

Disaster News Update – April 7 to 13, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia
- **Explosion / Structure Fire:** Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh), Mississippi, New York (Troy)
- **Fire:** Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Alabama, Florida, Alaska, Kentucky
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Arkansas, West Virginia, Tennessee, Missouri, Vermont (warning), Wisconsin, Massachusetts (warning), Oklahoma, Ohio
- **Heavy Rain:** West Virginia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Iowa, Florida, Arkansas, Missouri
- **Mudslide:** Oklahoma, Colorado, Indiana
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Wisconsin, Nebraska
- **Strong Wind:** Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Oklahoma, Iowa
- **Tornado:** Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Kentucky, Iowa

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Arkansas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (03/26)
- [Georgia](#): Severe Storms and Tornadoes (3/20)
- [Missouri](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (3/19)
- [Wisconsin](#): Snow (3/19 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Texas](#): Wildfires (3/14 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Illinois](#): Snow (3/13 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Missouri](#): Severe Winter Storms and Flooding (3/12)
- [Illinois](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (3/7)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(4/1\)](#), [Texas \(3/27\)](#), [Oklahoma \(3/21\)](#), [Texas \(3/20\)](#), [Texas \(3/19\)](#), [Texas \(3/14a\)](#), [Texas \(3/14b\)](#), [Texas \(3/14c\)](#), [Texas \(3/12\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

[America's Second Harvest Supports MO Flood Recovery](#) (PR Newswire, 4/7)

America's Second Harvest -- The Nation's Food Bank Network, is continuing its efforts to secure and transport necessary food and grocery products to communities affected by recent flooding in Missouri. As waters recede, individuals and families are beginning the arduous task of cleaning out their flood damaged homes. Cleaning supplies such as bleach are critical to this effort and are being distributed through two America's Second Harvest Members: the Bootheel Food Bank in Cape Girardeau and the St. Louis Area Food Bank in St. Louis. "As our Network Members in Missouri, and across the Midwest, continue to support flood recovery efforts, we are reminded that clean-up is an important part of the recovery process," said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of America's Second Harvest -- The Nation's Food Bank Network. "Our food banks throughout the affected region are working closely with state and local emergency management agencies, as well

as non-governmental partners in disaster relief and local social service agency partners, to identify the need for not only food, but cleaning supplies, diapers and personal care products to help those affected."

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Vermont needs volunteers for emergency drill](#) (Brattleboro Reformer, 4/12)

If you have some free time on Thursday morning, Vermont Emergency Management could use a hand. Starting on or about 8 a.m., VEM will be conducting a transportation drill, sending more than 50 buses to area schools. In addition, a number of buses will be sent to nursing homes, daycare facilities and hospitals in the emergency preparedness zone in Vermont. Volunteers are needed to help evaluate the exercise. "The emergency drill won't have accomplished its purpose if it doesn't get properly evaluated," said Harry Upton, the program manager for the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, or RSVP. "The volunteers play a very important role in getting that done." Volunteers will be required to "provide a written description of the loading zone in some specific detail," he said, including what time the buses arrive and how safe or unsafe the loading zone appears to be. All you need to bring, said Upton, is good observation skills and the ability to write a clear, succinct report on those observations. "You also have to be able to walk on to a bus," said Upton, though he said he would take handicapped or elderly volunteers who could record their observations from the curb or their vehicles.

[Volunteers help with New Orleans disaster exercise](#) (N.O. Times Picayune, 4/10)

Eight members of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), along with members of the Plaquemines Parish Sheriff's Office, attended a drill March 27 along the Mississippi River behind Audubon Zoo in order to practice what they would do in the event of an actual emergency. A fake bomb went off on the levee, and black smoke could be seen for quite a distance. Teams responded from Orleans, St. Bernard, Jefferson and Plaquemines parishes. These teams consisted of Homeland Security, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, fire departments from Orleans and Jefferson along with bomb squads, Port Authority, Coast Guard, Catholic Charities and many more. The victims were played by college students and other volunteers -- more than 200 total. The fake wounds and blood looked real. Victims were sent through triage and then to the participating hospitals, which were West Jefferson Medical Center, East Jefferson General Hospital, Ochsner Medical Center, Tulane University Hospital and Touro Infirmary. This allowed groups to see what they are doing right and to let them know what they need to change or improve. Some of the CERT members did traffic control, triage, paperwork and just helped wherever needed. Volunteers were blessed with a beautiful day and lots of help -- people from all over the country came. I even spoke to a student who said he was there because his professor told him if he helped out as a victim, he would not have to do a term paper. Now, that's quite a deal. This was a great way to become acquainted with procedures that would be followed if there were a real emergency like a terrorist attack, natural disaster, chemical spill, etc. Thanks to all who participated. It was quite a success.

Volunteer Committees Help Residents in Long-Term Recovery (FEMA, 4/8)

In every disaster there may be some applicants who need more assistance than state and federal programs can provide. Volunteers, working through two county Long-Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs), are ready to help Iroquois and Livingston County families put their lives back together piece by piece. These affiliations of faith-based organizations, private-sector businesses, municipal authorities and individual volunteers formed a strong partnership at the beginning of this disaster and will continue to offer time, compassion and support as long as the need exists. State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) partners support these committees with guidance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) division. "Local resources, whether in the form of families, friends, neighbors, churches, businesses or government, are always the first and last place for disaster-affected people to seek help," said Larry Belmont, FEMA's VAL for this disaster. "These LTRCs were deeply involved in helping their neighbors before FEMA assistance arrived and will continue their fine work after we are gone."

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Severe Storms Hit Mid-South – Again (Disaster News Network, 4/13)

Deadly storms struck again over the weekend across the nation's mid-South with tornadoes and flash flooding in some of the same areas hit by the Super Tuesday tornadoes. The most severe storms through Friday afternoon were reported in Alabama and Tennessee. In Tennessee, in addition to at least six tornadoes, emergency responders rescued motorists from flash flooding. On Saturday, a tornado tore through homes in Wayne County, NC, destroying homes and trailers. A state of emergency was declared Friday by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA). The Tennessee and Alabama storms were part of the same weather system that hit parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa and Missouri earlier in the week. The weather front was forecasted to bring snow to some of the higher elevations Friday night and Saturday. Most of the damage to homes was reported in Giles and Lawrence Counties along the Alabama border according to Jeremy Heidt, a TEMA spokesman. As many as 50 homes were damaged in those two counties. An apartment building in Hoover, AL, reportedly lost its roof and damage was also reported in Gadsden. Damage to Tennessee homes was also reported in Bedford, Cumberland, Warren and Macon Counties. Hundreds of homes and 13 people were killed in February when tornadoes hit Macon County. In Texas and Oklahoma Wednesday and Thursday, a line of severe storms with high winds and heavy rain battered communities, damaging homes and businesses.

Broken levee forces evacuations near Poplar Bluff (AP, 4/12)

Widespread flooding is reported in southeast Missouri after a levee along the Black River failed for a second time in recent weeks. Butler County Fire Chief Bob Fredwell says residents were evacuated early Saturday morning from approximately 50 homes east of Poplar Bluff when the levee gave way. Fredwell says no one was injured and his office hasn't had to perform any rescues. He said the flooding is much less severe than last month. He said floodwaters in homes range from six inches to as much as three feet. The

county's emergency management officials estimate the floodwaters will ultimately cover 15 to 20 square miles of Butler County. A flood warning has been issued for much of southern Missouri until Sunday afternoon.

Flooding Continues to Plague AR, MO (Disaster News Network, 4/12)

The rain has ended, but rivers are continuing to flood parts of Missouri and Arkansas and as still more evacuations take place, the latest round of flooding has claimed at least two lives. A levee along the Black River in Missouri failed for the second time in two weeks Saturday forcing the evacuation of more than 50 homes. Bob Fredwell, Butler County's Fire Chief said the evacuated homes were east of Poplar Bluff in the southeastern part of the state. As a result of the levee break, floodwaters are expected to cover 15 to 20 square miles of the county, local emergency management officials said Saturday. In Arkansas, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers opened the spillways at Bull Shoals Lake Saturday creating even more flooding along the White River. Emergency officials said two people in a pickup truck died Saturday when their vehicle was engulfed in flood water. Meanwhile, assessment teams have been moving slowly across northern and western parts of Arkansas trying to determine the amount of damage to the state's infrastructure. The best they have been able to do is an incomplete estimate.

Blizzard Shuts Down North; South Floods (The Capital Times, 4/12)

Schools closed, thousands lost electricity because of trees toppling onto power lines and snow plows were back at work Friday as blizzard-like conditions shut down far northern Wisconsin, authorities said. Keith Kesler, Douglas County's emergency management coordinator, said up to 9 inches of snow had fallen in places near Superior and it was being whipped around by winds that earlier Friday gusted to 62 mph. Later, sustained winds neared 40 mph. No injuries had been reported, he said. No travel was advised. The Red Cross opened a temporary shelter at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, which canceled classes for the day, for people who have had extended outages of electricity, Kesler said. Steve Kinney, a spokesman for Minnesota Power in Duluth, Minn., said about 11,500 customers were without power Friday afternoon, including about 1,500 in Superior. The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for Douglas, Bayfield and Ashland counties. In southern Wisconsin, officials monitored flooding on the Rock River in Jefferson and Rock counties, Wisconsin Emergency Management spokeswoman Lori Getter said. As many as 200 homes in Jefferson County had water in their basements or were surrounded by water, she said. The Rock County Sheriff's Department said flooding has closed some roads, parks and boat ramps. Some residents near Newville were building dams in their backyards to block the water.

Storm caused \$25 million in Texas (Ft. Worth Star Telegram, 4/12)

The early-morning storm that pounded North Texas on Thursday caused about \$25 million in damage in Johnson County where a tornado skipped along a 4-mile stretch west of Lillian, officials said Friday. Six homes and two businesses were destroyed, 22 homes were significantly damaged, and 18 had minor damage, emergency management coordinator Gerald Mohr said. In the Happy Hills area, the hardest-hit homes were uninhabitable. "Some homes with half the roof gone and major water damage inside will have to be stripped out and start over from nothing," Mohr said. "One house doesn't look

too bad, but it shifted several inches on the foundation and broke loose the bolts and plates holding it to foundation. It will be totaled." Johnson County is waiting for more information before possibly seeking a state disaster declaration, County Judge Roger Harmon said. On the bright side, Mohr said, residents are helping one another recover from the damage. "Everyone is pitching in real good. It's neighbor helping neighbor," he said.

Storms destroy homes, barns in Kentucky (Lexington Herald Leader, 4/12)

Storms that may have unleashed tornadoes raked southern Kentucky Friday, damaging or destroying homes and barns in several counties and snapping trees and utility poles. However, few injuries were reported. Areas near the Wayne-Clinton County line appeared to be among the hardest hit. Though officials were still trying to firm up damage assessments Friday evening in several places, Lonnie Scott, emergency-management director in Clinton County, said an estimated 50 to 60 structures there were damaged, some heavily. That included houses and barns. Two people were treated at Clinton County hospital for minor injuries. The damage was centered about 7 miles east of Albany. In Wayne County, the preliminary estimate was that 40 houses, barns and other structures were damaged or destroyed, mostly in the western part of the county, said Sherwin Corder, emergency-management director. Corder said he had not received reports on serious injuries from wind damage.

Storms damaged half of state (Tulsa World, 4/12)

Residents in eastern Oklahoma continue to feel the effects of spring storms that swamped the area this week. Gov. Brad Henry on Friday declared a state of emergency for 38 Oklahoma counties, including several in northeastern Oklahoma, because of tornadoes, storms and flooding associated with severe weather that began Wednesday. Recovery efforts in many areas will take months and millions of dollars to complete. Oklahoma 20 closed. Repairing a deluge-induced landslide that damaged a section of Oklahoma 20 in Rogers County will take two to three months and cost upward of \$1 million, Oklahoma Department of Transportation officials said Friday. "This is an emergency situation," ODOT Chief Engineer John Fuller said at a news conference at the site. "This is a priority to get a road that carries 10,000 vehicles a day open again." Brought on by this week's torrential rains, the landslide destroyed a roughly 600-foot section of the westbound shoulder, twisting a guard rail and buckling the hilly highway just west of Keetonville Road, officials said. The main route between Owasso and Claremore, the damaged stretch of Oklahoma 20 will be closed until the highway is repaired. During the restoration, officials will detour eastbound traffic onto Oklahoma 266 and westbound traffic onto Oklahoma 88, ODOT said.

Storms leave damage across Middle Tennessee; 5 injuries reported (AP, 4/11)

A powerful line of thunderstorms tracked across central Tennessee on Friday, damaging dozens of homes and buildings and injuring at least five people. There were several reports of tornado touchdowns from local officials and residents, but they had not yet been confirmed by the National Weather Service. A possible tornado damaged 56 homes in Lawrence County along the Alabama line. Video from Nashville television stations showed homes in Lawrence County with roofs torn off, trees downed and debris littering

yards. Tennessee Valley Authority power lines were damaged, causing widespread power outages. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency declared a state of emergency and activated its emergency operations center in Nashville, which allows them to direct state resources to counties.

First Chainsaws, Now Boats Needed (Disaster News Network, 4/10)

First they needed chainsaws to clear the trees strewn by tornadoes that ripped through central Arkansas last week. And now they need boats. Heavy winds and rains were forecast for Saline County Thursday and the call has gone out for flat bottom and inflatable boats. "The good news is that this is the last storm" for a while, said Joy Ballard, an assistant to Saline County Judge Lanny Fite, the county's chief administrator. Pleasant weather is forecast for the coming week -- time to continue the cleanup from the tornadoes a week ago and time to dry out. It is almost the middle of April and residents throughout the state have been coping with tornadoes, heavy rain, snow and flooding since early February. Since the beginning of February, volunteers from the Arkansas State Baptist Convention have served about 15,000 meals, and chainsaw crews, some on standby to clean-up from this current round of storms, cleared more than 160 land sites. And 10 homes were also mudded out by volunteers following flooding March 24-29. "We haven't approached compassion fatigue yet," said Dr. Emil Turner, the executive director of the Arkansas State Baptist Convention. But if the state is battered for another month, Turner is not so sure how his volunteers will hold up.

Missouri Businesses Still Recovering From Flood (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 4/9)

Richard Hely knew the Meramec River would overflow into his Fenton heating and cooling business last month. But he wasn't prepared for the deluge that eventually came, and the impact it had after the water receded. More than 5 feet of water washed through Hely Heating and Air Conditioning on Gravois Road, damaging the drywall and ruining some steel pipes and air conditioning equipment that Hely left behind. Nearly three weeks after the flood waters reached their crest, Hely and many other business owners are still rebuilding and working to reopen. It's difficult to verify how many local businesses were affected. According to initial estimates by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, water damaged at least 34 businesses in St. Louis, Franklin and Jefferson counties. But estimates by cities along the Meramec suggest the number is higher. Pacific reported nearly 30 businesses affected. Fenton officials said up to 40 might have sustained damage. By this week, many of those businesses had re-opened their doors or completed repairs. Some owners are waiting for city inspections and flood insurance payoffs. Hely was one of those owners. On Monday Hely, a relative and an employee focused on replacing the drywall in the front of the building. Building damages totaled more than \$50,000 and inventory loss was about \$20,000, Hely estimated, yet he didn't seem burdened by the costs. He expects flood insurance will reimburse the losses. Most business policies exclude flood protection, but any business close to a river should have flood insurance, said Dennis Flatness, president of Welsch Flatness & Lutz Inc. in St. Louis, which specializes in business insurance.

Counties Added To Presidential Declaration (FEMA, 4/9)

Twenty-one Arkansas counties were approved Wednesday, April 9, for additional federal disaster assistance making them eligible for Individual Assistance and Public Assistance announced the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM) and FEMA. Five counties - Monroe, Pope, Prairie, Scott and Sharp - are now eligible for Individual Assistance (IA) and join the initial eleven counties of Baxter, Benton, Independence, Jackson, Lawrence, Logan, Madison, Marion, Randolph, Stone, and Woodruff. The FEMA Individual Assistance program can help eligible applicants with temporary housing assistance, uninsured personal property and medical, dental, and funeral expenses caused by the disaster, and other serious unmet needs. Nineteen counties - Clay, Conway, Crawford, Franklin, Howard, Independence, Jackson, Lawrence, Logan, Marion, Monroe, Newton, Perry, Pope, Randolph, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren and Woodruff - are now eligible for Public Assistance (PA) (Categories A - G) and join the initial ten counties of Baxter, Boone, Carroll, Fulton, IZard, Johnson, Madison, Scott, Searcy and Yell. The PA program reimburses local and state agencies and certain nonprofit agencies for the expenses and damages that occurred during the response and recovery phase of the disaster. FEMA officials said the assistance was approved based on a review of damage data gathered by federal, state and local disaster recovery officials.

Federal government denies N. Maine disaster assistance (AP, 4/9)

Sen. Olympia Snowe says she's disappointed the federal government is denying Maine's request for disaster assistance in response to a blizzard that hit the northern part of the state in March. Snowe says the record snowfall March 19-22 has had disastrous effects on Aroostook County's infrastructure. The Maine Republican says roofs collapsed, roads were blanketed in black ice and homes were swallowed by massive drifts. Congressman Mike Michaud shares Snowe's view. The Maine Democrat says the denial demonstrates the inability of the federal government to respond to disaster situations within a timeframe that matters. Snowe and Michaud say they'll support an appeal of the FEMA denial.

60 Homes Damaged in OK Flooding (Associated Press, 4/8)

Two city bridges remain closed and dozens of homes are in need of repair after torrential rain caused flooding. Tom Tillotson, the city's emergency management director, said it was the worst flooding he's seen in his 30 years as a Coweta resident. The flooding accompanied a March 31 storm system that dumped more than 7 inches of rain on Coweta in a 90-minute period. Tillotson said engineers estimate the infrastructure damage at \$306,000. Officials are awaiting word from the Federal Emergency Management Agency on whether the city will receive federal aid for recovery. A total of 63 homes had some flood damage. "Most had just a few inches or less, but a few homes had up to 4 feet of water," he said. No injuries were reported, but firefighters and police officers were involved in several high-water rescues. The Tulsa Area Chapter of the American Red Cross assisted 28 adults and 16 children affected by the floods, providing assistance with housing, minor home repair and food.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

For Emergency Alerts, Colleges Try Sirens (Chronicle of Higher Education, 4/11)
Colleges and universities, ever more mindful of campus safety, are installing outdoor sirens. The systems can blast spoken messages or tone alerts of danger -- and one of the preset messages on many of the public-address systems warns: "There is a shooter on campus. Seek shelter immediately." As college officials reviewed their emergency-notification strategies in the wake of the deadly shootings at Virginia Tech last spring, many decided to install outdoor public-address systems. The Virginia Tech tragedy, in which a student killed 32 people before committing suicide, led administrators to think about how they would communicate with their diverse mixes of students, professors, and staff members if a similar tragedy took place on their campuses. One popular answer has been to install complicated digital systems that beam text, e-mail, or instant messages to thousands of registered users. But many officials have come to realize that not everyone on a campus would be at a computer or a cellphone at a given time. Students may be playing Frisbee on the quad or listening intently in class with their laptops closed and their cellphones set to silent. "Then you have athletes," said Richard W. Schneider, president of Norwich University. "You're not carrying your BlackBerry when you're playing football." Many colleges have decided that the old-fashioned approach of using sirens should be part of the mix of emergency-response technologies. Companies originally designed the high-powered systems to be used on military bases, or at industrial plants where hazardous spills were possible.

"National 9-1-1 Education Month" Resolution Passes Senate (US Congress, 4/10)
The United States Senate last night passed by unanimous consent, Senate Resolution 468, sponsored by Senators Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), which designates April 2008 as "National 9-1-1 Education Month." The resolution recognizes the importance of educating citizens about the proper use of the 9-1-1 system. Stevens noted that 9-1-1 education is crucial, as demonstrated by the story of 4-year-old Tony Sharpe, an Alaskan resident who dialed 9-1-1 when his mother lost consciousness during a gall bladder attack, essentially saving her life. Tony was recently presented with the Citizen in Action Award from the E-9-1-1 Institute. "9-1-1 calls are a lifeline for those in danger and are essential for our public safety personnel to respond quickly to emergencies," said Senator Stevens. "Designating April 2008 as National 9-1-1 Education Month recognizes the important need to educate all Americans about the proper use of 9-1-1." "In an emergency, knowing how to correctly use 911 can mean the difference between life and death. Effective 9-1-1 education can save lives, aid our first responders, and keep our communities safe," Senator Clinton said. "We should do all we can to educate the public about this vital service and I am pleased that the Senate has passed this resolution and has designated April and National 911 Education Month." Highlights of Senate Resolution 468 include:

- Public awareness events, including conferences and media outreach, training activities for parents, teachers, school administrators, other caregivers and businesses;
- Educational events in schools and other appropriate venues; and
- Production and distribution of information about the 9-1-1 system designed to educate people of all ages on the importance and proper use of 9-1-1.

TX Community Offers CERT in Spanish (Houston Chronicle, 4/10)

Ever since Andres "Gunny" Ortiz completed Community Emergency Response Team training in late 2006, he's been working to get the rest of his Denver Harbor community trained, too. CERT is a Federal Emergency Management Agency program designed to prepare participants for times of disaster. "Every person should have the opportunity to learn survival skills, whether it's for their personal use or in the event of a catastrophic event, and they serve others," said Ortiz, coordinator and trainer for the Denver Harbor CERT team. These days, Ortiz is getting the word out about Denver Harbor's first CERT course in Spanish. "We all need to be able to take care of one another," said Ortiz, a retired U.S. Marine who works as a letter carrier. The free Spanish-language CERT class will meet 6-9 p.m. Thursdays, beginning today through May 29, at the Denver Harbor Civic Center, 6402 Market St. The program is open to all Harris County residents, age 18 and older. Teens ages 15-17 can participate, too, if a parent or guardian accompanies them.

'Active' hurricane season forecast: predictions downplayed (Orlando Sentinel, 4/9)

The Colorado State University professor who pioneered the science of seasonal hurricane forecasting is predicting another active season _ amid growing questions about the value of such long-range prognostications. With much fanfare from a weather conference in the Bahamas, William Gray and associate Phil Klotzbach on Wednesday predicted 15 named storms would develop during the six-month season beginning June 1. They forecast eight will blossom into hurricanes, and four will reach at least Category 3 strength, with winds exceeding 110 mph. Federal scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are poised to make their own seasonal predictions next month. But if National Hurricane Center officials have any sway, that forecast will debut with far less hype than in years past. The reason: The center's specialists so question the value of seasonal outlooks that its new director, Bill Read, has asked their parent agency to de-emphasize its forecast, especially on the number of storms expected. They are concerned that hurricane-vulnerable residents rely on the long-range predictions of above- or below-average activity when preparing for an upcoming season. That, the forecasters say, is folly, as Hurricane Andrew painfully demonstrated. The catastrophic Category 5 killer walloped south Miami-Dade in 1992, a year that Gray had accurately predicted would bring below-average hurricane activity. "Ignore the seasonal outlooks," said James Franklin, a veteran hurricane specialist at the center, when asked his best hurricane tip. "The bottom line is, it's a curiosity but doesn't affect what people should do. I think most of us have felt for some time it was getting too much attention _ more than it deserved."

Nationwide cellphone alert system in the works (USA Today, 4/9)

Federal regulators as early as today are expected to take a major step toward development of a nationwide emergency alert system that would send text messages to cellphones and other mobile devices wherever a crisis occurs. Lack of a simple way to deliver vital warnings to residents has hindered emergency response in disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, recent college-campus shootings, and a spate of devastating tornadoes in the Southeast in February. The Federal Communications Commission is slated to establish technical standards and other requirements that for the first time would make such

communication possible, two FCC officials say. The officials requested anonymity because commissioners have not yet voted on the plan. Although wireless carriers would not be required to upgrade their networks to accommodate the alerts, those that agree to participate would have to implement the FCC's standards. All four national cellphone providers -- AT&T, Verizon, Sprint Nextel and T-Mobile -- said they almost certainly will take part if the FCC adopts an advisory committee's recommendations on how the system would work. The agency is expected to approve those proposals, which, among other things, would initially limit warnings to the English language and 90 characters in length, officials say. "We look forward to offering mobile emergency alerts to our customers," says Jim Bugel, assistant vice president of federal affairs for AT&T. The network is expected to be up and running by 2010.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

City on stilts rises in post-Katrina era (Newhouse News, 4/9)

The image of a city on stilts has slowly crept into the landscape of this coastal town with each new house built higher than its predecessor wiped out by Hurricane Katrina. New federal flood elevation maps in Mississippi would require construction of some buildings even higher off the ground, with elevations of more than 26 feet above sea level in some areas of the state's coastline. "They said it's going to help, but I don't think so," said Mike Bowser, a 62-year-old Pass Christian native, standing on the porch of his new house, about 11 feet off the ground. "If we get another Katrina, I don't care how high, that wind and water will tear the house down again." Local authorities in Mississippi must adopt FEMA maps this year for residents to remain eligible for federal flood insurance. The maps show areas with at least a 1-in-100 chance of flooding each year and designate required elevations for buildings. Some officials in Mississippi have expressed concern that higher elevations and expanded flood zones could hamper development in towns where Katrina wrought devastation, leaving only concrete slabs where many houses and shops stood. Coastal development experts, meanwhile, say that as a general rule, higher elevations often prevent buildings from being destroyed in floods and make communities more resilient to storms.

FEMA Agrees to Pay Firefighter Overtime (PR Newswire)

International Association of Fire Fighters General President Harold A. Schaitberger today issued this statement on the decision by FEMA to reimburse hurricane-affected communities for the overtime that fire fighters worked in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005: "First responders stepped up and worked tirelessly in adverse conditions to help victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita stranded by flood waters. Their communities did the right thing by paying fire fighters for every hour they worked. "Unfortunately, FEMA's arcane rules allowed the agency to reimburse communities for just eight hours of overtime a day for each fire fighter. But first responders worked around the clock in their flood-ravaged parishes, town and cities in the Gulf Coast to rescue those who were stranded and get them to safety. "This agreement to reimburse communities is fair, even if it's long overdue, and the IAFF was proud to work with Senator Mary Landrieu in this fight," President Schaitberger said.

FEMA agreed on March 24 to repay Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, fire departments for about \$542,000 in overtime pay accumulated during the first 14 days after Hurricane Katrina. But there were no other agreements in place until now to reimburse other cities for overtime costs. With the overtime issue resolved, more challenges remain. "Finding funding to rebuild fire stations - especially in Saint Bernard Parish - destroyed by the August 2005 hurricane and ensuring that first responders who were exposed to toxic flood waters and other environmental hazards continue to receive medical monitoring and the necessary medical treatment are needs that must be met by the federal government," President Schaitberger said.

N.O. criticized for hasty demolition process post-K (N.O. City Business, 4/8)

When Michael Duronslet arrived at the corner of St. Ferdinand and North Galvez streets and saw only a plot of reddish-brown dirt where before there had been a boarded-up home, his first thought was he was standing on the wrong block. "When I got there, the house was down and I was like, 'Am I at the wrong place?'" said Duronslet, a longtime friend of the house's late owner, Paul Fernandez, who had owned the house at 2138 St. Ferdinand St. before he died several years ago. Duronslet was at the right place. The land is bald where Fernandez's home once stood thanks to a demolition order issued by the city in July and acted on more than a year later, according to city documents. The modest, one-story bungalow was bulldozed even after the family contested the demolition in a letter sent to the city that explained a plan to rehab the intact structure, Duronslet said. "I called the number on the letter they sent and someone told me it had been taken off the demolition list," said Duronslet, who works as a caretaker for the family. "I called back a few months later and they said it's OK, but we better take another picture of it boarded up. The next day I went to take the picture and the house was down. " The Fernandez family is the newest plaintiff in a federal class action lawsuit filed against Mayor C. Ray Nagin and his administration in August by a Lower Ninth Ward pastor and five New Orleans homeowners. They claim the city illegally ordered the demolition of their salvageable homes under a law created after Hurricane Katrina to allow the city to tear down properties in danger of collapse without going through a lengthy public appeals process. Under the law, a structure can be demolished within 30 business days of the first citation as an "imminent health threat" with a lien placed on the tract for the cost of the work. Since February, the demolitions have been managed by two city-contracted private companies - Beck Disaster Recovery of Seattle and DRC Emergency Services of Mobile, Ala. The companies took over a job the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started after Katrina. The demolition contracts total \$40 million, a cost FEMA agreed to cover under a commitment that expires Aug. 29.

FEMA: More than 18,000 trailers remain in Louisiana (N.O. City Business, 4/8)

The number of government-issued trailers in Louisiana has fallen 37.2 percent since a phase-out of the units began Nov. 26, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As of last Tuesday, there were 18,176 trailers and mobile homes serving as post-hurricane housing in the state, down from 28,978 in November, FEMA said. The figures include group sites and units on private property. FEMA has stepped up efforts to remove families from the trailers amid concerns about high levels of formaldehyde in them. Trailer figures by parish show 6,360 in Orleans Parish, down from 10,471 Nov. 26; St.

Prepared by Project TADS for the Corporation for National and Community Service

Bernard, 2,176, down from 3,376; St. Tammany, 2,151, down from 3,206; Jefferson, 1,333, down from 3,138; and Plaquemines, 1,696, down from 2,365.