

Disaster News Update – February 25 to March 2, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Blackout:** Florida
- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Maryland
- **Explosion:** Illinois (mall gas leak), New Jersey (Chemical plant explosion)
- **Fire:** Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma
- **HAZMAT:** Nevada (Ricin in Hotel)
- **Heavy Rain:** Tennessee, Texas, Missouri
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Wisconsin
- **Strong Wind:** Alabama, Georgia, Texas, California, New Mexico, Tennessee
- **Tornado:** Texas, Mississippi

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Kentucky](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding (2/21)
- [Tennessee](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding (2/7)
- [Arkansas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (2/7)
- [Hawaii](#): Severe Storms, High Surf, Flooding, and Mudslides (2/6)
- [Missouri](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (2/5)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Winter Storms (2/1)
- [Indiana](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (1/30)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(2/28\)](#), [Texas \(2/25\)](#), [Oklahoma \(2/25\)](#), [Texas \(2/25b\)](#), [Texas \(2/23\)](#), [Texas \(2/13\)](#), [Texas \(2/8\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Organizations getting ready for storm season (Mobile (AL) Register, 2/29)

As Baldwin County relief agencies resolve some of the last cases from hurricanes Ivan and Katrina in coming weeks, they also are looking ahead to prepare for the 2008 storm season. Members of Baldwin County Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster met Thursday to discuss ongoing and upcoming plans. The group is a network of public, church and community relief agencies. Out of 223 households, including 553 individuals, that received assistance from the group's Long Term Recovery agency, almost all are resolved and the remainder should be completed in the next few weeks, said Karen McElroy, Long Term Recovery director. "We have two cases left, a mobile home north of the interstate and one down Baldwin County 1," she said. "We anticipate the last case being completed by April 15." Glover said that since she started with the agency in October 2006, Long Term Recovery has spent \$342,750 in state funding on home repairs and other services for storm victims. She said the total does not include donations or other funding sources. Carla White of United Way of Baldwin County said a training session for volunteers will be held at the Loxley Civic Center in about a month to prepare workers for the upcoming hurricane season, which begins June 1. White told VOAD

members that volunteers will be needed for a variety of services from working on computers to answering telephones and helping victims with paperwork needed to apply for assistance. "Our goal is to have a pretty good base of volunteers trained so that the next time something comes up, they'll be in place," White said. White said tentative dates being considered for the volunteer sessions are March 27 or April 1, depending on when training personnel will be available. Brenda Lee, VOAD president and Baldwin County United Way director, said many people come forward to volunteer after a disaster, but by having a core of trained volunteers available immediately, relief efforts can move forward more quickly.

Red Cross launches new program to prepare for emergencies (AP, 2/28)

The American Red Cross on Thursday introduced a new program that organizers say is unique because it provides a measurable way for businesses, schools and organizations to learn their readiness should disaster strike. The Ready Rating program is being launched in St. Louis, but organizers expect it to be available nationally within two years. Federal and local officials announced details during a news conference at Anheuser-Busch's headquarters. The brewery provided financial and other support to get the program started. Participants in the St. Louis region can register online, where they use tools provided by the Red Cross to assess their disaster vulnerabilities and put together an emergency response plan. They can grade themselves annually, using a points system. They'll also be encouraged to help prepare their community, with efforts like sponsoring blood drives or training employees to become national disaster volunteers. "We each have a personal responsibility to do our part to be ready," said Joe White, chief executive officer of the St. Louis-area Red Cross chapter. Red Cross officials cited their surveys showing that only one-fifth of Americans feel prepared for a catastrophic event, and close to 60 percent are unprepared for a disaster of any kind. There is no cost to organizations that take part in the program, except for funds they decide to spend to get prepared for an emergency, White said. The program works like this: Participants fill out an electronic survey and award themselves points for completing certain tasks. For example, they get one point if 10 percent of the staff is trained in basic first aid and CPR, or another point for having safety equipment on hand in case of an emergency. The maximum score is 65, and organizers say participants should strive for a score of at least 60.

President Bush Declares March as Red Cross Month (PR Newswire, 2/28)

In a tradition dating back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President George W. Bush declared March as Red Cross Month, calling it a time to "honor this charitable organization" and "reflect on its remarkable achievements and contributions to our country." In a Proclamation signed today, the President cited examples of how the Red Cross had provided food, comfort and medical assistance to the victims of a number of disasters in 2007, from the tragic bridge collapse in Minnesota to the devastating wildfires in California. He also noted how the Red Cross provides vital assistance by organizing blood drives, teaching health and safety programs, and supporting our men and women in uniform. Throughout the month, 750 Red Cross chapters across the country will celebrate in a variety of ways, including holding special events, trainings or fundraisers to give people an opportunity to support the organization through donations of time, money or blood. The Red Cross is also launching a new national advertising

campaign with the message that when you support the American Red Cross, you change a life, starting with your own. You can view the new campaign here: <http://www.redcross.org/advertising> . The Red Cross also holds its National Convention in March. The Red Cross also uses March to urge all Americans to get prepared. There are three simple actions to get "Red Cross Ready" for disasters and other emergencies: 1) Get a kit, 2) Make a plan and 3) Be informed.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Preparing for disaster (The Capital (MD), 3/2)

If disaster strikes, you'll want to be among the retirees at Heritage Harbour. "Block captains" will have identified the weak, the sick, and planned the rescue. The amateur radio team will use experience gained in weekly practice sessions to fire up the emergency communication system. And the community's Emergency Preparedness Committee has residents stocking up on sleeping bags, hand-crank radios and flashlights, canned food and medical supplies. Some retirees in this Annapolis community of 2,500 take up bingo, bocce or water aerobics. About a half-dozen have taken up World War II-style disaster planning with such verve and intensity that the county's Emergency Management Director, Capt. Thomas Wilson, recently remarked: "That's what we do at the county level, from the state to FEMA to the federal level, that kind of planning every detail into the weeds, that's not really seen at the community level. It's a very intense plan. They have taken the ball and run." "It keeps us young," jokes retiree Walter Van Gieson, 86, although he'll assure you the Emergency Preparedness Committee is serious business. The team began preparing intricate plans nearly a year ago. Its duties are written into the bylaws of the Heritage Harbour Community Improvement Association. The committee has been given a budget between \$1,000 and \$10,000 (the retirees won't say exactly how much), made up formal nameplates for the members and launched a public relations campaign to help their fellow residents survive whatever may come their way.

Emergency Preparedness Partnership in Colorado (Business Wire, 2/29)

Heading into one of Colorado's snowiest months, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is teaming up with Wal-Mart Stores Inc. to encourage residents to prepare their own home, office and car emergency preparedness kits. The company's Sam's Club locations also are participating. "I am very pleased that Wal-Mart selected Colorado for its first such statewide partnership, which helps us continue our efforts to increase the number of Coloradans who have emergency preparedness kits in their homes, office and cars," said Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter. "As one of the nation's largest retailers, Wal-Mart can help us reach more people with our message about the importance of having an emergency preparedness kit - and can make it easy for Coloradans to shop for kit items." Beginning March 1 and continuing through March 9, Coloradans can visit their local Wal-Mart or Sam's Club to view sample emergency preparedness kit items on display and pick up an informational brochure, available in both English and Spanish, which includes a checklist to help them shop for their own kit. Many of the Wal-Mart displays will be staffed with

volunteers from the Colorado Public Health and Medical Volunteer System and other volunteer organizations to assist in distributing brochures and to answer questions from the public. They also will distribute specific brochures for people with disabilities and special needs. In addition, at the end of the nine-day program, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club locations will donate emergency kit items to the National Organization on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Initiative, which works to ensure that people with disabilities are included in all levels of emergency preparedness.

Va. emergency officials launch YouTube channel (Associated Press, 2/27)

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management is hitting the Web. VDEM is launching the VA Emergency Channel on the wildly popular video-sharing Web site YouTube.com. Department officials say visitors will be able to see public service announcements from Governor Tim Kaine -- and may be able to get critical information during emergencies. The site is a continuation of the Commonwealth's partnership with Google. The channel can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/VAEmergency>. VDEM is not alone. Old Dominion University, Roanoke County, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Virginia Tourism Authority and the Library of Virginia all are building their own YouTube channels.

Fire Pals have fun teaching kids about safety (Oroville Mercury Register, 2/25)

More than 700 children from local schools cheered, giggled, and applauded during the Fire Pals program at the Southside Community Center, Monday. Fire Pals uses popular culture, music, and skits that promote interaction with the children while instilling important safety messages. The Fire Pals team involves firefighters, paramedics, police officers, sheriff's deputies, and other public safety personnel who experience firsthand the tragedy of what can happen if children are not prepared in an emergency. "They literally get off the ambulance, fire engine, or patrol car and go to schools to put on this program to prevent tragedies. They see in their daily jobs what can happen and are first responders to accidents where children suffer injuries," said CAL Fire-Butte County's Public Information Officer Janet Upton. "Fire Pals is a creative, fun way to get these safety messages across to children, and there are documented cases of lives being saved because children remembered Fire Pals' life-saving messages," Upton said. "That's why we do this. It's about saving lives." Among the safety messages taught through music, skits, dancing, and puppets include: "Stop, drop, and roll;" "Always wear a helmet;" "Have an exit plan and two ways out (of a burning house);" "Get out, stay out, and have a safe meeting place outside during a fire." The program began with music from "Mission Impossible" while Fire Captain Grayson Magana and Engineer Chelsye Jenkins dashed about the room in dark clothing, holding brief cases, and pretending to be "smoke detectives." Their mission? They are to locate fresh batteries and change the old ones out of the smoke detector. "Smoke detectors should be clean, check their batteries once a month and change the batteries twice a year," Upton told the children.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Severe Storms Pummel Oklahoma (Disaster News Network, 3/2)

Wind damage to roofs and buildings and at least two tornadoes were reported here Sunday night as a cold front pushed across the Midwest. According to local weather forecasters, wind damage and power outages were reported Sunday night near the center of the city. The same storm system earlier in the day had produced two tornadoes in northwestern Oklahoma in Blaine and Grant Counties. Little damage was reported. "It's just more than a scare than anything else, really," said Adam Austin of the Blaine County Sheriff's office. Grant County emergency officials said there was scattered damage reports that were still being assessed Sunday night. In the western part of the state, a wind gust of 65 mph was reported. Earlier the same storm system had dropped a foot of snow in Colorado and closed Interstate 70 between Limon and Burlington and I-25 near the New Mexico border. As the weather front moves east on Monday and Tuesday, weather forecasters were warning of more potentially severe weather. In California Sunday, weather forecasters were warning of the potential of winds up to 60 mph in the deserts, mountains and valleys of Southern California.

FEMA: Long-term housing needed for victims of tornado (FEMA, 3/1)

One-third of about 150 tornado-afflicted Muhlenberg Countians who have registered for federal aid need long-term housing that is in short supply, a relief center worker said Friday. "We're able to come up with short-term solutions," said Todd Bass, manager of the FEMA's Mobile Disaster Recovery Center in Powderly. Those quick fixes since the Feb. 5 tornado include hotels, motels, one-month rental sites and staying with family or friends, Bass said. For some, the month is nearly up, and staying with friends can mean overcrowding, he said. "A month can be a real long time," Bass said. Bass said he has seen a need for rental property since FEMA's mobile center set up shop by the Career Advancement Center of Muhlenberg County on Monday. How much need won't be known until everyone registers with FEMA, said Lynda Lowe, its individual assistance branch director in Lexington. When residents register, workers try to learn whether they need housing and if they qualify for rental assistance funds, she said. Community-relations teams are making sure tornado-affected residents have registered, Lowe said. "They are also on the lookout for any housing opportunities that may be available in (the) area," she said. Workers are searching the Internet and classified ads and are contacting known landlords, she said. "We try to exhaust all available resources," Lowe said. "We try to find them something if they can't find it on their own," said Dianna Gee, a FEMA public information officer. The agency is asking for property owners with places for rent to call (703) 254-9221 or (770) 986-4641.

Just 1 of 700 Nevada Homes Insured (Disaster News Network, 2/28)

Char Dykema left the cold of Michigan for the relative warmth of Nevada last week to assist the survivors of a very unusual flood in the Nevada desert. She and a team of 10 will be going door-to-door in the Fernley area talking to those whose houses were flooded Jan. 6 when a levee broke and flooded 700 homes. Only one homeowner has the necessary insurance to replace his home and contents. All of the others are having to rely on their own resources and on the kindness of others to try to get their lives back on track. Dykema is a member of the Christian Reform World Relief Committee's (CRWRC) disaster assessment team. CRWRC has a four page interview document they will bring to residents to find out what they still need now that the initial clean up has

been completed. "It could be anything from emotional assistance to washers and dryers," Dykema said. Sometimes, survivors just need someone to listen and team members are prepared to do that too. The group, which calls itself the Green Shirts after their adopted uniform, will stay in town for two weeks and compile all the information into a database to be used by the city's Long Term Recovery Team. That team is made up of members of the Lyon County Human Services division, a representative of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and representatives of a number of relief organizations, said Janet Gilbert.

Additional Counties Eligible for December Ice Storm Assistance (FEMA, 2/28)

FEMA and the Kansas Division of Emergency Management (KDEM) announced today that five additional counties affected by the severe winter storms are now eligible for disaster infrastructure assistance. Gove, Logan, Wallace, Thomas, and Sheridan counties have been added to the Feb. 1, 2008 major disaster declaration. Sixty-five Kansas counties and entities including local governments; Indian tribes; and certain private non-profit organizations are now eligible for reimbursement of eligible costs under the Public Assistance Program. Applicants may now be eligible for debris removal costs and expenses for emergency protective measures taken before, during and after the storms to protect public and private property, and for permanent repair to facilities due to the Dec. 6-19 storm. Since this storm did not meet the federal qualifications for individuals, the declaration will only address reimbursements for local government and eligible non-profit organizations, and will not address personal or business losses. The initial counties eligible for Public Assistance are: Atchison, Barber, Barton, Brown, Butler, Chase, Cherokee, Clark, Clay, Cloud, Comanche, Crawford, Dickinson, Doniphan, Edwards, Ellis, Ellsworth, Ford, Geary, Graham, Harvey, Hodgeman, Jackson, Jefferson, Jewell, Kingman, Kiowa, Labette, Leavenworth, Lincoln, Lyon, Marion, Marshall, McPherson, Miami, Mitchell, Morris, Nemaha, Osage, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Pottawatomie, Pratt, Reno, Republic, Rice, Riley, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Saline, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Smith, Stafford, Wabaunsee, Washington, and Woodson.

Wildfires pop up across Texas and New Mexico (Associated Press, 2/27)

Fire officials kept watch Tuesday on a wildfire threatening this town of 1,500 people, but evacuated residents were allowed to return. Wildfires across the state, mostly in West Texas, since Monday have charred nearly 390 square miles about 250,000 acres. The largest was a 219-square-mile blaze some 50 miles west of Robert Lee, and officials expect that number to be revised upward once assessments can be made, said Anne Jeffery, an information officer for the Texas Forest Service. Officials were monitoring a roughly 30-square-mile fire that threatened Robert Lee, about 250 miles southwest of Dallas. While residents were allowed to return, schools remained closed Tuesday. "It's still hot here," said Robert Lee Superintendent Aaron Hood, who sent his wife and two children to nearby San Angelo overnight while he assisted in evacuations. "You can still smell the smoke and smell the fire. If the high winds get up again, we just have to be ready." He said some houses burned in the smaller communities of Silver and Edith near the E.V. Spence Reservoir. On Tuesday, fires were stoked by winds up to 50 mph. Three firefighters were injured in a truck accident. David Abernathy, an incident commander with the Texas Forest Service, said Monday he was aware of at least two dozen separate

fires across the state and expected there were "many, many more that we won't know about" until local fire departments report in. "We had so many fires that there is no possible way to have enough firefighting resources for that many fires," Abernathy said. "Texas had the same conditions that you might expect in Southern California with some of their Santa Ana winds. The right conditions came together. It's extremely rare for us to see that."

Power grid glitch causes massive Florida blackout (Associated Press, 2/27)

A relatively minor glitch in Florida's electrical grid somehow triggered a chain reaction Tuesday that caused a nuclear plant to shut down and briefly cut power in patches from Daytona Beach through the Florida Keys. Up to 3 million people - about a fifth of Florida's population - lost power at various points during the afternoon, though there were no safety concerns at the nuclear plant. And while many areas were hit hard, the outages were short-lived and only about 20,000 people lacked electricity during the evening commute home. Most of the evening outages were due to bad weather, not the grid problem, officials said. An equipment malfunction in a substation near Miami disabled two power distribution lines between Miami and Daytona Beach, and in response, Florida Power & Light's Turkey Point nuclear plant south of Miami stopped operating around 1 p.m., Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman Kenneth Clark said. The utility was trying to determine what caused equipment failure and a fire at the substation, but the company said it was not the kind of problem that should have created the widespread blackouts. Grid problems caused both Turkey Point reactors to shut down, said the utility's nuclear spokesman, Dick Winn. "All the safety systems worked just like they were supposed to and both of those units are in stable condition right now," he said. Clark agreed the plant's safety was not in question. The outages had no connection to terrorism, Homeland Security Department spokeswoman Laura Keehner said. Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez said the outages were technical, not criminal. "It's a matter of just a cascading effect," he said. Florida emergency management officials said the outages cut power to 2 to 3 million people during the heat of a day that saw temperatures reach the 80s.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

DHS Announces 2008 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Now Open (GovTech, 3/2)

DHS's Grant Programs Directorate will begin accepting applications for FY2008 Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) beginning March 3, 2008, at 8:00 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) with the deadline for receipt of the applications no later than April 4, 2008, at 5:00 p.m. EDT. The AFG, which will be distributed in phases throughout FY 2007, will ultimately award approximately \$500 million. Eligible applicants for the FY 2008 AFG are limited to fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical service (EMS) organizations operating within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Interested applicants may submit two separate applications for consideration under each of the following two program areas:

- **Operations and Safety Program Area:** Eligible activities for fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations are limited to training, equipment, personal protective equipment, wellness and fitness, and modifications to facilities.
- **Vehicle Acquisition Program Area:** Eligible apparatus available to fire departments under this program area include, but are not limited to, pumpers, brush trucks, tankers/tenders, rescue vehicles, ambulances, quints, aerials, foam units, and fireboats.

The FY 2008 AFG will also allow eligible applicants to submit an additional application for a regional project through which multiple organizations, serving more than one local jurisdiction, may benefit directly from the activities implemented with the grant funds.

GAO: FEMA Crisis Counseling Needs Help (GAO, 2/29)

Excerpt from the Summary: Hundreds of thousands of people nationwide have been exposed to psychological trauma resulting from catastrophic disasters, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. 1 Traumatic experiences such as losing a loved one, losing one's home, or witnessing disturbing scenes can affect the residents, responders, and others involved in a catastrophic disaster and its aftermath. These experiences have led to a variety of psychological consequences, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD),² and increased use or abuse of tobacco or alcohol. In addition, catastrophic disasters can affect a community's ability to deliver mental health and substance abuse services. For example, hospitals had problems meeting the demand for inpatient psychiatric care after Hurricane Katrina because of disruption to the health care infrastructure.³ Hundreds Effectively delivering mental health and substance abuse services to address psychological consequences related to catastrophic and other disasters requires that both predisaster preparedness efforts and postdisaster response⁴ efforts be well planned and coordinated among the multiple jurisdictions, agencies, and nongovernmental organizations involved. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the Institute of Medicine reported that there were gaps in the preparedness of the nation's mental health, public health, medical, and emergency response systems to ⁵ meet the psychological needs that result from terrorism. It noted, for example, that government agencies and service providers were not well coordinated and mental health providers often did not have disaster training.

FEMA Evaluating Non-Traditional Alternatives To Disaster Trailers (DHS, 2/29)

Housing specialists from HUD; building science experts NIBS; and specialists from FEMA housing, policy, Individual Assistance, Long-Term Recovery and Public Assistance divisions are exploring the latest in factory-built contemporary housing, modular homes based on universal design, housing built from recyclable materials, and innovative work by schools of architecture and design at universities across the country. To date, they have evaluated 40 different types of units. They have looked at modular 'folding houses' that could transition to permanent housing, a steel modular modernist-design unit already in use in some areas, and housing units that basically are converted shipping containers. Costs range from \$15,000 to \$150,000, with most falling between \$20,000 and \$50,000. The group also will evaluate Gulf Coast-type cottages with front porches and other types of housing developed through the Alternative Housing Pilot

Program (AHPP) for Katrina/Rita households. The inclusion of the AHPP units in the JHSG evaluation process will provide a unique opportunity to assess occupied homes under actual living conditions. The group developed a comprehensive Housing Assessment Tool (HAT) that is designed to collect information on housing products and help FEMA determine whether proposed options are suitable for disaster housing needs. The assessment tool contains 175 questions about the major aspects of the housing products proposed by potential providers around four criteria to be used to analyze alternative housing units:

- Range of Use
- Livability
- Timeliness
- Cost
- Footprint
- Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards
- Indoor Air Quality
- Production Lead-time

GAO: FEMA Needs to Better Coordinate Govt/Volunteer Response (GAO, 2/28)

From the GAO Summary: Using lessons from the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, the federal government released the NRF in January 2008. This report examines (1) why the primary role for mass care in the NRF shifted from the Red Cross to FEMA, and potential issues with implementation, (2) whether NVOAD is equipped to fulfill its NRF role, (3) the extent to which FEMA has addressed issues with mass care for the disabled since the hurricanes, (4) the extent to which major voluntary agencies have prepared to better serve the disabled since the hurricanes, and (5) the extent to which FEMA has addressed issues voluntary agencies faced in receiving Public Assistance reimbursement. To analyze these issues, GAO reviewed the NRF and other documents, and interviewed officials from FEMA, voluntary agencies, and state and local governments.

Community, state officials hold summit to get ahead of flooding (AP, 2/28)

Instead of waiting for Mother Nature's next strike, state and local officials gathered Thursday to discuss ways to be ready for future floods. "We can't stop horrible weather. We can't stop flooding. But we can lessen it. We can make the recovery time shorter. We are here looking for new ideas," said Michael Balboni, the state's deputy secretary for public safety. "We want to make sure we have all the capabilities we can put in place." More than 200 local officials and first-responders attended the state's first flooding summit, which was held in Binghamton, the scene of devastating floods in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The meeting was held at the Binghamton Regency hotel, which sits on the banks of the Susquehanna River and sustained \$1 million in damage during the June 2006 flood. Over the last four years, nine floods in New York resulted in major federal disaster declarations. The cost of these events was staggering, with nearly \$600 million spent for emergency response and repairs to public infrastructure alone. The flood in June 2006 swept away homes and cars from Binghamton to the Mohawk Valley and cut a chasm across Interstate 88. Four people died. Last June, a flash flood strong enough to rip homes from their foundations washed through the Catskills. Witnesses described a rushing wall of water. Four people were swept away. "So many people look at flooding as a local

event, but when you consider it impacts Interstate 88, the New York Thruway, the state canal system ... it's not just a local event, it becomes a state event," Balboni said. "We need to have more focus. Flooding occurs, the water recedes, people get assistance, they get back to their lives and they move on. We need to change the dynamics. We just can't keep going from disaster to disaster. We need to come up with a longer-term, comprehensive strategy," he said.

CA needs its Guard gear back, governor insists (San Francisco Chronicle, 2/26)

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger told Bush administration officials Monday that he is tired of the Pentagon treating the California National Guard like a stepchild by using its equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan without returning or replacing it. The Republican governor said the California National Guard is missing about half of its equipment - from humvees to radios. That could leave California at risk in an earthquake, fire or other emergency, Schwarzenegger said. "It's not fair to the states for the federal government to go into a war and then to take from us the equipment," he said after meetings Monday with President Bush and Cabinet officials. "Every time our National Guard leaves, they take with them equipment but they don't bring it back." Other governors have also complained about the drain of equipment. Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, a Democrat, said last May that her state's response to a tornado in the town of Greensburg was limited because 15 of the Kansas National Guard's 19 Black Hawk helicopters were overseas, along with trucks, bulldozers and other equipment. Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Schwarzenegger and other governors that the Pentagon plans to pay to replace some of the equipment that is damaged or destroyed, but the compensation could take several years because of budget constraints. Schwarzenegger said states also face budget shortfalls and can't shoulder the burden indefinitely. During the Southern California fires in October, some local officials complained about a lack of air support to contain the blazes, while state and federal officials criticized the U.S. military for failing to deploy some of its C-130 planes immediately after the fires broke out.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Recovery Chief Powell ready to leave Gulf Coast (N.O. Times Picayune, 3/1)

Donald Powell, who was put in charge of Gulf Coast recovery efforts by President Bush after the federal government's embarrassingly slow and ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina, announced Friday he will be leaving the job in the next few weeks. Powell did not give a specific reason for the timing of his decision. The executive order that created the office is due to expire in November, three years after it began. Powell's chief of staff, Paul Conway, has been named his interim replacement. Powell plans to return to Amarillo, Texas, and resume his banking career. Powell said the most rewarding aspect of his job has been to observe the rebuilding progress, "albeit sometime very slow," in Gulf Coast communities devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Powell conceded he was frustrated at times with his inability to move the bureaucracy, alluding he said to federal, state and local agencies. He said federal agencies were sometimes "reluctant" to bend regulations to address more urgently the widespread devastation

caused by the hurricanes. "The thing that I struggled with more than anything else is the inability to cause things to happen as fast I would like," said Powell, who tried to expedite the processing of work sheets that spell out the scope of FEMA reconstruction projects. FEMA often required time-consuming adjustments by local and parish officials that delayed construction. Former Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco, who often tangled with the Bush administration over whether the state or federal government was at fault for the slow pace of recovery, described Powell as an "honest broker" who became an advocate for the state when he was "convinced that the state was not exaggerating" its post-hurricane needs. "It was because of him that we were able to get enough money to do what we needed to do," Blanco said.

19,000 families need help: Katrina summit convenes (Biloxi Sun Herald, 3/1)

Don't wait for government funds. Forget about race and religion. Think outside the box and be creative. And most important, stay organized and prepared. "We all know it's a matter of time before we are doing disaster recovery again," said Dale Kimball of Northshore Disaster Recovery in Slidell, one of many Gulf Coast recovery organizations in attendance at a Friday summit about Katrina and the role of the case manager. Case managers are the people who work with nonprofits, faith-based organizations and long-term recovery committees to find who is in need after a disaster, to assess what they need, and to advocate on their behalf to get aid. They are comparable to social workers. There are still 19,000 local families who need help, said Roberta Avila, director of the Interfaith Disaster Task Force. The FEMA funding that pays for their case managers will expire at the end of the month. IDTF helps bring volunteer groups together to best help those in need. FEMA doesn't have a plan for the day after, said Brian Martin, policy advisor for U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor, and as it is currently written, the federal Stafford Act for natural disaster assistance won't help either. It allows FEMA and the Department of Health and Human Services to privatize case management, but only in the next disaster, he said. Taylor's camp has come out in support of Senate Bill 2335, sponsored by Mary Landrieu, D-La. The bill, called the Case Management Services Improvement Act of 2007 would amend the Stafford Act to include case-management services by nonprofits and faith-based groups. Martin said it would be difficult to get the bill through Congress and funded in 30 days. He said Taylor's office would like to "give FEMA a little time to do the right thing administratively" through an extension or new funding. Any lapse in case management would impede those already in the system, and could delay help for those needing to move immediately from FEMA trailers with high levels of formaldehyde. A survey of statewide long-term recovery committees conducted by IDTF showed case managers have helped their clients get more than \$45 million in help, but there are more than 6,500 cases on waiting lists. Each case represents a family, she said, so more than one person is affected.

LRA takes over 'Louisiana Cottage' housing program (N.O. Times Picayune, 2/29)

With a year-old hurricane recovery housing program yet to break ground, Gov. □Bobby Jindal's administration has shifted control of the project from the state housing board to the Louisiana Recovery Authority. Leaders at both agencies, along with the private contractors enlisted to build the "Louisiana Cottages" at sites around the state, said they support the move, the latest turn in a program marked by considerable wrangling among

public and private players since December 2006 when FEMA first announced distribution of \$388 million across four states. LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater, whom Jindal had previously identified as the state's chief authority figure for all recovery related projects and financing streams, said his agency hopes to have full control of Louisiana's \$74.5 million share of the program by March 24. Still, officials said it will be months before the first Louisianian moves into the first of 550 residences planned under the state's share of the Alternative Housing Pilot Program, authorized by Congress to test post-disaster housing models other than the emergency travel trailers. Rainwater confirmed that Louisiana cannot meet a March 17 deadline to have completed site selection and the initial construction preparation. Rainwater said LRA, in collaboration with the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency and FEMA project managers, are working on a letter asking for an extension, which is necessary to avoid the risk of federal officials stripping some of the financing already obligated to the state.

Relocation of evacuees complicated (Advocate, 4/28)

The federal government's plan to move hurricane evacuees out of FEMA trailers as soon as possible due to potentially high levels of formaldehyde could be either a blessing or a curse for Hurricane Katrina victims looking for a way out of the temporary homes. The CDC said many of the more than 500 trailers it tested had high formaldehyde levels. FEMA, which commissioned the tests, responded by saying it will accelerate efforts to move evacuees out of the cramped travel trailers. There are 25,000 occupied FEMA travel trailers and mobile homes in Louisiana. The new urgency could expedite a process - often criticized as too slow - of relocating trailer residents to apartments and other more-permanent housing. But the urgency also could force hurricane victims into unstable housing situations. Sue Lacy, a project manager for the nonprofit group AmericaSpeaks, which has been working with trailer residents and government agencies to facilitate the relocations, said that before the formaldehyde announcement, the transition process had "not been going as smoothly as everyone had hoped. Some trailer residents say they've had trouble getting assistance to buy furniture and appliances for their new apartments. Others complain they need more time to move out of a trailer after a new address is secured, or that their new location offers no access to public transportation. "You can't move people out without furniture, without appliances, without access to transportation," Lacy said. Lacy and trailer residents are waiting to see how FEMA's plans to accelerate relocations will translate into policy, and whether it means trailer residents will be forced to move sooner than they expected or into locations not of their liking.

Army-style barracks for New Orleans' homeless (Associated Press, 2/26)

Since Hurricane Katrina rendered him homeless 30 months ago, Donald Collins says he has fled to an evacuation center, huddled in an abandoned house, lived in a camping tent before City Hall, and finally migrated to a stretch of underpass where crack sales and clothing donations seem equally common. Now New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin has another stop in mind for Collins and a caravan of some 200 homeless people who have been squatting along the downtown road for months: a military-style barracks that critics say is crammed with beds but short on long-term solutions to a homeless epidemic here. "I'm not going," said Collins, 52, as he gulped down a beer at 10:30 a.m. and described

himself as a Katrina-inspired alcoholic. "Something else will turn up." Collins, a former sanitation worker, is on a nonprofit's waiting list for so-called "permanent supportive housing," which combines subsidized rent and health counseling but is in rare supply in the post-Katrina city. Meanwhile, Nagin said by the end of this week he will use health and safety codes to move the men and women living underneath the stretch of Interstate 10 known as the Claiborne Avenue bridge to the tarp-covered facility that is erected and awaiting fire inspections. The barracks, 120-feet long and 30-feet wide, is air-conditioned, filled with double-decker bunk beds, and located on the grounds of a local mission that has worked with the city's homeless for 20 years. But even its administrator said he is unsure the facility that offers only meals and overnight stays to about 120 people can really help a homeless population that has doubled to 12,000 since Katrina.