

Disaster News Update – April 21 to 27, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee
- **Earthquake:** Nevada, Oregon
- **Explosion / Structure Fire:** Florida (Repair Shop Explosion)
- **Fire:** California, New Mexico, Michigan, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Arizona, Texas
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Iowa, Wisconsin (warning), North Carolina (warning)
- **Hail:** Texas
- **HazMat:** Montana (Gas Spill), Maryland (Highway Accident)
- **Heavy Rain:** Wisconsin, Iowa, Louisiana, Tennessee
- **Landslide:** California
- **Mudslide:** Minnesota
- **Rockslide:** Nevada
- **Snow:** Minnesota
- **Strong Wind:** Wisconsin, Texas, Michigan
- **Structure Fire:** Connecticut (Apartment Complex)
- **Tornado:** Wisconsin, Texas, Maryland
- **Transportation:** Tennessee (Train Wreck)

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Ohio](#): Snow (4/24)
- [Arkansas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (03/26)
- Fire Declarations: [New Mexico \(4/21\)](#), [Texas \(4/16\)](#), [Colorado \(4/16\)](#), [Texas \(4/10\)](#), [Texas \(4/1\)](#), [Texas \(3/27\)](#), [Oklahoma \(3/21\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Women Volunteers “Get Dirty for Jesus” In Texas (DNN Volunteer News, 4/27)

A group of 47 women from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recently built a house for Jesus. The group of church members from around the United States and Canada spent five days in Beaumont, TX (just north of Port Arthur) to continue rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Rita which devastated the area in 2005. "The damage there is still tremendous," Carl Zerweck, director of the church's Vision Builders ministry, said. "New Orleans needs a lot of help and New Orleans is getting a lot of help. But everyone has forgotten about the victims of Rita." Zerweck said there are "very few" people responding to the Beaumont and Port Arthur areas where there are still families in need of repairs and housing. He said the Disciples of Christ have had a presence there since a month after the hurricane hit and have been working where they are needed for more than two years. When Adonna Bowman, who leads the Office of Disciple Women, met with her constituents recently they told her that they wanted to find hands-on mission work to do. Bowman approached Zerweck and he suggested a Habitat for Humanity house in Beaumont that was scheduled for construction.

California Volunteers Introduce Disaster Preparedness Program (PR News, 4/24)

"As a mother of four children, I realize how important it is that WE Prepare for disasters as a family," said Maria Shriver. "We cannot afford to wait for the next disaster to hit before we take steps to Get Ready! I encourage families to visit CaliforniaVolunteers.org and download the WE Prepare tools today so everyone will know what to do before the next disaster strikes." WE Prepare features easy-to-use disaster preparedness tools on CaliforniaVolunteers.org, such as:

- A customizable children's story designed to teach children how to be disaster prepared in a fun, non-threatening way;
- A fill-in-the-blank family plan that tells families where to meet if they have to evacuate, who they've identified as an out-of-state "family contact," how to get emergency information in their community how to take care of their family's unique needs such as infants, and pets;
- A risk assessment to help determine a family's current level of preparedness.

Since 1950, 255 states of emergency have been proclaimed in California. Since 1989, there have been 27 major declared disasters. Despite this threat of unexpected disasters, less than half of Californians have a disaster plan. WE Prepare is designed to make it easy for families to take the necessary steps to become disaster ready. "California is a disaster-prone state -- a state where wildfires, earthquakes, winter storms and even man-made disasters can happen without warning," said Karen Baker, Governor Schwarzenegger's newly-appointed secretary of service and volunteering. "When families are well prepared, they can become part of the solution so disaster workers can focus on those most in need." As part of the Los Angeles-area WE Prepare disaster preparedness pilot program, CaliforniaVolunteers has created a "Moms Brigade," a group of more than 100 mom advocates who are charged with spreading the word to other moms about the importance of being disaster prepared. These moms are empowering fellow moms and their families to visit <http://www.CaliforniaVolunteers.org> and complete a family disaster plan. The WE Prepare disaster preparedness initiative will initially be piloted in the greater Los Angeles area during the month of April. By the end of 2008, CaliforniaVolunteers plans to expand the initiative statewide.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

'Touch a Truck' program planned for kids (Connecticut Post, 4/24)

Police and fire departments often sponsor "Touch a Truck" programs for children, but the event the town's emergency personnel have scheduled Saturday is special. The event, which will go on at three different fire stations, is being held in recognition of Autism Awareness Month and is particularly designed for children with special needs and disabilities. "We're looking forward to having these children become acquainted with our people and equipment before they meet them at an emergency," Fire Chief Richard Felner said. Fairfield's Emergency Communications Center has prepared a "Special Needs Alert" form to provide emergency personnel with background information when dispatched to a home where a person with disabilities may live. "We're very excited about the program this Saturday," Police Chief David Peck said. "This is the first time we are having anything like this." Felner said officials hope the event will also give firefighters, police and emergency medical technicians the chance to find out from the families what

their needs are. "We're also hoping to learn from them and their families how we can better respond to their special needs," Felner said. The "Touch A Truck" event will take place Fire Stations 1, 2 and 3 because there are playgrounds next to the buildings. "These kids may be shy or reluctant to come to the firehouse," Felner said. "This way, they can come at their own pace, or just watch from where they are." In addition to fire trucks, there will be ambulances, police cruisers and motorcycles at each location. "Every single one of our officers have been through training as first responders, so they know how to deal with the children," Peck said. "This is an opportunity for us to interact with them, and for them to get to know what we're like."

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

1000 Evacuated from CA Wildfire (Disaster News Network, 4/27)

About 550 homes in Sierra Madre were evacuated Sunday as a wildfire burned out of control nearby. Firefighters, battling the fire as temperatures have soared to nearly 100-degrees say it may take days to control the fire which is burning in an area of dense brush. The fire which started about 3 PM Saturday has burned more than 400 acres in the Angeles Forest north of the city. Much of area has not been burned in more than 40 years. As temperatures are predicted to reach nearly 100-degrees today, Michael Bamberger, Sierra Madre Fire Department Battalion Chief, did not rule out more evacuations but said progress had been made to control the southern end of the fire closest to the city. According to the American Red Cross about 50 residents spent Saturday night in shelters and more are expected Sunday night. Sierra Madre is about 15 miles northeast of Los Angeles. It is one of several wildfires reported burning in California Sunday but the only one that has prompted evacuations. In New Mexico, fire crews were putting out hot spots as they try to contain the Trigo Fire. The nearly 5,000 acre fire, which has been burning for more than a week in the Manzano Mountains was just 60 per cent contained Saturday. At least nine weekend/summer homes have been burned by the fires and caused voluntary evacuations in two nearby towns.

Ky. residents recovering from tornadoes unhappy with FEMA (AP, 4/27)

Allen County Judge-Executive Bobby Young has a simple description of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "FEMA is a joke," Young said. That sentiment and variations on it can be heard commonly among southern Kentucky residents seeking to rebuild after a tornado blew through in February, killing five people, injuring 13 others and causing significant property damage. Multiple property owners say they have received rejection letters from FEMA telling them they don't qualify for help. Anyone with any level of insurance, even if it was not nearly enough to cover actual losses, was unable to receive any help, Young said. Instead, Allen County residents talk about the generosity of neighbors, while criticizing the federal agency's response to the deadly storm. Volunteers from all over the state came to Allen County to help clean debris in the storm's aftermath, Young said, but FEMA was not willing even to offer any reimbursement for the county's expense to dump the debris. "There were people from FEMA here for two weeks using computers, talking to people," Young said. "I guarantee they spent more than anyone in this area will receive. I can understand the disappointment of people in New Orleans and other places that have had natural disasters." FEMA, which has been increasingly under fire since Hurricane Katrina and its

aftermath in New Orleans in August 2005, is only designed to be a helping hand for people who have no other means of assistance, said Mary Hudak, external affairs officer for FEMA in Atlanta. The SBA provides far more funding to victims of disasters than FEMA, Hudak said. "FEMA will not make you whole (after a disaster). FEMA is meant to be a helping hand in recovery" she said.

Wildfires Cause California Evacuations (CNN.Com, 4/27)

A wildfire in Southern California that has scorched 270 acres and forced the evacuation of about 100 homes in neighborhoods might not be under control for days, officials said Sunday. Firefighters originally had hoped to have the blaze contained Sunday, but gusting winds late Saturday night kept the fire burning out of control and creeping toward nearby homes, said Elisa Weaver of the Arcadia Fire Department. The mandatory evacuation order came shortly before 11 p.m. The fire broke out on a hot, dry Saturday afternoon about 10 miles northeast of Pasadena, Weaver said. More than 100 hikers were escorted out of a forest by Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies, and Boy Scouts were evacuated from a camp, Weaver said. No injuries were reported. Containment was not expected for two to three days, Weaver said. "I think the biggest concern is this area ... has not burned in 10-plus years, so there's a lot of fuel up there for this fire," Weaver said. More than 200 firefighters were aided by a dozen engines, three water tankers and three helicopters as they took on the blaze, Weaver said. She said more air support was expected later Sunday morning.

Reno urged to prepare for worse as earthquakes continue (AP, 4/27)

Scientists urged residents of northern Nevada's largest city to prepare for a bigger event as the area continued rumbling Saturday after the largest earthquake in a two-month-long series of temblors. More than 100 aftershocks were recorded on the western edge of the city after a magnitude 4.7 quake hit Friday night, the strongest quake around Reno since one measuring 5.2 in 1953, said researchers at the seismological laboratory at the University of Nevada, Reno. The latest quake swept store shelves clean, cracked walls in homes and dislodged rocks on hillsides, but there were no reports of injuries or widespread major damage. Seismologists said the recent activity is unusual because the quakes started out small and continue to build in strength. The normal pattern is for a main quake followed by smaller aftershocks. "A magnitude 6 quake wouldn't be a scientific surprise," John Anderson, director of the seismological lab, said Saturday. "We certainly hope residents are taking the threat seriously after last night." But Anderson stressed there was no way to predict what would happen, and said the sequence of quakes also could end without a major one.

Twisters touch down in parts of Texas, damaging homes (AP, 4/25)

A storm system that spawned several tornadoes hammered parts of Texas, destroying or damaging more than a dozen homes near Fort Worth. Meteorologists determined Thursday that a tornado packing winds of up to 115 mph destroyed homes and knocked down trees in suburban Fort Worth a day earlier. That tornado hit Crowley, leaving a path of damage and debris less than a mile long and 100 yards wide, according to the National Weather Service. Four other tornadoes were confirmed from storms that swept across west and north Texas. Other than scrapes and scratches, no injuries were reported from the storms, which brought heavy rain, winds up to 70 mph and baseball-size hail in some counties. The worst damage appeared to be near Crowley, where four homes were

destroyed and nine damaged, said Melissa Patterson, Tarrant County emergency management officer.

Widespread Storm Damage in Texas (Disaster News Network, 4/24)

About 15,000 homes and businesses were left without power Wednesday night in Dallas and Fort Worth after powerful storms came through the area. The storms, which brought hail and lightening, also damaged about 20 homes in Crowley, in southern Tarrant County.” Damage assessments are still underway,” said Marty Nerren, chairman of Dallas County VOAD and director of emergency planning and branch operations for the Dallas Area Chapter of the American Red Cross. Nerren said this area has been in hit in consecutive weeks, usually on Wednesdays or Thursdays, by similar storms, typical for this time of the year when warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico collides with cool air reaching down from the Rocky Mountains. Last week, softball-size hail bombarded Parker and Palo Pinto counties, west of Dallas and Ft. Worth, shattering windshields and breaking tree limbs. “(Parker and Palo Pinto counties) have been hammered during the last three weeks,” he said.

President Declares Emergency Federal Aid for Ohio (FEMA, 4/24)

FEMA announced that federal aid has been made available to supplement state and local response efforts in the area struck by record snow and near record snow during the period of March 7-9, 2008. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said federal funding is available to the state and eligible local governments in the counties of Ashtabula, Brown, Clermont, Clinton, Crawford, Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Geauga, Greene, Hardin, Huron, Lake, Morrow, Richland, Union, and Wyandot. Paulison said that federal funding is available on a cost sharing basis to save lives and protect public health, safety and property over a continuous 48-hour period during the incident period. Snow removal and emergency protective measures will be provided at 75 percent Federal funding. Paulison named Michael H. Smith as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area.

MS Governor asks for flood disaster declaration (AP, 4/24)

Gov. Haley Barbour is asking President Bush to declare a major disaster in four counties hit by the worst flood the region has seen in more than three decades. Barbour told Bush in a letter sent Thursday that 343 homes in Bolivar, Warren, Washington and Wilkinson Counties have been destroyed by flooding and backwater. He says the flooding damage is so severe state and local governments will require federal assistance. Barbour is asking FEMA to make grant money available to individuals and may soon ask for community aid.

Indiana appeals FEMA decision on flood aid (South Bend Tribune, 4/23)

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security on Tuesday sent a letter to the Federal Emergency Management Agency appealing a March 20 denial of federal assistance for northern Indiana counties affected by flooding earlier this year. Counties included are Elkhart, Marshall, Kosciusko, Starke, Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Jasper, Newton, Noble, Pulaski and White. Last week, Homeland Security, the Indiana Department of Transportation, FEMA and county officials performed preliminary damage assessments to quantify additional damage in those counties.

Counties Added To Arkansas Presidential Declaration (FEMA, 4/23)

More Arkansas counties were approved for additional federal disaster assistance making them eligible for Individual Assistance and Public Assistance, announced the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM) and FEMA. Eleven additional counties - Cleburne, Crawford, Jefferson, Lee, Miller, Phillips, St. Francis, Searcy, Sebastian, White and Yell - are now eligible for Individual Assistance (IA) and join the previously declared counties of Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Clay, Conway, Craighead, Cross, Franklin, Fulton, Garland, Greene, Hot Spring, Izard, Independence, Lonoke, Jackson, Lawrence, Logan, Madison, Marion, Monroe, Newton, Pope, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Scott, Sharp, Stone, Washington 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. Nine additional counties - Clark, Cleburne, Hot Spring, Lee, Little River, Mississippi, Phillips, Pike and Washington - are now eligible for Public Assistance (PA) (Categories A - G) and join the previously declared counties of Arkansas, Baxter, Boone, Carroll, Clay, Conway, Craighead, Crawford, Cross, Franklin, Fulton, Garland, Greene, Howard, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Logan, Lonoke, Madison, Marion, Monroe, Newton, Perry, Pope, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, St. Francis, Saline, Scott, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White, Woodruff and Yell. Examples of category A-G include expenses associated with debris removal, emergency protective measures, road systems and bridges, water control facilities, buildings including contents and equipment, utilities and parks and recreational areas. Three additional counties were previously declared for PA but for Category B only which is emergency protective measures. Those counties include: Benton, Faulkner and Nevada.

FEMA Aid Expanded in Missouri (FEMA, 4/23)

FEMA has expanded Public Assistance to include Douglas and Ozark counties. Public Assistance funding is available to state and local governments and certain private non-profit organizations. FEMA will fund 75 percent of eligible disaster-related debris removal and emergency protective measures (such as police, fire and medical), as well as permanent work that includes road and bridge repair, and repair and restoration of public buildings, utilities and recreational facilities. The counties authorized as eligible for Public Assistance are: Barry, Barton, Bollinger, Butler, Camden, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Cedar, Christian, Crawford, Dallas, Dent, Douglas, Franklin, Gasconade, Howard, Howell, Iron, Jefferson, Laclede, Lawrence, Madison, Maries, McDonald, Miller, Mississippi, Montgomery, New Madrid, Newton, Oregon, Osage, Ozark, Pemiscot, Perry, Phelps, Pulaski, Reynolds, Ripley, Saint Clair, Scott, Shannon, Stoddard, Stone, Taney, Texas, Washington, Wayne, Webster, and Wright.

New Mexico wildfire burns several homes near 2 towns (AP, 4/23)

A wind-fed wildfire went on a nail-biting run between two central New Mexico towns, destroying nine homes, nine outbuildings and two RVs, fire officials said. The flames jumped a fire contingency line, crossed the Cibola National Forest boundary onto private land and roared onto flatter land with grass and shrubs, fire officials said Monday. About 14,000 tons of fire retardant were dropped on the blaze as it burned a path through the towns of Manzano and Torreon. No injuries were reported. The fire, burning in the Manzano Mountains south of Albuquerque, was estimated at 3,750 acres, or half a square mile, and was fed by juniper, ponderosa pine and mixed conifer. More than 385 people

were fighting the blaze. "We are throwing everything we possibly can at this to hold it," said fire information officer Deanna Younger. Officials asked people to leave about 130 homes around Manzano and Torreon as the fire raced down the east side of the Manzano Mountains, doubling in size from Sunday afternoon to Monday morning. Although few people paid heed to the voluntary evacuations, they remained in effect Monday, said Younger. Evacuation centers were closed Monday because so few people showed up. "There is a possibility still that something could happen," Younger said. "Because we're dealing with Mother Nature we just want to be on the safe side." FEMA announced Monday it has authorized the use of federal funds to fight the fire. The aid covers 75 percent of firefighting expenses incurred by state or local governments.

Tornado Damage Surveys Conducted in MD (Baltimore Sun, 4/22)

Storm damage surveys continued late yesterday in the wake of Sunday's violent weather. But the count of tornadoes that raked parts of Maryland over the weekend remained at two. Storm damage reported in Towson, Lutherville and Hunt Valley fell far short of the criteria for tornadoes after a survey by Christopher Strong, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service's Baltimore-Washington Forecast Office in Sterling, Va. "We saw a couple of branches down," he said. "That was about the extent of it." But the damage patterns in Charles and Prince George's counties did indicate that two relatively weak tornadoes touched down there. Sunday's storms provided a curious prelude for a meeting in Linthicum of several hundred emergency management officials, who convened yesterday for the Maryland Emergency Management Agency's 23rd annual Severe Storms Awareness Conference. On the meeting's agenda: a talk titled "Tornado Damage Assessment - Recognizing the Signs." It was delivered by Strong and William Sammler, the warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Wakefield, Va., forecast office. After the meeting, Strong was dispatched to survey the Baltimore County damage. The storms also damaged Glyndon United Methodist Church and sparked a fire, the pastor said yesterday. The roof of the bell tower burned, but smoke and water damage were primarily confined to an area behind the sanctuary, said the Rev. Norman Obenshain. There were no injuries.

Guardsmen work on earthquake response after Midwest temblor (AP, 4/22)

Military rescue teams training to respond to a killer earthquake crawled through tons of broken concrete and twisted metal Monday to get a feel for what they'll face if a major temblor hits the central United States. And though the five-day training exercise for National Guard troops from four states had been planned for months, it took on a fresh urgency following a 5.2 magnitude quake and a series of aftershocks that rattled nerves across the region on Friday and through the weekend. The temblor, centered in southeastern Illinois, underscores the fact that earthquakes are "no-notice events," said Jim Bassham, director of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. "What we're doing here is to prepare for no notice because there'll be no notice," Bassham said as his agency joined in the training exercise centered at the National Guard armory at Millington, a small town north of Memphis. More than 1,700 National Guard personnel from Tennessee, Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri were taking part in the exercise that began Saturday. The training scenario assumed that a huge earthquake 7.6 magnitude had hit at Memphis, which is about 50 miles from the New Madrid Fault, a series of cracks in the earth's surface believed capable of producing major temblors. The Illinois quake,

centered in a largely rural area, caused little damage, though it reportedly could be felt from Nebraska to Atlanta.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Citizen and Community Preparedness Act of 2008 Introduced (States News, 4/25)
Rep. Henry Cuellar, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response released the following Statement of Introduction for H.R. 5890, The Citizen and Community Preparedness Act of 2008: "I rise today to introduce the Citizen and Community Preparedness Act of 2008, which reaffirms the Federal Government's commitment to helping our communities prepare for and respond to acts of terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies. The legislation I am introducing today formally authorizes the Citizen Corps Program and provides it with the necessary funding to be effective. It also authorizes key Citizen Corps components administered by the Department of Homeland Security - Fire Corps and CERT. Fire Corps promotes the use of volunteers to assist fire and rescue departments in non-operational roles such as fire safety outreach, youth programs, and administrative support. The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program concept was developed and implemented by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985 and has since spread to over 1,000 communities nationwide. This legislation will also create a pilot program to enhance citizen preparedness at primary and secondary schools, as well as on university or college campuses, by providing training, exercises, and public awareness campaigns. Finally, my bill directs the Secretary to carry out a public affairs campaign utilizing diverse media outlets to get the word out to the public to assist them in preparing for acts of terrorism and other emergencies.

FL shelter will host seniors and pets (Palm Beach Post, 4/24)
Senior citizens, and their furry friends, will have a special shelter from storms within two years. The Council on Aging of Martin County received a \$748,000 grant Wednesday from the state Department of Elder Affairs to fortify the proposed Charles and Rae Kane Senior Center on Salerno Road to make it a hurricane shelter. Barbara Kauffman, chief executive officer of the council, said the grant would pay for special wind-resistant windows, a kitchen and a sewage lift station to keep water and sewage flowing after a power outage. More importantly, it would pay for a 650-kilowatt generator to power the air conditioning and outlets for medical equipment. During a storm, the center could hold at least 200 people and will mainly be for senior citizens with special medical needs, she said. The council plans to build the \$10 million center by 2010. Seniors who go to the center seeking shelter from a storm won't have to go alone, Kauffman said. The council will spend some of the money to design a pet shelter so seniors can bring their dogs, cats and birds, she said. "Our experience in the last hurricanes was that you couldn't pry senior citizens out of their homes if they had pets," she said. "For the sake of getting them into a safer environment, we'll have a pet shelter." The council has raised \$9.7 million to build the center, including the grant, and will seek county development approval soon, she said.

NW quake zone growing (Tri-City Herald, 4/23)
The chances of a destructive earthquake in Washington state have increased slightly because of the discovery of two new major faults and revised calculations for a fault line

that runs from the Vancouver Islands to northern California. The newly released seismic hazard maps from the U.S. Geological Survey also show that what might be the state's most dangerous fault actually extends from south of Whidbey Island through Seattle's heavily populated northern suburbs to Woodinville and perhaps as far as North Bend. While none of the new faults are in South Puget Sound, they provide further evidence of the high earthquake hazard in Washington, among the highest in the nation. Western Washington and Oregon are laced with 100 or so known faults, and no one is sure how many more crisscross the region. More than 1,000 earthquakes occur in the state every year, including a magnitude 3.4 quake Monday in Snohomish as the updated maps were released. "These areas have a high earthquake hazard and these new maps reinforce that," said Art Frankel, a geophysicist at the USGS National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colo. One of the new faults identified is about 25 miles from Bellingham, not far from the Canadian border. Known as the Boulder Creek Fault, it is thought capable of producing a magnitude 6.8 earthquake and has been active over the past several thousand years. The main danger is to Abbotsford, B.C., a city of about 175,000, said Craig Weaver, the Pacific Northwest earthquake coordinator for USGS.

Innovative first-aid program focuses on mental health (Providence Journal, 4/22)

A woman in the supermarket is gasping for air, clutching her chest. A coworker often returns from lunch smelling of alcohol. A friend is having crying jags and won't leave the house. Any of these people could be in the throes of a mental health problem, perhaps a panic attack, alcohol abuse or depression. And chances are, those around them have no idea what to do. Today, Gateway Healthcare, a nonprofit mental health center in Pawtucket, will announce the launch of a pilot program to teach ordinary people that they can help, and exactly how -- the small steps one can take to help those who may be in a mental health crisis or developing a mental illness. Called Mental Health First Aid, it's a 12-hour course that teaches how to recognize and respond to mental and addiction problems in colleagues, friends and strangers. Mental Health First Aid was invented in Australia by a nurse and psychologist who realized that people are more likely to encounter someone stricken with anxiety than someone in need of CPR. The first Mental Health First Aid course was offered in 2000, and since then thousands of Australians have been trained. Now Mental Health First Aid is coming to the United States, under the auspices of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the national trade group for community mental health centers like Gateway.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

McCain tours battered N. Orleans (Deseret Morning News, 4/25)

John McCain directly confronted Thursday what many perceive as one of President Bush's most monumental failures: the bungled federal government response to Hurricane Katrina. In doing so, McCain, the not-yet-official Republican presidential nominee, hopes to convince Americans -- including blacks, Hispanics and working-class whites -- that he doesn't represent a continuation of the unpopular Bush administration. "Never again will a disaster of this nature be handled in the terrible and disgraceful way that it was handled," McCain told the media after taking a four-block walk to survey recovery efforts still under way in New Orleans' devastated Lower 9th Ward. This week, McCain's

ambitious It's Time for Action Tour took the GOP senator to several locales that not only tend to vote Democratic, such as New Orleans, but also are historically identified with liberal causes. He started Monday in Selma, Ala., speaking on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the scene of a violent 1965 attack on civil-rights marchers by baton-wielding Alabama police. By Wednesday he was in Inez, Ky., where in 1964 President Lyndon Johnson declared his War on Poverty.

Making a Home Away From Home for Hurricane Victims (NY Times, 4/24)

It was not long after Hurricane Katrina, in late 2005, that local governments all over Louisiana started saying no to clusters of the tinny white shelters now known, infamously, as FEMA trailers. They did not ban all the trailers, of course; just the ones for people who did not own land, who had no place else to go, who were mainly poor and black and from New Orleans's toughest neighborhoods. Just the trailers for the hurricane's most desperate victims. But when everyone else said no, Harold M. Rideau, the mayor of this small city outside Baton Rouge, said yes. "We agreed we'd do what's right," Mr. Rideau said recently. "It was a no-brainer as far as I was concerned." Of course, it was not as simple as that. But in large part because of the mayor, this city -- nestled rather uneasily between farm country and the state capital -- became home to Renaissance Village. With almost 600 trailers lined up like big tombstones, it was by far the largest encampment for hurricane victims run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Now, almost three years after the storm that left New Orleans under water, the trailer park is closing. FEMA's deadline is May 31. The number of trailers in the "village" is dwindling, to fewer than 200. White pipes mark trailer sites, but more than half of the pipes just poke up out of the weeds, with only muddy tire tracks or old Mardi Gras beads to show that anyone lived there. As the remaining residents worry about where they will go next, the mayor took time before a recent Rotary Club lunch to talk about the lessons he had learned and how he had become a champion for people who sometimes seemed to get a kinder welcome in Houston than they did in their home state. The biggest lesson from Baker's experience may be how few of the predicted problems actually materialized, which Mr. Rideau attributes to lots of planning. Early on, he came up with a long list of things that he felt the trailer community would need, including laundry facilities and legal services.