pretty great," said the Rev. Terry Hatfield of First Christian Church in Independence. "We have three to four times more people than housing available." The severe flooding in late June and early July in eastern and southeastern Kansas prompted a federal disaster declaration for 20 counties. In addition to Montgomery County - which saw 6,500 homes affected including those in Independence - other areas across the region were facing serious challenges, said Bob Baer of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). "There is a lot of uncertainty," Baer said. "A number of people were renters and it's very possible that those houses may not be rebuilt. Where will these people live if they decide to stay?" As organizations and faith groups from the counties and cities form long-term recovery committees, housing is just one issue. In Coffeyville, residents are contending with the impact of a 72,000-gallon oil spill during the flood which left a hazardous residue on many homes.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

### **Parched Colorado in fire peril** (Denver Post, 7/26)

Fire danger in the northern half of Colorado, north of Interstate 70, is rated high to extremely high, according to the state's Office of Emergency Management. Much of the grassland east of Interstate 25 is drying out as well and becoming tinder. The National Weather Service predicts that temperatures in August will be higher than normal this year, while precipitation amounts should be normal. Nineteen counties have issued fire restrictions, some so restrictive as to prohibit any open flames. Restrictions are in place for the counties of Archuleta, Delta, Eagle, Elbert, Garfield, Grand, Jackson, La Plata, Larimer, Mesa, Moffat, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, San Miguel and Summit. Fire restrictions also have been placed on Brown's Park National Wildlife Refuge, all Bureau of Land Management lands managed by the Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction offices, Dinosaur National Monument, Mesa Verde National Park, San Juan National Forest, the Southern Ute and the Ute Mountain Ute Indian reservations, and the White River National Forest.

### **Storm season quiet so far, but peak nears** (Houston Chronicle, 7/26)

The 2007 hurricane season, having produced just two minor storms, has come in like a lamb. But don't take comfort yet. More than 90 percent of Atlantic hurricanes develop between Aug. 15 and Oct. 15. And if that weren't enough, consider the 2004 hurricane season with its eight hurricanes, four of which battered Florida. Its first storm didn't form until Aug. 1. There are reasons to hope this season will be like last year, which produced just nine named storms and relatively little damage, but there are also more ominous signs in the tropics as this season approaches its peak. First, the good news. Scientists had worried about La Niña, unusually cold ocean temperatures in the eastern equatorial Pacific, developing by now. This pattern, which hasn't yet appeared, has historically augured a fierce Atlantic season. Additionally, sea surface temperatures remain near average across much of the Atlantic tropics, providing less fuel for hurricanes. That's partly because of large African dust clouds that have blocked the sunlight and kept a lid

on ocean warming. This dust, largely from the Sahara desert, also inhibits storm formation.

**St. Charles staff plans shelter role** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/25)

If St. Charles Parish residents are forced to evacuate in the path of a hurricane again, they won't be entirely dependent on the kindness of strangers. Parish workers will be assigned to accompany some of the evacuees to Avoyelles Parish and will staff the shelter where residents will stay, if officials of both parishes agree. Parish Emergency Preparedness Director Tab Troxler will travel to Marksville on Thursday to work out the details of the agreement, which officials of both parishes said will benefit both. "I think it's better if we take care of our own business up there. That way we don't wear out our welcome," Parish President Albert Laque said Tuesday. During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there were 27 shelters housed in Avoyelles Parish, about 160 miles from the Hale Boggs Bridge in Luling.

**FEMA Encourages Pet Protection Plans** (FEMA, 7/25)

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, FEMA, and the Humane Society of the United States recommend the following steps before a disaster:

- Contact a local animal shelter, humane society, veterinarian or emergency management office for information on caring for pets in an emergency
- Find out if there will be any shelters set up to take pets in an emergency, and see if your veterinarian will accept your pet in an emergency
- Make sure the pet has a properly fitted collar that includes current license and rabies tags. Consider having the pet identified through microchip technology (your veterinarian can help locate a provider)
- Contact motels and hotels in communities outside the area and find out if they will accept pets in an emergency
- Keep a week's emergency supply of pet food, water and other essential support items including a first-aid kit
- Take pictures of the animal and keep them with important papers you plan to carry with you in an emergency
- If a pet sitter is used while you are on vacation, discuss disaster plans and evacuation sites

**Study Finds Nearly 1/3 Will Not Evacuate Hurricane** (Disaster News Network, 7/24)

Nearly one-third of people living in high-risk hurricane areas would refuse government orders to evacuate in a major hurricane - up from 23 percent one year ago, according to a Harvard survey released Tuesday. Only 14 percent of residents in New Orleans, however, would refuse such an order, it said. "Public officials need to be concerned that the further we get from the severe hurricanes of 2005, the less willing people are to evacuate," said Robert J. Blendon, professor of health policy and political analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health which conducted the survey. "Officials need to remind people that many homes are vulnerable to major storms. They also need to ensure safe evacuation routes are available and the public is aware of them." The survey also indicated that people were unprepared for a major hurricane. Twenty-three percent would run out of clean water after two days and 54 percent would run out after six days. Thirty-nine percent did not

know where an evacuation center was located in their community. In New Orleans, 61 percent did not know the location of an evacuation shelter. "It is worrisome that New Orleans, the site of one of the most severe hurricanes in U.S. history, has such a large proportion of people who don't know the location of an evacuation center," Blendon said. "An important priority for government and voluntary agencies should be to inform people of the location of shelters well before a storm hits."

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

### **St. Charles says it's time to take away FEMA trailers** (N.O. Times Picayune, 7/26)

For nearly two years after his New Orleans home was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, Lloyd Smith has lived in a FEMA trailer in front of his sister's house in St. Rose. Now, St. Charles Parish is telling Smith and others in similar situations that they are welcome to stay, but the trailer has to go. Parish officials last week sent 333 letters to property owners who have travel trailers on property not zoned for them that the portable homes must go by Sept. 1. Smith, 78, said he and his wife, Yolanda, are looking for an apartment in the area. "We'd rather stay here, but apartments are hard to come by," he said. Parish officials say they are hearing complaints from neighbors about the trailers and allegations that some occupants and property owners are cashing in on the emergency housing program by renting out the trailers to people who don't qualify for assistance or living in the trailers while renting out their habitable home to others.

### **State speeds N.O. school rehabs** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/26)

Chasing an ambitious timeline, state Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek announced a plan Wednesday to renovate or break ground on five new buildings in New Orleans by the end of the year. In an effort to launch construction and show progress before completion of a larger master plan, community leaders and officials hope to unveil the locations in each of the five council districts by Sept. 10. Pastorek said most of the work will probably be new construction, rather than renovations, and will be completed by the 2009-10 school year. Schools recommended under the master plan -- which will govern the rebuilding in a system where some 55 shuttered buildings were either moderately or severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina and, in most cases, by years of neglect -- won't be ready until 2010, two years after completion of the master plan, officials said. In the next three weeks, each City Council member will be charged with forming committees with Orleans Parish School Board members and residents to give Pastorek guidance on the criteria for selecting locations. Also, neighborhood groups will be encouraged to submit proposals by Aug. 31 to pitch why a school in their community should be renovated or torn down and replaced with a new school.

### **SBA Erred in Canceling Loans To 8,000 Along Gulf, Audit Finds** (NY Times, 7/25)

The SBA, which runs the federal government's largest program to help disaster victims rebuild their houses, improperly canceled thousands of loans it had promised homeowners along the Gulf Coast after the 2005 hurricanes, a government audit has found. The agency canceled nearly 8,000 loans without calling the borrowers or mailing them a notice, according to the audit by the agency's inspector general. The homeowners

did eventually receive a letter contending that they had voluntarily given up their loans, the report says, even though many told auditors that they actually needed the money. The loans were canceled last year, after the agency had come under fire for being slow to give out rebuilding money, according to the audit. Former agency employees have complained that they were pressured to withdraw the loans to cut the number of applicants whose loans had been approved but not paid out.

**Vitter plan to close gap in Road Home rejected** (N.O. Times Picayune, 7/25)

An amendment by Sen. David Vitter, R-La., that would have allowed \$1.2 billion in federal mitigation funds to be used to help close a shortfall in the Louisiana Road Home program was rejected Tuesday after claims that it violated a Senate rule that bars policy from being set in financing bills. A similar amendment to a pending homeland security spending bill sponsored by Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La, is likely to meet a similar fate. Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, D-New Orleans, said he has asked the Internal Revenue Service to grant an administrative waiver to give people who lost their homes to Hurricanes Katrina or Rita more than the current two years to avoid paying taxes on any gain in value for land being sold. Under current federal law, a person whose home is destroyed by a disaster has two years to sell the remaining vacant lot -- or the lot where the shell of the destroyed home still stands -- and avoid paying taxes on the money gained from the sale, according to the IRS.

**Hurricane Aid Is Extended for Some** (New York Times, 7/24)

After persistent criticism of its policies regarding evacuees from Hurricane Katrina, the Bush administration announced an extension of aid for some of those still unable to return to New Orleans. Housing assistance for those evacuees who lived in federally subsidized housing before the storm has been extended through June 2008. The extension's effect will be far less sweeping than it sounds. It will not change things for the more than 40,000 families who owned or rented homes before the storm but are now in apartments, mobile homes or trailers paid for by FEMA. Those families will begin contributing their own money toward their rent in March.

**Plans are under way for Katrina Memorial** (N.O. Times Picayune, 7/22)

A Slidell engineer wants east St. Tammany Parish residents to help document Hurricane Katrina's impact on the area through artistic expression, culminating in a Katrina Memorial project proposed at the Towers Building in Slidell. Pete Dammon, a Slidell Rotarian and owner of Dammon Engineering Inc., wants to mark the historical event and personalize the tragedy through architecture, art, landscape, literature and film at the hurricane-ravaged Towers Building, which is the St. Tammany Parish Administrative Complex on Old Spanish Trail. "We need to educate their children and their children's children about it," he said, noting that the storm demonstrated the need for the levee system and other storm protection measures. The Katrina Memorial, as a tourist attraction, also would interest visitors, he said. Parish officials have put his company in charge of renovating and modernizing the public building in Slidell but have not proceeded yet with the Katrina Memorial, which is a separate project.