

Disaster News Update – March 31 to April 6, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Building Collapse:** Michigan, Illinois
- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Texas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware
- **Explosion / Structure Fire:** Florida (Propane)
- **Fire:** Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri (warning), Illinois (warning), Oklahoma (warning), Arkansas, Vermont (warning)
- **HAZMAT:** North Carolina (Gas Station Leak), Arizona (chemical spill), South Carolina (Hazmat Tanker Accident)
- **Heavy Rain:** Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Vermont, Tennessee, South Carolina,
- **Mudslide:** Missouri, Illinois
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Wisconsin, Minnesota
- **Strong Wind:** Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Vermont
- **Tornado:** Oklahoma, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri
- **Transportation:** Vermont (Bus Accident)

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

Classes help coordinate efforts after disasters (Sarasota (FL) Herald Tribune, 4/5)
Curt Hencye has been involved in enough natural disaster efforts to know what often happens. "A hundred people show up with rakes and water," he said. "Nobody shows up with food or clothes. Then you get to the point where you need to do drywall, and people are still showing up with chainsaws." He and his church, Calvary Chapel of Sarasota, are leading a local effort to help faith-based volunteers be more efficient in their disaster response. Relief Ministries of Calvary Chapel will lead disaster relief training camps today and April 12. Through ongoing outreach, Relief Ministries hopes to organize other

area churches into an effective network ready to respond within hours. "We're looking for anybody in our community that either has a desire to be involved in this kind of work, or is already involved," Hencye said. "You may have no experience; you may have been doing it for years. What we want to see is people coming together." Relief Ministries began in 2004, after Hencye and a group of Calvary Chapel members helped with relief efforts in Charlotte County following Hurricane Charley. That experience led Hencye to remain involved in disaster relief, and another church member to donate a trailer to the effort. Hencye devoted his full-time efforts to Relief Ministries after becoming self-employed about two years ago. Within the past year, he has helped with disaster relief in Florida's Lady Lake area, near Nashville, Tenn., and in Peru. The training camp Hencye will lead today and April 12 covers key tracks of disaster relief, such as mass feeding, medical relief, distribution, communication and counseling. Hencye brings not only his personal experience, but the training he received at a disaster relief camp in North Carolina.

MO Governor Highlights Faith Based Disaster Initiative (States News Service, 4/4)
Gov. Matt Blunt has built upon Faith-Based Missouri by highlighting the Faith-Based Missouri Disaster Relief Initiative as an avenue to increase cooperation between state government and faith and community-based groups in providing services to Missouri families during times of emergency. "The idea behind the Faith-Based Missouri Disaster Relief Initiative is to ensure that relief agencies and state agencies have developed coordinated plans and are prepared to assist Missouri families before disaster strikes," said the Governor. The Disaster Relief Initiative will help officials from the State Emergency Management Agency and other state and local government agencies create a stronger network of service providers in times of emergency. It will help churches and charities improve their understanding and execution of emergency planning. Last year Gov. Blunt unveiled Faith-Based Missouri, and charged a five-person team with studying how we can improve relations between state government and religious and secular charities. The team's charge and Faith-Based Missouri's goal is to find ways to partner with religious charities to make Missouri a better place for all Missourians. The governor and agency directors will rely on the Faith-Based Missouri team for guidance and suggestions as to how the state can better transform lives and empower Missourians. Several state agencies already have successful partnerships with faith-based organizations.

Noah's Wish helped the little victims of Katrina, wildfires (Sacramento Bee, 4/3)
In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Mari Donovan wanted to do something to help storm victims. On a friend's suggestion, the Citrus Heights resident headed for Slidell, La., to assist the animal rescue group Noah's Wish as a "convergent" volunteer. "That's someone who just shows up," Donovan explained. She stayed 47 days, caring not for preemie kittens, as she had expected, but for large dogs, ranging from 11 to 160 pounds. On Friday, Donovan was working as a volunteer coordinator for a three-day training session at the El Dorado County Fairgrounds in Placerville, helping active and prospective Noah's Wish volunteers prepare for the unexpected. During the weekend, about 60 people attended classes on topics ranging from fire awareness and safety, to neonatal care, livestock policies and handling, and medical concerns in a disaster shelter.

Taking a lunch break Friday, they headed for the parking lot, some gathering at picnic tables or at tailgate buffets. Out-of-town participants were instructed to bring their sleeping bags, air mattresses and a three-day supply of food and water. "Everyone will camp out, just like we do in the field," Donovan said. "We bring our own food. We can't be a burden on the communities that we serve." Mike and Lisa Freer of Shingle Springs said they would spend the night at home because they had to tend to their horses and other animals. They learned to rough it during last fall's San Diego-area wildfires, sleeping in their pickup cab or trailers. They became involved in Noah's Wish through their neighbors, who are veterinarians.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Horse owners unite for disasters](#) (Virginian-Pilot, 4/6)

Local horse owners hope to put the CART, or Community Animal Response Team, before the horses when a storm, fire or other emergency strikes Hampton Roads. CART, a new regional network of animal and agricultural resources to help horse owners before, during and after disasters, meets monthly in Chesapeake. Watson Lawrence, an extension agent and city agricultural director for Chesapeake, is spearheading the meetings to unite local horse owners in learning how to work with local emergency management personnel during a disaster. "We're in the beginning stages of getting this established, and we're not quite there," Lawrence said. "I'm looking for a couple of people to take this on and get it up and running." So far, three meetings have drawn an average of 17 horse owners. "One of my assigned tasks as an extension agent is to assist emergency management with dealing with large animals," Lawrence said. "We have to have a plan in place and be ready for any storm or other disaster that may involve evacuating and rescuing horses. "There is no fully developed plan in Virginia, but North Carolina has done a lot since Floyd came through and Isabel in our area," Lawrence said, referring to the 1999 and 2003 hurricanes. "Oftentimes databases are taken up by emergency management when a storm hits." People won't leave home, if they can't take animals with them, he added. "Hopefully before that happens we will have a group that can work effectively and cooperatively with emergency management personnel."

[First responders aid the vulnerable in WA](#) (Tacoma News Tribune, 4/4)

Communication is the key to making sure Pierce County's most vulnerable residents are taken care of during a disaster, health and emergency officials said at a forum Thursday. After a violent windstorm struck in 2006, Emergency Management director Steve Bailey was asked how many vulnerable people were in the county. "About 800,000," he said, meaning everyone. That's because calls were coming in from able-bodied people wanting firewood to be delivered and from private businesses looking for generators. "I don't have the staff to take care of 800,000 people," Bailey said. "We need to understand who the truly vulnerable are." Figures presented by county Human Services officials said 10 percent of the population was over 65 years old and another 21 percent was under 15. That's nearly one-third of the county. Thousands of people are in nursing homes. Thousands more receive mental health and medical care at home. Sheri Badger, the vulnerable-population coordinator for Pierce County Emergency Management, said plans

were being put into place to make sure everyone is taken care of in an emergency. "After several days without power (following the windstorm), a lot of lights went off -- or on," she said. Cindy Daniel, the national disability coordinator for FEMA, told the health and emergency workers at the forum that the government would help, but that the local responders were the front line. She said, "go kits" were being put into place to provide those with disabilities with smaller but necessary items to allow them to live at an emergency shelter. They would have bigger cups and longer straws for those with mobility difficulties; picture boards to help children, non-English speakers and those with disabilities communicate their needs; and poop bags for service animals.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Thousands still in the dark after tornadoes hit state (AP, 4/6)

An estimated 33,000 Mississippians are still in the dark two days after five tornadoes hit the central part of the state. Entergy spokesman Checky Herrington says at least 1,000 workers are trying to get power back on for more than 33,000 Entergy customers. He said that while nearly 200,000 more metro area customers lost power during Hurricane Katrina, Friday's storm caused more damage. Crews are being hampered by the unknown number of trees that have fallen. The National Weather Service has confirmed that five tornadoes attacked central Mississippi on Friday. The most powerful was an EF2 that began in extreme southern Madison County and thrashed through northeast Jackson before ending in northwest Rankin County. The tornado that hit Jackson carried winds up to 115 mph. It was an EF1 by the time it reached Rankin County. Hinds Emergency Operations Center Director Larry Fisher said Sunday he now estimates the number of damaged houses to be closer to 6,000 or 7,000 at a cost of between \$7 and \$10 million. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency is surveying damage, director Mike Womack said. To qualify for FEMA grants, the area must have about 100 uninsured homes with major damage, Womack said. To qualify for low-interest federal loans, the area must have about 25 uninsured homes with major damage. "We should know Monday," Womack said. "Based on what we've seen, we'll certainly have 25 homes." Herrington said most people should have their power back on by Wednesday.

At least four tornadoes in last bout of Arkansas storms (AP, 4/6)

At least four tornadoes ripped across central Arkansas during the state's most recent round of storms, forecasters said Saturday, as rising rivers elsewhere spurred new flooding fears. A team from the National Weather Service in North Little Rock said the first tornado Thursday night left a 2.7-mile path of destruction near Benton that ran through the Hurricane Lake Mobile Home Park. The second traveled about 2.6 miles along the ground just north of Bryant. The weather service estimated the strength of both tornadoes as an EF2 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale of tornado severity. That means the tornadoes had winds of 111 to 135 mph. A third tornado traveled about 8 miles along the ground just northwest of Benton. A fourth traveled through Little Rock, starting near Interstate 630 before crossing the Arkansas River to head into Burns Park in North Little Rock. The tornado in the capital city had a 4.8-mile path. The team rated the third and fourth tornadoes in the EF1 category, meaning both had winds of 86 to 110 mph. The

storm uprooted thousands of trees, blew the roofs off of houses and knocked power out to thousands. Dan Daugherty, a spokesman for Entergy Arkansas, said 4,700 customers statewide remained without power Saturday the majority in Little Rock and Cammack Village. He said officials hope to have power back in all areas Monday, but work remains slow as linesmen must put up new poles and string power lines in those areas. Gov. Mike Beebe has already declared five counties disaster areas after Thursday's storms Arkansas, Garland, Pulaski, St. Francis and Saline.

Doyle asks for federal aid for 4 counties hit by record snow (AP, 4/5)

Wisconsin is seeking federal disaster relief for four counties in addition to the eight already granted help covering costs related to the record snowfalls in early February. Gov. Jim Doyle asked FEMA to provide the relief for Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha and Lafayette counties because of their costs for emergency response to the storm of Feb. 5 and 6. Wisconsin Emergency Management provided additional documentation in requesting the aid. Federal assistance was granted last month for Dane, Dodge, Green, Jefferson, Milwaukee, Rock, Walworth and Washington counties. More than 200 local governments have applied for federal assistance.

Little Rock hit by destructive tornado (CNN, 4/4)

At least one tornado ripped through central Arkansas Thursday evening, savaging a mobile home park and sending National Weather Service forecasters into a bunker as the storm roared overhead. "There's pretty extensive damage in the Little Rock area," said John Lewis, a senior forecaster with the weather service at the North Little Rock Airport. At least four people were hurt, authorities said, but there were no reports of fatalities. "We went into our shelter," Lewis said. "We could hear it ... go by." The storm destroyed hangars at the North Little Rock Airport and tossed numerous small planes. The forecasters spent about three minutes in their shelter. "The scariest moment of my life," said Mike Aubrey, who was at the airport securing his plane ahead of the storm. "Debris was flying across the ramp. Planes were beginning to stack up." Aubrey said he saw a Douglas DC-3, an early passenger plane, spin around. The aircraft was nowhere to be found after the tornado passed, he said. The damage extended from southwest of Little Rock to the northeast. "There's some structural damage in the city of Little Rock and several areas north of North Little Rock," said John Rehrauer, spokesman for the Pulaski County Sheriff's Department. "A lot of trees and power lines are down."

Two Additional KY Counties Approved For Disaster Assistance (FEMA, 4/2)

Two additional counties affected by the severe storms and flooding of Feb. 5-6 are now eligible for disaster infrastructure assistance, according to FEMA and the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM). Harrison and Nicholas County have been added to the Feb. 21, 2008 major disaster declaration. Eighteen counties 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 Feb. 5-6 storm. The initial counties

eligible for Public Assistance are: Adair, Allen, Bath, Carlisle, Casey, Estill, Franklin, Grayson, Hardin, Meade, Mercer, Metcalfe, Monroe, Morgan, Muhlenberg, and Shelby.

Some areas in Arkansas remain underwater (AR Democrat Gazette, 4/2)

State emergency officials posted fliers in flood-ravaged areas of the state Tuesday aimed at helping flood victims obtain federal assistance as already swollen rivers rose again because of heavy rain. Teams from the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management hung the information at flooded homes that they could reach and at public places, such as city halls and restaurants, said David Maxwell, the department's director. Maxwell said his primary concern is to get assistance to people who have suffered losses to the flooding. "I tend to focus on the victims first," said Maxwell, who assessed damage from disasters for individuals before taking administrative roles with the agency. "If you've ever had someone break down and cry on your shoulder after a disaster, you don't forget it." Federal Emergency Management Agency teams toured Monroe, Boone and Sharp counties Tuesday to assess damage to roads, bridges and other infrastructure, agency spokesman Dan Martinez said. Teams have not been able to reach some areas, especially in southeastern Arkansas because of floodwaters. "We're trying to do preliminary damage assessments in the counties that are not declared [by President Bush] as disaster areas yet," Maxwell said. "In some areas, that will take awhile." Bush declared 35 Arkansas counties disaster areas last week. Those counties could be eligible for money to help fix roads, public buildings and housing. Residents could get money to help them defer costs of temporary housing, medical bills and moving. Martinez said he expected additional counties to be added as disaster areas, especially in southeastern Arkansas. The teams began in Northwest Arkansas because floodwaters dissipated there quickly.

More Missouri Counties Added For FEMA Aid To Individuals (FEMA, 4/1)

Preliminary damage assessments have been completed and 16 more counties have been added to the 19 counties already approved in Missouri for FEMA Individual Assistance. Today (April 1), Butler, Callaway, Cape Girardeau, Gasconade, Howard, Laclede, Madison, McDonald, Osage, Ripley, Scott, Shannon, St. Louis, Stoddard, Taney, and Webster counties were added to the March 19 Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for severe storms and flooding in the state. This means that residents and business owners in these counties may register immediately for help from FEMA. The 16 new counties bring to 35 the total number of counties approved for Individual Assistance. On March 27, FEMA approved aid in the following counties: Bollinger, Carter, Christian, Franklin, Greene, Iron, Jasper, Jefferson, Maries, Newton, Oregon, Phelps, Pulaski, Reynolds, St. Francois, Stone, Texas, Washington and Wayne. Already, 814 households have registered for assistance and \$1.3 million has been approved in aid to individuals.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Florida Seeks Break On Hurricane Shelter Rule (Tampa Tribune, 4/5)

Florida officials are urging top federal emergency managers to give the state a break on tougher national standards that would require hurricane shelters to be tornado-proof. Florida's U.S. senators and House members also are being asked to exert their influence

on FEMA. "Florida historically has never had a need to shelter for the winds associated with a tornado," said John Cherry, a spokesman with the Florida Division of Emergency Management. The added costs of meeting the new FEMA guidelines, state officials say, already threaten the current construction or planning of at least seven hurricane shelters in six Florida counties -- including one in Hillsborough County and two in Pasco County -- as hurricane season approaches. The Brandon Community Advantage Center in Hillsborough County was to house one of the planned emergency evacuation shelters, with ground scheduled to be broken in May or June.

Forecasters Say Storms May Be Fierce (Disaster News Network, 4/5)

The new hurricane forecast will be ready later this week, but one announced earlier in December already suggests it could be a busy season in the Atlantic. Dr. Bill Gray, who leads a team of scientists at Colorado State University, has already predicted that 13 tropical storms will hit the region and seven of those will become hurricanes with winds of around 111 miles per hour. "We don't think that number is going to drop," Gray said, speaking here from the U.S. National Hurricane Conference. A La Nina has been cooling waters in the eastern Pacific and that increases the chance of hurricanes in the Atlantic. On the other side of the Atlantic, off the Iberian and African coasts, sea surface temperatures are very warm, conditions similar to 1995 and 2005, both busy seasons. Gray is not blaming global warming for the surge in storms which has affected the North American coastlines for many years. Instead, he said, it is a natural occurrence. "We've been in an active period for 13 years, and we'll be in it for another 15-20 years -- but we don't know," he said.

Report: In disaster, forget FEMA, find home store (UPI, 4/4)

If a major disaster strikes, a U.S. researcher says to forget FEMA and head to a local big-box chain. Steven Horwitz of St. Lawrence University examined federal and private responses to Hurricane Katrina and says that FEMA was destined to fail and for-profit firms succeed at disaster recovery. "Disaster response happens at the local level," Horwitz says in a statement "FEMA is not local to anyone except people who live in Washington." The study, published by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, found that Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's made use of their local knowledge about supply chains, infrastructure, decision-makers and other resources to provide emergency supplies. These big-box chains reopened stores well before FEMA began its response, Horwitz says. The chains gave tremendous discretion to store managers and employees to make decisions rather than waiting for instructions from upper-level management, allowing for more agile disaster response, Horwitz says. The study is called "Making Hurricane Response More Effective: Lessons from the Private Sector and the Coast Guard during Katrina."

Full Report: <http://www.mercatus.org/EffectiveHurricaneResponse>.

Philadelphia reveals new evacuation plan (Philadelphia Enquirer, 4/4)

For the first time since the Cold War, Philadelphia has a plan for how to evacuate any part of the city - or even all of it. Today, Mayor Nutter will unveil the result of a yearlong effort to map out citywide evacuation routes that will give anyone living or working in the city a better idea of what to do after a catastrophe. The plan was

prompted by the chaos in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. At the time, Philadelphia officials disclosed that the city did not have a comprehensive evacuation plan for moving masses of people out of harm's way. The plan will be a critical tool for emergency responders and fill a big hole in the city's disaster preparedness, said MaryAnn Marrocolo, Philadelphia's deputy managing director for emergency management. The evacuation plan outlines which roads will be used for what purposes: pedestrians, emergency vehicles, mass transit, private cars or a combination. The city also is releasing a special evacuation plan for high-rise buildings. That plan identifies 14 places throughout Center City where evacuees would go for directions or emergency help. Each high-rise is assigned an emergency rallying point in an area like a park, a sports field or open space. Today, too, the city will announce a service for people to get text messages or e-mail with emergency instructions.

Predicting hurricanes is tough work, experts say (South FL Sun Sentinel, 4/4)

For two years running, the forecast team at Colorado State University has botched its long-term outlook for the upcoming hurricane season. So should anybody pay attention in 2008? "It's tough to tell you what the future's going to be; try it," William Gray, who heads the team, told the final session of the National Hurricane Conference on Friday. In 2006 and 2007, Gray and his assistant, Phil Klotzbach, predicted busy seasons, and both years turned out to be about average. Last year, the Coloradans were particularly under the gun because they predicted a very eventful season with up to 17 named storms, including nine hurricanes. Instead, 14 storms, six of them hurricanes, emerged. Just the same, many of the tropical weather experts who attended the five-day hurricane conference said Gray is recognized as a top-notch atmospheric scientist, and that they listen when he speaks. "He's done a lot of tremendous research that goes far beyond seasonal forecasting," Jack Beven, a senior hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center in Miami-Dade County, said. "By in large, he's had a long, distinguished career." Craig Fugate, Florida's emergency management director, said the problem isn't inaccuracy in Gray's big-picture, long-term outlooks; it's that people read them expecting to learn whether a hurricane will be bearing down on their front door. "I never heard Dr. Gray advertise that this is how you should use his forecasts, whether you should get ready or don't get ready," Fugate said. Gray and Klotzbach are to release their updated 2008 forecast Wednesday at another hurricane conference on Grand Bahama Island. In December, they initially called for 13 named storms, including seven hurricanes, in the six-month season that begins June 1.

FEMA liquidates its free ice policy (LA Times, 4/3)

Don't expect to get free ice anymore from the federal government after a hurricane, the FEMA chief said Wednesday. That was the first major announcement from FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison during his visit to the National Hurricane Conference here. And when the leader said he intended to resign soon, it quickly created a media stir. Paulison issued a swift clarification, saying he planned to step down by the time the Bush administration ended its tenure in January, which he noted was standard Washington protocol. He said he might go sooner -- but not before the 2008 hurricane season ends in November. "I wouldn't leave during hurricane season," Paulison said. Before taking the helm at FEMA, Paulison spent 30 years with the Miami-Dade County Fire Department,

the last 10 as its chief. In the last six of those, he also was the county's emergency management director. President Bush appointed Paulison in September 2005 to replace Michael Brown, the former FEMA chief who became the focal point of blame for the agency's failures in Hurricane Katrina. Those blunders were underscored by thousands of homeless New Orleans residents begging for food, water and ice in the days and weeks after the Aug. 29, 2005, storm left most of the city under water. In Katrina's aftermath, Paulison set about changing the agency's culture -- to the point that he called it "the new FEMA." He doubled the agency's full-time staff, to about 3,400 workers, as well as its budget, to about \$9 billion.

Hurricane evacuations not always simple, officials say (South FL Sun Sentinel, 4/2)

Sally Bishop, emergency management director in Pinellas County on Florida's west coast, has found a creative way to encourage coastal residents to heed evacuation orders, should a hurricane approach. During the calm of last year's tropical storm season, her department put banners on county cherry-picker trucks, showing how high the level of the Gulf of Mexico would rise as a hurricane closed in. The trucks then drove around the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Because some low-lying areas near Clearwater would disappear under a whopping 24 feet of storm surge in the event of a Category 5 hurricane, the banner trucks really grabbed people's attention, she said. In Florida and other hurricane-prone states, getting coastal residents to evacuate has become one of the most difficult tasks facing emergency managers. The problem: Too often, people don't hear evacuation orders. Or they ignore them because they feel their homes are safe, Jay Baker, a professor of behavioral geography at Florida State University, said during a conference workshop. Because evacuations are a stressful and frequently costly experience for residents and businesses, emergency managers are in the tricky position of ordering them only when absolutely necessary. They must rely heavily on the predictions of the National Hurricane Center in Miami-Dade County before making their call.

Rivers in Midwest Keep Rising (Disaster News Network, 3/31)

The White River in Arkansas could reach historic levels this week. The devastating damage that has already ripped through the state held steady over the weekend, Renee Preslar of the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management said, but more rain is expected Monday night. But the White River is just one of many rivers across the Midwest that is expected to reach levels that could surpass records set 25 years ago. "We're just holding our breath on that right now," Preslar said. The water in the White River is being pushed higher by swollen rivers upstream in Missouri where flash flood warnings and watches have been issued in 67 of the state's 114 counties. While thousands of people have fled their homes from the floods in Missouri, Ohio and Southern Illinois, the waters continue to rise and threaten cities and towns in Arkansas as the swollen rivers to the north push the waters downstream. Two breaches in a levee on the Black River, a tributary to the White River, near Pochahontas were repaired last week and held over the weekend. The levee is more than six decades old and hadn't been maintained as well as it should have been, she said, but with the repairs that have been made this spring, it should hold against additional water. The breaks did allow water through in a few outlying areas, but there was no damage to buildings and no harm to any people there, Preslar said.

Tornadoes Damage Midwest Homes (Disaster News Network, 3/31)

Residents of an Oklahoma City suburb were cleaning debris, tarping damaged roofs and marveling that they and their neighbors survived without injuries when a tornado storm struck about 1:20 Monday morning. Twelve homes in the Valencia Subdivision near 182nd and Pennsylvania in north Edmond were the heaviest damaged, said Tim Wheeler, Edmond Chief of Fire Prevention. "We were very fortunate no one was injured," he said. The storm knocked out power for more than Edmond's 6,600 homes for several hours, said Charlie Burgett, Edmond Electric Utility director. Flooding from the severe storms and heavy rains caused many problems for commuters Monday morning. A woman was rescued from her car at the flooded intersection. The Highway Department was placing road blockades prevent drivers from entering flooded areas. One of the heaviest damaged houses in the Valencia Subdivision was the home of a woman and her two four-year-old twins. They were in their home when their roof was blown off, but they were not injured. "The woman has been attending our church for the past three weeks," says Carrie Kelly, a spokesman for a 4,000-member LifeChurch.tv campus located near the entrance to the subdivision. "We were with her Monday morning, seeing how we could help."

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Landrieu blasts FEMA's 'moderate' progress (The Advocate, 4/5)

Though FEMA has made "moderate" progress over the past 2½ years, the agency is years away from being able to handle a catastrophe the likes of Hurricane Katrina and a Louisiana senator said that is unacceptable. The conclusion was made in a report and testimony issued Thursday by DHS Inspector General Richard Skinner, who studied the organization for nine areas of disaster management. Skinner told the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee that the FEMA is positioned to perform well in responding to non-catastrophic or "garden variety" disasters. "However, it still has much to do to become a cohesive, efficient and effective organization to prepare for and respond to the next catastrophic event," Skinner testified. U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu is a member of the committee that Skinner and FEMA officials testified before on Thursday. Skinner gave FEMA a mark of "moderate" progress in the areas of overall planning; coordination and support; interoperable communications; pre-positioning of necessities; and having contracts in place with providers. FEMA received a grade of "modest" progress in the areas of evacuation preparedness; establishing a national housing strategy; and managing a disaster work force. The agency received its lowest mark of "limited" progress for improving staffing and training and enhancing management of mission assignments. FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison said the report was validation of the agency's effort to improve. Landrieu, however, criticized the agency for not achieving the highest available mark of "substantial" progress. She said the administration lacks the urgency necessary to improve the agency.

LA streamlines FEMA reimbursement process for parishes (CityBusiness, 4/3)

One month after the state implemented a new system to speed up reimbursements to hurricane-affected governments, the wait time has been cut by about 70 percent, from as high as 60 days to just a week. The administrators of the new program, the Louisiana

Recovery Authority and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, today said nearly \$102 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency funds have been paid to various government applicants throughout the state since the Express Pay System kicked off March 3. Since the program began, applicants have requested more than \$146 million in FEMA Public Assistance funds and the state has paid \$102 million, a nearly 70 percent disbursement rate, the LRA said. It now takes an average of six days for reimbursement. Previously, the reimbursement process averaged between 45 and 60 days. "We continue to look for common sense solutions to increase the flow of recovery dollars to local governments," LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater said. "By reducing the time local governments have to wait for reimbursements from the state, we are doing our part to ensure the return of long-term, brick-and-mortar infrastructure to south Louisiana." Prior to the Express Pay System, the weekly average of state payouts was about \$20 million. Now, weekly payouts have been increased by 90 percent to \$38 million. "The Express Pay Program has given the applicants the ability to move forward with projects in a more timely manner, as reimbursement time has been decreased by more than 70 percent," said Mark Riley, assistant deputy director of disaster recovery for GOHSEP. "We are very pleased with the results we have seen within the first month of implementing the program."

FEMA allows report deadline to pass (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/2)

FEMA on Tuesday missed a second deadline for producing its plan, in the works since the 2005 hurricanes, for housing displaced victims of the next major American disaster. The congressionally mandated report was supposed to be finished last June. Criticized for the delay, a top FEMA official promised at a hearing last month that it would be ready by April 1. It is now unclear when it will be done. The overdue housing report is the latest in a string of busted deadlines that had been imposed by Congress in landmark disaster legislation passed in 2006. The law was designed to remake the nation's disaster response and prevent a repeat of the mistakes exposed by Hurricane Katrina. "This has ramifications much greater than south Louisiana or Mississippi or the Gulf Coast," Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., said. "This dragging the feet, incompetence and lack of focus has serious consequences for future disasters where people think they are safe and are not."