

Disaster News Update –December 10 to 16, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Maryland, West Virginia
- **Fire:** Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina
- **Flooding / Flash Flooding:** Kentucky
- **HAZMAT:** Virginia (Propane Tank Explosion)
- **Ice Storm:** Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Maryland
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Pennsylvania, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Indiana, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Kansas, Missouri,
- **Shooting Rampage:** Colorado
- **Structural Failure:** New York (Crane Collapse)
- **Structure Fire:** Connecticut

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Kansas:](#) Severe Winter Storms (12/12 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Missouri:](#) Severe Winter Storms (12/12 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Oklahoma:](#) Severe Winter Storms (12/10 - Emergency Declaration)
- [Washington:](#) Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (12/8)
- [Oregon:](#) Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (12/8)
- [Indiana:](#) Severe Storms and Flooding (11/30)
- Fire Declarations: [New Mexico \(11/21\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Out-of-state volunteers storm in to help out (Tulsa World, 12/14)

They're assisting residents who are staying in the Red Cross shelters. Texas native Ken Leonard has seen some ice storms in his life. "But this is the worst one I've ever seen," he said from the Asbury United Methodist Church shelter. Leonard is one of a growing number of out-of-state volunteers arriving to help in Tulsa's recovery effort. He is an AmeriCorps volunteer from Forney, Texas, and is the manager at the Red Cross Owasso emergency shelter at First Christian Church. "With a disaster like this, it is expensive," said Leonard, who served as county commissioner in Kaufman County, Texas. "Nothing can take the place of contributions. The Red Cross works entirely on contributions to help people get back on their feet." Tulsa residents have done an exceptional job as first responders, Leonard said. "We have the training for disaster response, but people here knew what to do without the training," Leonard said. "As neighbors, they instinctively knew how to help each other. And Tulsa has one of the best Red Cross chapters in the country. It has a good reputation." Leonard and fellow AmeriCorps volunteer Mary McGuckin arrived Wednesday and have worked nonstop. They plan to stay for at least a week.

Red Cross Volunteers Will Head to Kansas (WI State Journal, 12/14)

Two disaster relief volunteers with the Madison chapter of the American Red Cross will head to Wichita, Kan., today to help residents who were forced to leave home because of severe ice storms earlier this week. Dan Kehoe will be managing a local Red Cross shelter, according to a press release from the Badger chapter of the Red Cross, while Bill Nitzke will work as a liaison with the FEMA. The storm that hit the Plains states beginning Monday left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity as ice took down power lines and trees.

Tornado Sparks His Whirlwind Efforts (DNN Volunteer Network, 12/13)

On May 3, 1999, a tornado - clocked at 318 mph - struck Moore, Okla., destroying 250 homes, injuring scores of people and leaving four dead. The twister caused an estimated \$1 billion in damages. Jess Freeman of Moore says that day changed his life. "I saw the tornado coming, and I saw the horrendous damage it left behind," he said. "The next day I went over to the First Baptist Church where our disaster response team was giving food and shelter and other kinds of care to people who were left without a home or anything else to speak of." "That's when the Lord called me to help with disasters," Freeman said. Since then, he has been serving in the Southern Baptist disaster response effort. After retiring from the Federal Aviation Authority where he was an electronics technician, Freeman has had more time to help. He has been trained to serve on Southern Baptist chain saw gangs that remove fallen trees, to cook at the mobile kitchens that feed hundreds and to offer spiritual counsel to people who are grief-stricken. He has responded to forest fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes and other disasters nationwide. "I've been to New York, Florida, Louisiana, Arizona and California, as well as to disasters here in Oklahoma," he said. "I've seen a lot of hurting people, and I've seen the Lord working through lots of people to help them." Freeman is currently ministering in Oklahoma, which is beginning to recover from the most severe ice storm in the state's history.

Volunteers help Iowans recover from winter storm (Associated Press, 12/13)

Emergency volunteers continued to work Wednesday providing food, shelter and water to help thousands of people still without power, a day after a winter storm blanketed much of the state under a thick layer of ice. Iowa's two major utilities, MidAmerican Energy and Alliant Energy, reported about 19,000 customers still without power late Wednesday night. Most of those customers were expected to get power back by Thursday morning, officials said. Meanwhile, Gov. Chet Culver has declared disaster areas in Appanoose, Mahaska, Marion, Union and Wayne counties. The declaration allows the counties to receive state funds and services to help recover from the storm. In southern Iowa's Wayne County where power was out for much of the county, officials set up six shelters, said Bill Yeager, emergency management coordinator. "We're transporting people almost continuously right now," Yeager said. "In the rural areas, we've had the power companies tell us it'll be from three, to five, to seven days before we get it restored."

OK City, 9/11 survivors aid Katrina rebuilding effort (Newhouse News, 12/11)

Taking a break from floating drywall in a storm-damaged house in St. Bernard Parish, Priscilla Salyers said seeing the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina dredged up

memories of being pulled from the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. On April 19, 1995, Salyers was working in the U.S. Customs office on the fifth floor when she heard a deafening explosion. Then the floor gave way and Salyers tumbled to the basement, where she was pinned by the wreckage in a fetal position, unable to move except for her left arm. "I didn't realize the building had collapsed. I thought I'd had a seizure and was still sitting at my desk," she said. "I tried to reach for my computer but all I could feel was broken concrete and rebar." Salyers, 56, who suffered a punctured lung and broken ribs, was trapped for more than four hours before she was rescued. "When they carried me out on a stretcher, I could see the gaping hole in the building," she said. "I remember thinking, 'Oh, those poor people inside.' I was so disoriented that I didn't realize I was one of them." More than 12 years later, Salyers said she still hasn't fully come to grips with what happened. She has been wracked by bouts of depression and survivor's guilt because a co-worker who had been standing next to her was among the 168 people killed. The emotions were still too raw six years later when Salyers declined an invitation to join recovery efforts at the World Trade Center in Manhattan after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. But when she was recently asked to help rebuild homes in St. Bernard Parish, she jumped at the chance.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Lawrence residents aid areas in need (Journal World (KS), 12/14)

With area communities still struggling through the effects of this week's ice storm, Lawrence agencies and companies are lending a hand. "The biggest need right now is just taking people in who are too cold and just tired of being in their homes without power," said Jane Blocher, executive director of the Douglas County chapter of the American Red Cross. The local Red Cross sent 50 cots Wednesday to shelters in Jefferson County, where by Thursday evening more than 3,000 electric customers still were without power. Blocher had assembled a few Douglas County volunteers who were waiting for an assignment to staff shelters there. With most Douglas County power outages under control Thursday, Westar Energy assigned four Douglas County crews to help work in the Topeka area, said Erin La Row, a Westar spokeswoman. Teri Smith, Douglas County's emergency management director, said Thursday afternoon she was touching base with emergency-management officials in another county about going to provide assistance. Smith declined to name the county because she was still working out logistics. Sunflower Broadband sent four workers and two bucket trucks earlier this week to the St. Joseph, Mo., area to help a cable company restore service. "They're God's gift from above," said Bill Severn, chief operating officer for St. Joseph Cablevision.

Custer County, IA is StormReady (GovTech, 12/11)

Custer County, Idaho, and the communities of Challis, Mackay, and Stanley completed the NOAA National Weather Service StormReady program, better equipping the county to handle severe weather. The Custer County emergency management team fulfilled a rigorous set of warning and evacuation criteria, including the development of a formal hazardous weather plan. "Custer County is vulnerable to severe weather due to its vast topography of arid desert and rugged rocky mountains," said Rick Dittmann,

meteorologist-in-charge of the National Weather Service forecast office in Pocatello. "With the legendary Salmon River, Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area located within the county, the likelihood of the public encountering severe weather is greatly increased. Public awareness and preparedness are essential." Dittmann today presented a recognition letter and StormReady road signs to county officials during a ceremony at the Custer County commissioners' meeting. To be recognized as StormReady, a community must:

- Establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center;
- Have more than one way to receive severe weather forecasts and warnings and to alert the public;
- Create a system that monitors local weather conditions;
- Promote the importance of public readiness through community seminars;
- Develop a formal hazardous weather plan, which includes training severe weather spotters and holding emergency exercises.

The StormReady recognition expires in three years, after which the county will go through a renewal process.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

PA dealing with winter storm power outages (Associated Press, 12/16)

More than 137,000 customers in eastern Pennsylvania were without electricity, including 45,000 in the Harrisburg area alone, after a winter storm packing high winds, snow and rain swept through Pennsylvania over the weekend, officials said. The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency said the total was down from 160,000 earlier in the day. More than 45,000 customers were without power in the Harrisburg area because of falling trees, branches and ice, Pennsylvania Power and Light spokesman Jim Nulton said. PPL had restored power to more than 62,000 customers by Sunday evening in the company's 29-county area from Harrisburg to the Lehigh valley, Nulton said. He estimated that more than 900 jobs needed to be completed in the Harrisburg area, which might take until Wednesday evening. The situation was improving for MetEd customers in Berks, York and Lebanon counties. The company's Web site estimates that less than 30,000 people are without electricity. More than 3,800 Peco Energy customers are without power in the five-county Philadelphia area. State emergency management officials warned that more outages are possible with expected high winds. Wind gusts of up to 50 mph were expected into Monday morning, increasing the chance of falling frozen tree limbs and the potential for other outages. Wind chills down to zero were also forecast.

Big Winter Storm Pummels Northeast (AP, 12/16)

Motorists slid off roads Sunday across the Great Lakes states and into New England as a storm already blamed for three deaths cut visibility and iced over highways with a wind-blown brew of snow, sleet and freezing rain. The National Weather Service posted winter storm warnings from Michigan and Indiana all the way to Maine. Around a foot of snow had fallen on parts of the Chicago area and Ann Arbor, Mich., with 10 inches in Vermont. Meteorologists said that 18 inches was possible in northern New England and

that there was a chance of 14 inches in parts of Michigan. "Our biggest advice right now is, stay home," said Maine State Police Sgt. Andrew Donovan. Visibility in the blowing snow was less than 200 yards, and in stronger gusts "if there's a car in front of you, you can't even see it," he said. Every available plow truck was at work in Vermont, said Reggie Brown, highway department dispatcher in Montpelier. "Everybody's out and running," he said. Illinois Department of Transportation spokesman Mike Claffey said 1,000 trucks were out clearing snow there Sunday. Snow depths in some places were uncertain. "They can't tell how much because it's blowing so hard," Brown said. "I don't mind an inch or two, but this is too much," said Larry Thelen in Ann Arbor. The storm canceled hundreds of flights at airports in Chicago. Many flights were canceled at airports in the Northeast, including in Portland, Maine; Buffalo, N.Y.; and Manchester, N.H. Few major problems were reported at airports in Philadelphia, Boston and New York, although New York's Kennedy and New Jersey's Newark Liberty reported delays.

Second storm hits, dumping foot of snow in central Kansas (AP, 12/16)

Utility crews faced about a foot of snow in some parts of the state as they worked Sunday to restore power to about 57,000 homes and business that remained in the dark. A snow storm swept across the state Friday and Saturday on the heels of an earlier ice storm. The heaviest accumulations were reported in central Kansas, with Hays getting more than 13 inches of snow. Elsewhere accumulations ranged from 1 inch to 5 inches in western Kansas to about 2 inches in eastern Kansas, said Jennifer Stark, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Topeka. "I think it has exasperated some of the problems they've had with power outages," Stark said of the snowstorm. "The trucks have had to go back to snow removal instead of debris removal." On Sunday, Westar Energy Inc. was reporting about 19,000 outages, down from a high of more than 80,000 Tuesday, said Sharon Watson, spokeswoman for the Kansas Department of Emergency Management. Also, about 38,000 customers of rural electric cooperatives were without power Saturday but updated numbers won't be available from Kansas Electric Cooperatives Inc., a statewide association, until Monday, Watson said. "They are gradually coming down," Watson said of the outages, although she said the snow was making the power restoration effort more difficult. The National Guard was helping clear debris in Horton in northeast Kansas' Brown County to help power crews reach power poles. Watson said parts of the county may not have power fully restored for two weeks.

Power-restoration efforts continue in Missouri (Associated Press, 12/16)

Power outages continued to shrink Sunday despite another winter storm that dumped up to 8 inches of snow across parts of Missouri. Only about 14,900 homes and business remained without power Sunday morning, down from a high of about 165,000 on Tuesday, said Duane Nichols, deputy director of the State Emergency Management Agency. That includes about 6,200 Empire Electric customers primarily in Joplin, about 5,300 Aquila Inc. customers around St. Joseph and Maryville and about 3,400 customers of electric cooperatives. "These are diminishing rapidly," Nichols said of the outages. "There are going to be whole pockets that go up today." But he said it could be midweek or the end of the week before power is restored statewide. "That's because of isolated pockets that took more severe hits," he said. "The companies have made a genuine effort to get out and get this done." Nichols said the snow storm, which hit Friday and Saturday,

didn't cause additional outages. "The crews continued to work right on through the snow and continue to work today (Sunday)," Nichols said. The heaviest accumulations of about 8 inches fell in an area spanning from Moberly to Vandalia, Ill. The rest of the state received from 1 to 5 inches of snow, he said. Across the St. Louis area and into Illinois, crews on Sunday scrambled to clear roads of often drifting snow.

Gov't aid hassle delays flooded business owners from rebuilding (AP, 12/16)

Some business owners in southeastern Minnesota who saw their livelihoods washed away in last summer's floods are now facing delays of up to a year before they can get government aid to relocate and rebuild. The counties where the businesses were located had never prepared what are called local hazard mitigation plans, which the federal government requires before it will distribute money to buy out individual properties in flood-prone areas. Brenda and Bruce Kimble, owners of the Junction Inn in Hokah, saw a six-foot wall of water from a nearby Creek swamp the building and wash away its parking lot. The Kimbles would like to rebuild out of the flood plain, but their home county, Houston, is one of five that didn't have the hazard mitigation plans. Officials in Houston along with Fillmore, Olmsted, Wabasha and Dodge must craft mitigation plans before property owners like the Kimbles can get the federal hazard mitigation funds. And county officials said that process could take up to a year. "This is a huge undertaking that takes a lot of time and effort," said Deb Teske, emergency operations director for Fillmore County. "We're trying to fast-track it." Property owners not only must wait for the money, in most cases they can't even find out how much assistance they'll be eligible for as they make decisions about rebuilding.

Early estimates show \$1 million in ice storm damage (12/15)

Early estimates showed nearly \$1 million in damage after ice storms in southeast Nebraska, with a more accurate estimation anticipated Monday, state officials said. The preliminary estimate did not include damage in Falls City, which was hardest hit by the storm that began Monday night. The Omaha Public Power District reported \$500,000 in damages, Nebraska Public Power District had \$350,000 and Norris Public Power District reported \$100,000 in damaged infrastructure. "At this point, we're just waiting for reports from any of the counties that have been affected," said Jim Bunstock, spokesman for the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. The storm left roughly 4,000 people without power on Tuesday, and more than 1,000 still did not have power on Friday. The storm itself has made estimating the damages tough, Bunstock said. "A lot of the roads have been kind of treacherous for the past few days," he said. "There's a lot of territory to cover and the weather has been a factor." Emergency management officials in Richardson, Nemaha and Gage counties have already given estimates to the state. Tree damage was not included.

Storm may only dent Oregon economy, but damage still serious (AP, 12/15)

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management says the initial estimate of damage to homes, business and public entities from a pair of recent storms is \$180 million. But the total will be higher when agricultural losses and other damages that are measured separately are added. Abby Kershaw, who oversees finance and recovery for the emergency management office, said Friday the \$180 million is an estimate of damage

from 13 counties. She said it would fluctuate as "real dollar amounts come in." Based on this measurement from the counties, Kershaw said, the state will seek further federal assistance. The Pacific storm that toppled trees and cut off power for days along the northern Oregon coast left serious damage in the three counties that bore its brunt but may only dent the statewide economy. "We're always amazed at the resiliency and flexibility of the economy," said John Mitchell, a regional economist. Those counties hardest hit Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook account for about 2 percent of the state's nonfarm employment base, and insurance and relief money is expected to offset the losses of property and productivity. But the toll was heavy for many businesses and homeowners at the center of the storm. In Astoria alone, an estimated 150 commercial properties and 596 homes suffered damage.

Shelters staying open as needed (Topeka Capital Journal, 12/15)

Kenneth Sallaz spent most of the day Friday watching TV while sitting in a folding chair at Agricultural Hall on the Kansas Expo Centre grounds. The 23-year-old had his first experience staying in a shelter after his family lost power in their home near S.W. 11th and Jewell earlier this week. Some of his family members went to Kansas City, but he stayed behind. A stranger told him about the shelter Thursday, he said, and he has been there since. "They suit you as good as you could hope for," he said. "They try helping you out any way they can." The Agricultural Hall location is being managed by the Shawnee County Emergency Operations Center and the Kansas Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross. Volunteers from Community Emergency Management and the Salvation Army also are assisting at the shelter, which remained open Friday night. "It probably will be open through the weekend until all of the people staying there have electricity," said Kathy Allen, homeland security coordinator in emergency management for Shawnee County. The shelter for families at the Topeka Rescue Mission in North Topeka is full, said the Rev. Barry Feaker, executive director. However, Feaker said the weather wasn't responsible. "We have had quite a number of calls from people asking us if we have had space," Feaker said. "To my knowledge, we've only had one lady come in because of the ice storm."

DOT Provides \$1M in Emergency Relief for OR Roads (GovTech, 12/14)

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters announced that the federal government is making \$1 million available immediately to help cover the cost to repair flood-damaged roads in northwestern Oregon state. "The last thing residents should have to worry about is how they're going to pay for road repairs when their homes and hope have been washed away. We may be divided by geography, but nothing separates us in our resolve to repair, rebuild and reopen Oregon's damaged roads," Secretary Peters said. The quick-release funds, which do not require a local match like most federal-aid, are a down payment on future funding which will be made available once the state has completed damage assessments and repair costs are more fully known, Secretary Peters said. Specific locations along the damaged roads targeted for the emergency funds have not yet been identified, she added. The state can use the funding made available today to pay for clean-up and recovery work, including clearing debris and re-routing traffic, as well as for new construction to replace damaged sections of highway. The announcement was made during a visit to Oregon state by Deputy Secretary of Transportation Thomas

Barrett and Federal Highway Administrator J. Richard Capka. They visited an Oregon Department of Transportation maintenance facility to receive a briefing on road damages, meet with road crews and thank them for their efforts.

Governor: Damage tops \$200 million (Tulsa World, 12/14)

Gov. Brad Henry said Thursday that the public and private cost of this week's ice storm will certainly exceed \$200 million. Officials at every level of government are busy conducting a damage assessment so the state can seek a major disaster declaration from President Bush as early as Friday. "Before it's all said and done, this could very likely be the most expensive disaster in the state's history," Henry said as he toured one of Tulsa's many streets that is littered with broken tree limbs. "The damage is just so much more widespread than we've ever seen before." A major disaster declaration would make the state, counties and cities eligible for reimbursement for a portion of the storm response and infrastructure damage. It also would help uninsured residents and businesses by providing grants to address temporary housing and repairs and low-interest loans. Mayor Kathy Taylor encouraged citizens to keep track of their expenses and document their damage from the storm. "I think a lot of people are still in a state of shock, but we need to plan for this now," she said. Henry said the government's damage assessment will continue even after the request is made by the state. The hardest hit areas like Tulsa and Oklahoma City are being looked at now to make the initial request," he said. If your county is deserving, but you don't see it on the initial request, it's only because we haven't gotten to your particular area yet." Bush declared a state of emergency earlier this week for all of Oklahoma that freed up federal resources to responding agencies, including commercial generators, cots and food. Henry said the state of emergency request was issued by the president less than 24 hours after it was requested by Oklahoma officials.

Recovery Underway in Pacific Northwest (Disaster News Network, 12/13)

Recovery efforts are under way in the Pacific Northwest after hurricane-force winds earlier this month toppled acres of trees and torrential rainfall caused massive flooding that ripped out bridges, buckled pavement and inundated homes with up to 25 feet of water. In some cases, there is nothing to recover. "One farmer alone lost \$1 million worth of dairy cows and equipment. He spent his life developing his business and now it's all gone. How can you recover from a loss like that," asked Stan Wyse, treasurer and volunteer with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) of Washington. "Sadly, his story is just one of many," Wyse said. Wyse and others from a wide range of faith-based organizations have spent the past few days assessing the destruction caused by back-to-back storms that ravaged coastal areas in Washington and Oregon. At least eight people were killed. Preliminary findings indicate that damage is more widespread and extensive than originally expected. A long-time volunteer with the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia, a branch of Episcopal Relief and Development, said that while the state has experienced many emergencies in the past, he can't remember being faced with anything this widespread.

Oklahoma sets record for presidential disaster declarations (AP, 12/13)

This week's winter storm has allowed Oklahoma to set an apparent, if dubious, national record that for presidential disaster declarations for one state in a calendar year. When

President Bush declared an emergency disaster for Oklahoma following the massive ice storm that has left hundreds of thousands without power, it marked the eighth time in 2007 that federal disaster aid had been made available via a presidential declaration to either public entities or individuals in Oklahoma. According to FEMA's Web site, no other state has had as many presidential disaster declarations in one year. Bush's order, issued Monday, directed that federal aid be used to supplement state and local response efforts. State emergency management officials now are compiling damage estimates to report to FEMA, the step that is required before the president can declare a major disaster to exist, as Bush has done for Oklahoma six previous times this year. Twice, including this week, he has issued emergency disaster declarations. Oklahoma emergency management officials are all too familiar with the process. Just in 2007, presidential disaster declarations have been issued for everything from ice storms to flooding caused by what later was determined to be a tropical depression that hit the state. "We're just so disaster savvy, it's scary," said Michelann Ooten, a spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. The first presidential disaster declaration of 2007 was of the emergency variety. It came on Jan. 15 in response to an ice storm that passed through the state, causing damage in McAlester, Muskogee and other parts of eastern and central Oklahoma.

Families flee freezing, blacked-out homes, head to shelters (AP, 12/13)

After three nights in a freezing, powerless home, Jeanetta Plunkett couldn't take any more. She picked up her two young grandchildren and sought refuge at a shelter for people who lost electricity after a huge ice storm. "We've been at home trying to endure, but it wasn't working," said Plunkett, who feared she was getting a cold and noticed the children had runny noses. Oklahoma was hit hardest by the storm that encrusted the nation's midsection in ice and was blamed for at least 33 deaths. On Wednesday, the state still had a half million homes and businesses without power, and utility officials warned it could take a week to 10 days to get electricity fully restored. Iowa's two major utilities, MidAmerican Energy and Alliant Energy, reported about 19,000 customers still without power late Wednesday night. Most of those were expected to get power back by Thursday morning, officials said. Dozens of Oklahoma shelters in churches and community centers offered food and a warm place to sleep, especially for the poor, the elderly and families with young children who had nowhere else to go.

Federal Government Responds to Midwest Ice Storm (FEMA, 12/12)

Federal assistance continues to speed into the Midwest states affected by the recent ice storms in order to assist state and local governments respond to communities impacted by widespread power outages and icy conditions. FEMA has been coordinating the federal response efforts to provide the life-sustaining and critical infrastructure support missions already underway in the hardest hit states. Through direct federal assistance, FEMA and the US Army Corps of Engineers specialists have delivered generators to support the needs of such critical facilities as emergency shelters, hospitals and water treatment plants in Oklahoma and Missouri. President Bush today signed federal emergency disaster declarations to assist the states of Missouri and Kansas. The emergency declarations opened the way for more federal aid to assist in the efforts to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a

catastrophe in these affected states. The declarations are for all 105 counties in Kansas, and for all 114 counties in Missouri and in the Independent City of St. Louis.

President Declares Emergency Disaster for Missouri (FEMA, 12/12)

FEMA announced that the President declared an emergency exists in the state of Missouri and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local response efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms beginning on December 8, 2007, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said that the President's action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts which have the purpose of alleviating the hardship and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population, and to provide appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in all 114 counties in the state and in the Independent City of St. Louis. Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize, and provide at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Debris removal and emergency protective measures, limited to direct federal assistance, will be provided at 75 percent Federal funding. Paulison named Michael L. Parker as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area.

President Declares Emergency Disaster for Kansas (FEMA, 12/12)

FEMA announced that the President declared an emergency exists in the state of Kansas and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local response efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms beginning on December 6, 2007, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said that the President's action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts which have the purpose of alleviating the hardship and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population, and to provide appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in all 105 counties in the state. Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize, and provide at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Debris removal and emergency protective measures, limited to direct federal assistance, will be provided at 75 percent Federal funding. Paulison named Thomas A. Hall as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area.

Hundreds of thousands shiver after nation's midsection encased in ice (AP, 12/12)

Stan Turner awoke Tuesday to find not only was his home without power but an ice-coated tree limb had crashed into his classic Mustang. The only heat available for the house came from a fireplace, a wood-burning chimenea on the porch and a gas stove. "I've been scrounging all the wood I can," he said. "I'm going to get out there and get the bigger limbs down, but the wet weather is what's making it so bad." Turner was among a million utility customers who were struggling without electricity in the nation's midsection after a massive storm dropped sleet and freezing rain across much of Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and Iowa. The system has been blamed for at least 24 deaths since it developed last weekend. Glistening, ice-covered roads contributed to many of the deaths.

Downed power lines caused dozens of fires in Oklahoma. And then there was the problem of staying warm because officials cautioned that electricity may not be restored for days, if not weeks. "We have the upstairs fireplace going and the gas burners on the stove," Turner's wife, Joanie Wilson, said in the couple's frigid home. "That's it for heat. I'm getting the cider ready for later, and the Captain Morgan's for later, later." The power outage was the worst ever in Oklahoma, with nearly 600,000 homes and businesses without electricity Tuesday. Nearly 350,000 other customers were affected by outages in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Illinois.

Hundreds seeking federal disaster assistance (AP, 12/11)

More than 1,600 people in Lewis and Grays Harbor counties have applied for federal disaster-relief money since Sunday. FEMA, which oversees the program, mailed its first check, for \$1,740, to a Grays Harbor resident Tuesday. The person's name wasn't available. Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg, director of the state military department, said he wasn't surprised at the number of people applying for federal assistance. "We know there are undoubtedly many more who need the aid," he said. President Bush, at the request of Gov. Christine Gregoire, declared the two counties federal disaster areas over the weekend after a drenching storm last week pushed rivers over their banks. Hundreds of homes and many businesses were destroyed or damaged by the floods. The disaster declaration cleared the way for federal aid of as much as \$28,800 for each uninsured household and low-interest federal loans. More counties may be added later. The assistance is available to renters, homeowners and businesses that suffered storm-related damage. Once a report has been made, the agency will send someone out within a few days to verify the losses. Those who qualify for aid typically get a check within eight to 10 days.

Midwest looking at slow comeback from outages (Ft. Worth Star Telegram, 12/11)

It will take more than a week to restore electricity to much of ice-glazed Oklahoma, where residents are either stranded or struggling to reach friends or family in Texas, according to reports. Half a million Oklahomans are reportedly without electricity today. Officials there say the biggest power outage in state history has resulted from power lines snapping under the weight of ice and falling branches. At least 23 deaths had been blamed on the major ice storm that has glazed the nation's midsection. Ice as much as an inch thick had accumulated on trees, power lines, streets and car windshields Monday in parts of Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri. Officials in those states have declared states of emergency, and hundreds of thousands of people had been blacked out. "This is a big one," said Ed Bettinger, a spokesman for Public Service Company of Oklahoma. "We've got a massive situation here and it's probably going to be a week to 10 days before we get power on to everybody. "It looks like a war zone."

President Declares Emergency Disaster For Oklahoma (FEMA, 12/10)

FEMA announced that the President declared an emergency exists in the state of Oklahoma and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local response efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms beginning on December 8, 2007, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said that the President's action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts which have the purpose of alleviating the hardship

and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population, and to provide appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in all 77 counties in the state of Oklahoma. Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize, and provide at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Debris removal and emergency protective measures, limited to direct federal assistance, will be provided at 75 percent Federal funding. Paulison named Philip E. Parr as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area.

Additional Oregon County Now Eligible for Federal Aid (FEMA, 12/10)

FEMA announced that additional federal assistance will be available for individuals and communities in Clatsop County. The additional assistance was granted to help homeowners, renters, and businesses recover from the effects of the severe storms, flooding, landslides and mudslides beginning on December 1, 2007, and continuing. Federal assistance for emergency protective measures and debris removal, including direct federal assistance, was made available for Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook and Yamhill counties under the President's December 8, 2007, major disaster declaration. Residents of Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties may be eligible for assistance under FEMA's Individual Assistance program. The 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.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

NOAA Expands Storm Warning Capabilities (Government Computer News, 12/16)

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has constructed new digital elevation models for the East Coast communities of Long Island, Atlantic City and Daytona Beach to help emergency planners prepare for effects of tsunamis or other flooding driven by storms. The DEMs are constructed from measurements of near-shore depth of the sea floor and land elevation data to create a detailed digital relief map of the coastal region. According to NOAA, the information provides the underlying framework necessary to accurately forecast the magnitude and extent of coastal flooding during a tsunami or storm surge event. Since 2006, scientists at NOAA's National Geophysical Data Center and the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences, both based in Boulder, Colo., had already created DEMs for 20 U.S. coastal communities. The team expects to build more than 50 additional DEMs for U.S. coastal communities in the coming years. After DEMs are developed, they are sent to NOAA's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle, where they are plugged into tsunami model scenarios. These scenarios simulate offshore earthquakes, the resulting tsunami movement across the ocean and the magnitude and location of coastal flooding caused when the storm reaches the shore. As a result, NOAA Tsunami Warning Centers can employ the data to issue more accurate flooding forecasts if an earthquake triggers an actual tsunami.

Megastores come to rescue in storm (New Orleans Times Picayune, 12/16)

Pacific Northwest employees of two big-box chains received e-mail alerting them of a storm barreling toward their stores a full four days before 100-mph winds whacked the coast and murky floodwaters blocked Interstate 5 early this month. Behind a computer in Bentonville, Ark., Lucas McDonald, meteorologist for Wal-Mart Stores Inc., tracked the weather and notified colleagues that Washington and Oregon stores could lose power and the retailer should consider alternative truck routes. McDonald's counterpart at Home Depot Inc., Jim Schortal, the retailer's director of crisis management -- coordinated the transfer to Portland, Ore., of more than a dozen recovery workers, from hazardous-material cleanup crews to structural safety assessors. From his Atlanta office, Schortal also summoned trucks as far as Nebraska and Texas to hightail it west with extra batteries, flashlights, heaters and generators. In cases of extreme weather and natural disasters, some of the nation's largest retailers now behave like municipalities -- sometimes better. Spurred by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and rough hurricane seasons in 2004 and 2005, more retailers have created specialized divisions -- or hired outside firms -- to gird for emergencies. The goal: to speed recovery for customers, employees and ultimately sales. It's a measure of the times. Megaretailers going global with huge distribution networks face more frequent and varied disasters. Yet as leaders in the business of moving goods and information -- Wal-Mart's famous for daily crack-of-dawn conference calls detailing real-time sales -- some have found they can react more quickly than local governments. For them, disasters have become just another cost of doing business. Stakes are even higher around the holidays, when retailers can take in more than half of annual sales. The early-December storm did not damage either chain's stores on the Oregon coast. Wal-Mart's store in Aberdeen, Wash., lost power only temporarily and closed until generators arrived Dec. 4.

During evacuations, officials plan to weed out sex offenders (AP, 12/15)

Texans who board evacuation buses during hurricanes or other emergencies must first submit to criminal background checks, the state's emergency management director said. The policy is an attempt to keep sex offenders and fugitives from boarding evacuation buses with children, the elderly and the disabled, said Jack Colley, the chief of the state's Division of Emergency Management. Colley said no sex offenders or other criminals will be left behind, just evacuated on different buses. "This will allow us to help them evacuate," Colley said. "We're not going to leave anyone." The intent, he said, is to make sure vulnerable residents aren't victimized during the evacuation process. He also said that state officials will be able to segregate undesirable evacuees, even in the chaos of an emergency. "We'll be able to do it," Colley said. "We'll have procedures and we're not going to advertise what they are." Under the plan, anyone who boards an evacuation bus must provide a name. Officials can ask for photo identification, but one is not needed to board, he said. Officials will check names against sex offender registries and other criminal databases, Colley said. They are interested in identifying sex offenders, people with outstanding warrants and parolees. After Hurricane Katrina, about 1,700 parolees didn't check in with authorities in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Washington local officials have taken variety of approaches (Seattle Times, 12/14)

In the year since the Hanukkah Eve storm battered the Puget Sound region, leaving vast tracts without power or flooded or isolated by downed trees, Eastside cities have worked to be better-prepared for the next such emergency. Today, we revisit those cities to get a taste of what has changed:

Bellevue

- Sped up plans to post its Web site in languages other than English and Spanish. The site is now also is posted in Chinese and Russian and will be available in Vietnamese by the end of the year, said city spokesman Tim Waters.
- Held community workshops on emergency preparedness to help residents become more self-reliant.
- Is wrapping up a series of preparedness videos in a variety of languages. The videos will be posted online and presented throughout the city.
- Put emergency generators at the South Bellevue and Crossroads community centers. (North Bellevue Community Center already had one.) Now the centers, along with the Highlands Community Center and Northwest Arts Center, will be available as emergency shelters.
- Decided that in dangerous weather, fire crews will respond only to life-threatening emergencies, thereby cutting the amount of time firefighters must spend amid falling trees and power lines.
- Recently received \$1.4 million from the federal government to hire another coordinator for emergencies, buy more equipment and create the city's first detailed evacuation plan, Fire Chief Mario Trevino said.

Bothell

- Set up a city Emergency Update Hotline. In a crisis, residents should call 425-487-5132.
- Visited every residence in the city to help people prepare for emergencies.
- Conducted a campaign to educate people about the carbon-monoxide danger associated with generators.
- Hired a full-time emergency-preparedness coordinator, Jennifer Warmke.

Carnation

- Hard-wired a generator large enough to power the entire City Hall, including computers and phone lines. The generator at City Hall last year could power only lights and a few space heaters.
- Went door to door to give residents emergency packets, including tips, a list of recommended supplies, phone numbers and shelter locations information many residents didn't have last year.

Public Health Departments Preparing for 1st Responder Role (Business Wire, 12/12)

During an aviation flu outbreak, emergency response roles will be reversed. Public Health departments will lead the response efforts while police and fire departments will play a necessary and equally important secondary role. This change in roles requires some rethinking of strategies by all parties, as the City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Health Bureau and police and other departments found out in a recent pandemic flu exercise. "It was clear going into the exercise that several participants didn't initially fully comprehend how chaotic a pandemic could potentially be, and the complex implications

of what their roles might be in such an emergency," said Julie C. Zumas, MPH. As pandemic flu coordinator with the Bethlehem Health Bureau, Zumas and her department directed the day-long exercise. "Very quickly into the exercise, however, many of those participants realized how large a role they might be asked to play in a pandemic, and that there are things you can anticipate and plan for in advance," she said. While the Health Bureau took the lead in the exercise, several other city departments participated including the Bethlehem Fire, EMS, Police and Communications departments; the Bethlehem Mayor's Office; the Pennsylvania Department of Health; local colleges, universities, and school districts; the two major local hospitals; the local airport authority; and agencies such as Northampton County Mental Health and the Lehigh Valley chapter of the American Red Cross. Although Bethlehem Health Bureau officials have participated in numerous emergency preparedness exercises, this exercise marked the first time they led an exercise. More than 50 individuals participated in the drill, in which two mock cases of Avian Flu were reported in Bethlehem as part of a global pandemic. In the scenario, the city faced a widespread outbreak within days.

Shelters Lack Backup Power (St. Petersburg Times, 12/11)

Facing a shortage of hurricane shelter space for people with medical problems, Florida lawmakers set aside \$52.8-million last year to buy big generators to power air conditioning and life support equipment. All 52 of the generators were to be installed by June 1, the start of this year's hurricane season. But today, not one is up and running. And at least 32 locations, including sites in Hernando, Pasco and Pinellas counties, most likely will not be ready when next year's hurricane season starts. State emergency management officials say finishing the project will cost another \$51.5-million, almost doubling the initial request. "What an embarrassment it would have been had we been hit with a major storm with these generators sitting in a warehouse," state Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, said Tuesday. Fasano, chairman of a Senate appropriations committee, will have a hearing Thursday in Tallahassee to seek answers from Florida's Division of Emergency Management. Lawmakers allotted money for the program in the wake of multiple hurricanes that ravaged Florida in 2004 and 2005. The money was to pay not only for installing the generators - so large they're delivered by semitrailer truck - but also for the first tank of diesel fuel and maintenance for five years. Unlike standard shelters, all special needs shelters must have backup power.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

FEMA agrees to reimburse elevated homes owners (Associated Press, 12/16)

FEMA has changed its policy and will provide some reimbursement for homeowners who spent their own money to elevate hurricane-damaged houses above flood level. Until the decision announced Friday, FEMA had not paid for flood protection work that was already finished or under way because studies tied to federal aid environmental, risk, cost hadn't been conducted first. Tens of thousands of homeowners in Louisiana and Mississippi had faced having to pay the full cost of raising their houses after hurricanes Katrina and Rita simply because they rebuilt faster than the bureaucracy worked. There was no immediate indication how soon people will get the federal money. FEMA will

provide resources needed to review applications and documentation "in a timely fashion," Deb Ingram, director of a risk reduction division at FEMA, told The Associated Press after briefing Louisiana officials on the agency's decision Friday. Usually, FEMA requires written approval of work before it begins. But under the new policy, that requirement won't apply to homeowners who elevated their houses or did other mitigation work after the 2005 hurricanes and within 60 days of FEMA issuing its final policy. FEMA expects to issue its final policy next month, an act that would trigger the 60-day grace period. Louisiana has about \$1.1 billion in hazard mitigation funds for its homeowner aid program; Mississippi has about \$434 million total in hazard mitigation funds.

Many celebrities have helped with N.O. recovery efforts (Associated Press, 12/14)

A sampling of celebrities who worked in the recovery of New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005. Actor Sean Penn launched a door-to-door boat and air search for survivors in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Actor Matthew McConaughey helped rescue animals stranded in the flood. U2 guitarist The Edge helped launch Music Rising, a charity that provided replacement instruments to more than 2,000 musicians who lost theirs in the storm. Dr. Phil McGraw met with police officers and firefighters who lost their homes and focused his "Dr. Phil" talk show on post-Katrina stress and mental health challenges. New Orleans natives Harry Connick Jr. and saxophonist Branford Marsalis co-founded the Musicians Village to provide housing for musicians. Actor Denis Leary donated rescue boats to the fire department and through The Leary Firefighters Foundation raised money to repair firehouses. Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa brought their daytime talk show to town and assembled playground equipment at a storm-damaged elementary school. Five-time Grammy winning R&B artist Usher joined volunteers to clear the overgrown grounds of a damaged school. Oprah Winfrey's "Angel Network" donated money to storm victims. Actresses Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Garner and Cicely Tyson joined other women and the Children's Defense Fund to focus attention to the needs of young storm victims. Talk show host and New Orleans native Ellen Degeneres taped portions of her show in the city and gave a Quizno's restaurant to a resident who lost her home and business in the storm. Actress Kirstie Alley provided relief and aid to storm victims and first responders immediately after Katrina. Actor Steven Seagal was on law enforcement patrols in and around the city after the storm.

Public housing demolition draws protesters (Associated Press, 12/13)

In normal times, redevelopment of public housing to make way for mixed-income neighborhoods might have gone largely unopposed. But passions are high in hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, where residents are desperate for cheap housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development wants to demolish about 4,500 public housing units at four of the city's largest complexes and replace them with mixed-income neighborhoods. Protesters have marched on Mayor Ray Nagin's home and disrupted City Council proceedings with chants. A march on the HUD offices in Washington, D.C., also was planned for Thursday. Protesters were able to temporarily halt crews from demolishing decrepit buildings at the B.W. Cooper housing site on Thursday. They vow to continue disrupting work there and at other sites around the city. The protesters have

won the blessing of one presidential contender, John Edwards. "There is a housing crisis in New Orleans today the result of government policies that have failed the people of the Gulf," Edwards said in a statement this week. "Rents have doubled, families are being evicted from FEMA trailers and now the current administration is trying to make a bad situation worse." Opponents are suspicious of HUD because the redevelopment plans following a model used around the country to break up concentrations of poverty call for a reduction in subsidized housing and allow commercial development on the sites.

Center to help Katrina victims closing (AP, 12/13)

A center set up to help victims of the 2005 hurricanes get aid and recovery information is closing Friday. The Welcome Home Center, run by the city and FEMA, has helped more than 36,000 people since it opened Jan. 3. Billed as a one-stop center for information and help, the center offered aid from federal, state, local and volunteer groups, as well as help with the state's homeowner rebuilding grant program. Counseling and psychiatric services and information on jobs and housing also was available. Jim Stark, director of FEMA's state recovery office, said the goal of the center was to "provide residents who were returning home easy access to services to help them recover, and we have accomplished our mission." At the peak, about 400 people passed through the center each day. Questions many people had most recently dealt with housing and rental assistance.

Coalition wants more case workers to help evacuees find homes (Advocate, 12/13)

A coalition led by a group of Hurricane Katrina evacuees living in the Renaissance Village FEMA trailer park on Tuesday announced a 17-point plan to help residents here move into more permanent housing. The coalition of residents, clergy, community leaders and volunteers bused dozens of park residents to a nearby community center for a meeting on the plan, which calls on charities and federal agencies to band together and step up their efforts to help the park's 372 families. "For all of us, tonight signals a turning point in a very, very long journey," said park resident Arcenia Crayton, a leader of the coalition who helped organize the community meeting.

FEMA has announced plans to close the park, its largest group site in the Baton Rouge area, June 1. The coalition's plan names 17 strategies or goals and designates a combination of agencies to carry each out by a certain date. For example, the plan calls for an increase in the number of case workers at the park who can help residents find new housing. The goal is one worker for every 25 families. Currently there are eight FEMA housing case workers to assist the 327 families at the park. The plan designates the case worker goal as the responsibility of FEMA, the American Red Cross and the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Fund.