

Disaster News Update – February 11 to 17, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Avalanche:** Alaska
- **Drought:** Oregon, Nevada, California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Maryland, Virginia North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee
- **Fire:** Oklahoma, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Texas, Florida, Mississippi
- **Flood / Flash Flood:** Indiana, Massachusetts, Rhode Island
- **HAZMAT:** Connecticut (Hydrogen Transport Accident), Kentucky (Oil Pipeline Leak), Ohio (HAZMAT Fire), Texas (HAZMAT Trailer Accident)
- **Heavy Rain:** Florida, Massachusetts, Texas
- **Ice Storm:** Missouri
- **Severe Winter Weather:** New Mexico, Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia, Colorado, Wisconsin, Kansas, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, Missouri
- **Mass Murder:** Illinois
- **Strong Wind:** Mississippi, Virginia, Georgia, Indiana, Oklahoma, Missouri
- **Tornado:** Louisiana, Florida, Alabama
- **Transportation:** Pennsylvania (68-car Pileup), Maryland (multi-victim car accident)

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Tennessee](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding (2/7)
- [Arkansas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (2/7)
- [Hawaii](#): Severe Storms, High Surf, Flooding, and Mudslides (2/6)
- [Missouri](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (2/5)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Winter Storms (2/1)
- [Indiana](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (1/30)
- [Nebraska](#): Severe Winter Storm (1/11)
- Fire Declarations: N/A

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Volunteers can have big role in disasters (San Diego Union Tribune, 2/15)

The work of volunteers at evacuation centers during last fall's wildfires was impressive by any measure. The volunteers so impressed Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger that he now calls for a program to help government agencies throughout California become as well prepared for the immediate aftermath of natural disasters. At Qualcomm Stadium and the Del Mar Fairgrounds, in particular, thousands of evacuees found not only shelter but medical care, which was especially important for the 3,000 elderly residents who were moved from assisted living centers. Those medical services didn't appear by accident. They are the work of the EMS Medical Reserve Corps, sponsored by the Public Health Services of San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency, in partnership with

the San Diego County Medical Society, the Council of Community Clinics, the Pharmacy Emergency Response Team, the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties, the Red Cross and others. The Medical Reserve Corps has trained 900 volunteers, most with varying degrees of medical expertise and some with none, to respond to emergencies from disease outbreaks to fires and other natural disasters. Local health professionals who volunteer run the gamut: physicians and physician assistants, nurses and nurse assistants, psychologists and counselors, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, paramedics and emergency medical technicians, dentists, even veterinarians. MRC provides each with official identification for ready access to shelters or wherever they're needed. Even the best plans can improve, however, and the 2007 fires pinpointed room for improvement. MRC volunteers' shelter assignments were sometimes haphazard. A woman claiming to be a firefighter and registered nurse was neither, though by all accounts she was extraordinary at coordinating care. Red Cross national headquarters replaced capable local volunteers with volunteers from outside the region, at a cost of \$2.6 million for hotels and meals.

Hundreds volunteer help after tornadoes (AR Democrat Gazette, 2/11)

Volunteers fanned out across stormwrecked areas Sunday, trying to help residents restore order to the devastation left by two tornadoes that tore across Arkansas on Tuesday. Some came in small, family groups, armed with chain saws and work gloves, wanting to help neighbors in need. Others came in large relief groups, from states as far away as New Hampshire and as close as Oklahoma. Among the volunteers was a group of more than 800 students from Harding University in Searcy, who spent their Sunday in Clinton helping residents. One tornado - rated a Category EF4 - gouged an uninterrupted path along 123 miles of forest, farmland and towns, starting 5.6 miles eastsoutheast of Centerville in Yell County and ending 3.2 miles northeast of Highland in Sharp County, according to the National Weather Service. An EF4 tornado, on the Enhanced Fujita scale, is capable of producing winds of 166-200 mph. A second tornado cut a 14-mile path in Marion and Baxter counties, destroying three-quarters of the town of Gassville before rising back into the sky a few miles from Mountain Home. The tornadoes left 13 people dead in Arkansas, more than 130 injured and damaged or destroyed more than 880 houses. The storm system was the strongest to hit the state since March 1, 1997. The Arkansas tornadoes were part of a series of tornadoes Tuesday that affected five states and killed 59 people. Tennessee saw the most destruction, where tornadoes killed 32 people and injured 192. The destruction was so widespread that Harding students decided they wanted to do something to help, said Charlie Walker, president of the Harding University Student Association. When the idea of a mass volunteer effort was brought up at chapel on Thursday, more than 300 students signed up, he said. By Sunday, the number had grown to more than 800, who traveled in a caravan of buses and cars the nearly 60 miles to Clinton.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Class Trains Volunteers To Report Bad Weather (Washington Post, 2/14)

When severe weather threatens Loudoun County, the latest radar and satellite technology

comes in handy. And so will about 50 new "storm spotters." The group of weather buffs, 911 dispatchers, community volunteers, and fire and rescue officials attended a class in Leesburg last week on how to identify early signs of severe weather. Howard Silverman, senior forecaster for the Baltimore-Washington office of the National Weather Service in Sterling, led the session at the Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Training Center with one mission: to bring more storm spotters into the fold. "You are the most valuable resource in the severe-weather warning process," Silverman said during the training course, called Skywarn Basics I. Chris Strong, a Weather Service meteorologist involved with the program, said people drawn to the classes are typically interested in weather, amateur radio or public service. "It's certainly people who have an interest in weather, but people who are looking to help their communities as well," he said. For the Weather Service, the goal is to build a network of "weather spies" who will share information about weather patterns in their area, Strong said. "The purpose is to have eyes on the clouds to let us know of something we might not see on radar or satellite or the other observation systems that we have," he said. Although most of those attending the Feb. 4 class were from Loudoun, some had traveled from as far away as Frederick, Md. Silverman's three-hour presentation explained how to detect severe weather, report conditions to the Weather Service and respond to dangerous situations. Participants were given wallet-size cards that listed the criteria for severe weather and a phone number to call in reports. Spotters are asked to call at the first sign of tornadoes, funnels, hail, heavy rain, flooding, high winds and ice and snow accumulation. Any damage tied to weather, such as a fallen tree after high winds, should also be reported. Often, Silverman said, people don't report what they see because they assume someone else has reported it.

Wal-Mart offers help in emergencies (Dayton (OH) Daily News, 2/12)

A Wal-Mart executive who oversees the company's plans for coping with emergencies told Red Cross and government officials Monday that the retailer can work with them to help communities recover from disasters. Wal-Mart wants to respond to the needs of its employees and customers in areas damaged by floods, fires or tornadoes, but also has a vested interest in helping local authorities to help their communities recover, said Bryan W. Koon, Wal-Mart's senior operations manager for emergency management. "Our goals are the same as theirs are: We want to get these communities back up on their feet. Otherwise, there's no point in having a Wal-Mart there," Koon said during a meeting with Montgomery County emergency management officials. Smaller retailers can also help by building relationships with local authorities to share information and coordinate responses when emergencies arise, Koon said. During his Dayton stop on Monday, Koon also met with local Red Cross officials before going to Columbus to meet with Ohio emergency management officials. He planned similar meetings Tuesday with Indiana emergency management officials and on Wednesday with Tennessee state authorities. "It's always good to know what resources the community has and can bring to bear if there are disasters," said Jeff Kursman, a spokesman for Dayton's Red Cross chapter. Wal-Mart, and other large companies with their own emergency management departments, can help public officials during emergencies with corporate expertise in moving merchandise and communicating with local store managers, Koon said.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Tornadoes Sweep Across Southwest (Disaster News Network, 2/17)

Hundreds of homes, apartments and businesses were damaged or destroyed Sunday afternoon when severe storms, including a reported tornado, hit this central Alabama city. In a winter that has seen tornadoes and flooding ravage parts of Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee on more than one occasion, Sunday's storms brought unconfirmed reports at least 29 tornadoes and damage to parts of Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Georgia. In Prattville, two local residents were hospitalized in critical condition said Prattville Fire Chief Dallis Johnson. So many people were treated at Prattville Baptist Hospital Sunday that the less severely injured were encouraged to go to a mobile treatment center. Shelters were set up in two local churches. Jim Byard, mayor of this town of more than 25,000 residents, declared a curfew Sunday night. He estimated as many as 30 homes were destroyed and another 170 houses were damaged by the storm. Two apartment complexes were also badly damaged. Nearly 10,000 homes were without power Sunday night. According to witnesses, a Wal-Mart store and many other businesses were badly damaged. In Covington County, two homes were reported to be completely destroyed and there was damage to two others when a tornado touched down there.

Faith-Based Organizations Help Arkansas Victims (Disaster News Network, 2/17)

As Arkansas gets past the initial clean up phase following the deadly tornadoes that hit the state earlier this month, the full scope of the rebuilding challenge is beginning to come into focus. According to preliminary reports, 80 percent of the residents of Stone County, Ark. who were impacted by last Tuesday's tornado do not have insurance to cover their losses. Dan Martinez, public information officer with the Arkansas branch of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), said community relations personnel are still in the field gathering information, but so far, in that county alone, they have reported 1,188 single family dwellings that were damaged. Of those, 46 were completely destroyed and 50 to 60 received severe to moderate damage. Martinez said FEMA hopes to house displaced Stone County residents in the many vacation cabins and lodges in the Mountain View area. In other parts of the state where housing isn't available, they will be bringing in manufactured mobile homes. "However, before we can do that we will first have to make sure that conditions are safe and sanitary – that hook-ups for things like power, sewage and water are back in place," he said. Atkins resident Bobby Boren who lost three houses in the storm said he wasn't sure whether or he would be applying for aid to rebuild.

CA wildfire victims wait months for FEMA mobile homes (Associated Press, 2/17)

Patty Reedy is still waiting for someone at FEMA to send her the mobile home she was promised before Christmas. In December, agency inspectors said she wouldn't get a government house to replace the one she lost during last year's wildfires because it would be too difficult to haul the 60-foot, three-bedroom prefabricated home up a winding road to her remote mountaintop property. Reedy isn't alone. FEMA brought dozens of mobile homes to Southern California after the fires, only to find their own guidelines prevented them from putting them on many properties in rough terrain. San Diego County officials

say dozens of applicants were denied homes because their properties were inaccessible to trucks, didn't have connections into the electrical grid or were on hillsides deemed at mudslide risk. "They don't have any familiarity with these areas so they can't conceive of the needs being different," said Deena Raver, a contractor who was hired by San Diego County to help fire victims. "You're talking about one area with sewage and water and other places that are very rural." The mobile home delay is another blemish on a beleaguered agency. When the fires broke out in five Southern California counties, forcing half a million people to flee, many thought FEMA still bruised from its performance after Hurricane Katrina had a golden opportunity to repair its image. "FEMA wasn't really tested here," said Paul Light, a professor of public service at New York University. "It really wasn't a dry run for sustained response and recovery." FEMA spokesman James McIntyre said the agency applied lessons it learned in Katrina to streamline its operations in Southern California like the need to respond quickly. Two days before President Bush declared a federal disaster, FEMA crews were moving into fire-stricken zones and setting up at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium.

Missouri National Guard aiding storm victims (Associated Press, 2/15)

Members of the Missouri National Guard went door-to-door in parts of southeast Missouri on Thursday, checking on the welfare of residents facing a third day without power after a severe ice storm. Gov. Matt Blunt sent 30 members of the Guard to Cape Girardeau and Bollinger counties. While temperatures on Thursday were expected to climb to around 50 degrees, most of the time since Monday's storm has been unseasonably cold. The warmer weather isn't expected to last. Forecasters are calling for the possibility of a mix of rain, snow, sleet and freezing rain for some already hard-hit areas on Friday, with highs in the 20s and 30s. And another winter storm is possible over the weekend. By Thursday morning, about 2,300 AmerenUE customers in and around Cape Girardeau were still without power. Among them: Two nursing homes in Bollinger County, but generators were heating the facilities. Ameren had about 1,100 employees working on the problem, but said a few outages may extend into Friday. "With these extensive resources, along with improved weather, we expect to make good progress," said Jean Mason, manager of Ameren's SEMO Division.

Guard fills sandbags to protect Monticello homes from flooding (AP, 2/14)

Indiana National Guard members filled about 9,000 sandbags to use against rising floodwaters caused by an ice jam on Lake Shafer. The pileup of frozen chunks across the lake forced lake levels to rise by 8 inches Wednesday, causing water to seep into homes, said Gordon Cochran, White County's Emergency Management director. Late in the day, the water appeared to have dropped more than a foot, which might signal a shift or break in the ice jam, Cochran said. The flooding threat convinced Gov. Mitch Daniels to authorize the Army National Guard to help build protective sand walls and take other safety measures that may affect 100 to 200 homes and roads in the area about 20 miles north of Lafayette. "I've been here since 1988 and there's never been water in here," said Ron Motuelle of his lakefront home he feared could become flooded. "I hope the Guard can take a little stress off, but once the water starts, there is no stopping it." Soldiers from 1638th Transportation Company from Remington and Detachment 1 from Gary along with the 1538th Transportation Company from Elkhart assisted, the National Guard said.

An ice jam is unpredictable, said Scott Morlock, chief of the hydrologic networks section for the U.S. Geological Survey in Indianapolis. Sometimes, when high water flows are followed by bitter cold, small rafts of ice can form, he said. These pieces can catch on rocks or narrow points and build up to create a dam.

1000's of Claims Pour in From Mid-Southern Tornadoes (Bestwire, 2/14)

Insurers continue to cut checks and assess the damages from as many as two dozen mid-South tornadoes that reduced as many as 1,000 homes in a half dozen states to rubble. Tennessee Farmers, the second-largest writer of homeowners multiperil in Tennessee after State Farm, has paid about \$42 million on 3,586 total claims as of Feb. 13, said Dan Batie, spokesman for the Tennessee Farmers Insurance Cos. It has paid out \$18.2 million on 642 claims as of Feb. 13 in Jackson -- a "micropolitan" with about 100,000 people. Macon County, a more agricultural area where Tennessee Farmers has a large market share, also suffered extensive damage. The company has paid out about \$18.4 million on 513 claims in Macon. Those numbers are expected to rise, Batie said. The first to report were homeowners with uninhabitable homes and, depending on coverage, living expenses were doled out. But apparently, the kindness of residents appears to be slowing the claims process. "We had one (claimant) come in yesterday and say, 'I would have come in yesterday but I know there's folks worse off than me who need attention first,'" Batie said. "We're encouraging everyone to come in as soon as possible." The path of the storm was about 100 to 200 yards wide, said Batie, about the scene he saw in Jackson, Tenn. "We're getting a lot of wind and hail claims from where these things (tornadoes) set down but it's not like one big hurricane that completely destroys one area. Some people don't have a home to go to while three blocks over, life goes on as usual." A severe thunderstorm outbreak late Feb. 5 included tornadoes, heavy rain, lightning and hail some the size of softballs in Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, Alabama, Missouri and Mississippi, according to catastrophe modeler AIR Worldwide. Hundreds of home were destroyed or damaged. The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced it was sending mobile homes from its Hope, Ark. facility to provide temporary housing to areas in Tennessee and Arkansas. In Tennessee and Kentucky -- two of the hardest hit by the storms -- about 4,000 home and business claims have been taken by State Farm as of Feb. 13, said spokesman Jeff McCollum. Advanced living expenses have been distributed to many and the adjustment process is just beginning, he said.

Extreme Snow Isolates CO Residents (Disaster News Network, 2/14)

Residents in Park County Colorado were again bracing for more cold temperatures, high winds and snow Thursday, Feb. 14, a weather pattern which has frequently bombarded the region since Christmas. About 100 residents living near the towns of Fairplay, Como, Jefferson and Hartsel have been stranded in their homes for about a week. Mike Roll, the public information officer in Park County and the chief of the North-West Fire Protection District, said emergency responders have been doing their best to reach these people who live as close as three to five miles from a town or up to 50 miles away on a ranch. "They are calling us, and we're using snowmobiles and snow cats to get to them," he said. Park County, about 10,000 feet above sea level, is located in central Colorado about 90 minutes west of Denver, about 90 minutes south of Vail and about 30 minutes from Breckenridge. Roll said residents are used to the high winds, snow and very cold

temperatures – but not of this consistent magnitude during the last month. “The problem we are having this year is that it’s happening all at the same time and for about three weeks straight,” he said. “We’re not getting a break.” To help clear the snow drifts, Pueblo, Baca, Arapahoe, Clear Creek and Jefferson counties have sent equipment and manpower to keep the roads open. The Mile High chapter of the American Red Cross, based in Denver, is operating a shelter at the Park County Fairgrounds in Fairplay to house the extra manpower, which consists of about 80 people.

Snow, sleet and rain clog streets and knock out power (Portland Press Herald, 2/14)

A day-long winter shot of snow, sleet and rain downed tree limbs, flooded roads and caused almost 74,000 power outages across southern and central Maine Wednesday. The mix - heavy, wet snow followed by sleet and then steady rain - produced thick slush that clogged street drains, flooding many urban intersections. It weighed down tree limbs, some of which broke, crashed onto power lines and caused electricity outages that kept power company crews busy well into this morning. "It's certainly one of the messier ones we've had in a long time," Lynette Miller, spokeswoman for the state's Emergency Management Agency, said of the storm. Gov. John Baldacci declared a state of emergency as the number of power outages rose late in the day. That declaration allowed Central Maine Power Co. to call in teams from out of state to help restore power, Miller said. Public safety officials and weather forecasters warned of another tough commute to work this morning. They said overnight temperatures were expected to dip into the mid-20s and leave an icy glaze on roads. The storm moved into the state late Tuesday night and dropped between 8 and 10 inches of snow in parts of Androscoggin, Cumberland and York counties by late morning. Snow changed to sleet around noon and to rain by mid-afternoon. Tree limbs, weighed down by snow and sleet, broke and damaged power lines. By 4:15 p.m., about 16,500 homes and businesses throughout the state were without power. That number swelled to nearly 74,000 by 10 p.m., with most of the outages in Androscoggin, Kennebec and Cumberland counties.

Tornado Victims May Get Unused FEMA Trailers (USA Today, 2/13)

Some of the thousands of trailers sitting unused since they were purchased by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2005 for Gulf Coast hurricane victims may finally be put to use — to help victims of last week's tornadoes, officials said Tuesday. Some members of Congress have accused FEMA of playing down the danger of possible formaldehyde contamination in the trailers — 7,200 of them stored at the Hope airport — but an agency spokesman said Tuesday the trailers are safe. The decision to use some of the trailers for Arkansas and Tennessee twister victims comes after requests by state officials and members of Arkansas' congressional delegation, who have criticized the trailers in the past as a sign of federal ineptitude after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. David Maxwell, head of the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, said his office told FEMA immediately after the tornadoes the victims would need some of the trailers. FEMA administrator R. David Paulison said Friday on a tour of the damage that the agency would prefer putting storm victims in rental property, although he acknowledged that could be difficult in rural communities. "Knowing rural Arkansas and the areas that were hit, there's not a lot of rental property," Maxwell said. "Then you're stuck with mobile homes."

8 disaster-declared counties eligible for fed. assistance (AR Democrat Gazette, 2/12)

FEMA has declared eight counties - Baxter, Pope, Sharp, Stone, Conway, Randolph, IZard and Van Buren - federal disaster areas qualifying for individual-assistance grants. These counties will also get public-assistance funds for infrastructure needs. Two counties - Independence and Union - will receive only the public assistance. FEMA helps fund these infrastructure repairs on a 75/25 cost-sharing basis with no cap on the sum FEMA will contribute. The federal disaster designation for individual assistance means residents in these counties may apply for up to a maximum of \$28,800 per applicant (usually per household) in federal grant money to repair homes and vehicles and to pay for medical bills and temporary housing, said FEMA spokesman Dan Martinez. Once residents apply for the grants, they will receive either funds or a request for additional information, which may also include a Small Business Administration loan packet. If they get that packet, they should complete it to see if they qualify for a loan. If they do not qualify for a loan, they will automatically be referred to continue the grant application process. Gov. Mike Beebe has declared these 13 counties state disaster areas: Baxter, Conway, Franklin, Independence, IZard, Marion, Newton, Pope, Randolph, Sharp, Stone, Union and Van Buren. The state declaration is a precursor to requesting a federal disaster declaration, said Richard Griffin, the state coordinating officer with the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management. If, however, a county ends up not qualifying for federal individual assistance, Griffin said, its residents may apply for state assistance. He said the state program "pretty much mirrors the federal program with the exception of the dollars available." State assistance can reach only about \$3,860 per applicant, he said.

Area mops up after another round of floods (Columbus Dispatch, 2/12)

Volunteers with the American Red Cross have handed out more than 100 cleanup kits and are working this week to assess the damage to flooded homes in northwestern Ohio. Hancock and Defiance counties were hit hardest by last week's floods, which forced some residents from their homes and into temporary shelters. The shelters have since closed, and people are working to mop up the damage to homes and businesses for the second time in six months. "This is not nearly as bad as the flooding was back in August," said Jodie Tienvieri of the American Red Cross Greater Toledo Area Chapter. So far, she said, about 50 homeowners have reported water in their homes, measuring anywhere from 3 inches to a foot. Officials in Findlay estimate about 300 homes and businesses were damaged. And the timing of the latest floods couldn't have been worse. Some residents hadn't yet moved back into their homes since the August flood -- the worst since 1913 -- or had just finished fixing up their homes, Findlay Police Chief William Spraw said yesterday. "I think the big thing is frustration," Findlay Mayor Pete Sehnert said. He said the city hopes to qualify for federal funding that will allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study the Blanchard River and determine why it is prone to flooding. Meanwhile, state and federal officials are encouraging families and business owners who experienced damage to call the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program at 1-800-638-6620. Residents who received assistance after the August floods might still be covered under the same flood policy, said Tamara McBride of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. The most recent damage does not

have to be declared an emergency in order for people to be eligible because it happened so close to the last flood, McBride said.

Guard Joins Fight Against Virginia Wildfires (US Army, 2/12)

More than 120 Virginia National Guard Soldiers went on state active duty Feb. 11 to join in the commonwealth's battle against wildfires raging throughout the state. While a Virginia National Guard helicopter dumped 600-gallon buckets of water to help contain fires in the Tazewell area, more than 100 Soldiers trained at Fort Pickett to be prepared for duty Tuesday in Roanoke and Bedford. "The Virginia National Guard helicopters were amazingly effective today," said Dave Slack, the Virginia Department of Forestry regional forester in Tazewell. "Our objective for the Guard was to protect structures in the area from the fires, and we accomplished that mission." The target area was a housing development approximately one mile southeast of Center Cross, Va., Slack explained. The terrain in that area would have made it very difficult for Department of Forestry personnel to battle the blaze with their tracked vehicles. It would have taken a crew of four to six firefighters and Forestry personnel three to five days to accomplish what the Virginia Guard helicopter did in an hour, Slack said. As the Guard aviators were helping contain fires with their water dumps, approximately 100 Virginia Guard Soldiers conducted firefighting training with the Forestry Department at Fort Pickett. The Soldiers are scheduled to leave Fort Pickett in the early morning Feb. 12. About 60 Soldiers are scheduled to travel to the Roanoke Armory to establish a command post and begin assisting Forestry Department officials with the firefighting effort in the Carvin's Cove area. About 40 Soldiers are scheduled to travel to the Bedford area and assist with the fight in the Smith Mountain Lake area.

Illinois Federal assistance request rejected (University Wire, 2/12)

A request for federal assistance concerning severe January flooding in Livingston and Iroquois counties was denied by FEMA on Wednesday. Thunderstorms and rain hit the counties Jan. 7, causing a flood in both counties. The normal amount of rainfall for this region is usually about two inches in January, but some reports said there were four to six inches of rain during the storm, said Jim Angel, state climatologist. "January is usually one of the driest months," Angel said. "But there was almost spring-like weather that day." After a wet December, much of the soil was already very moist and unable to handle more rain, which was a main cause of the severe flooding, he said. Within the city of Pontiac alone, more than 800 homes had some kind of water damage, and the city was one-third under water, said Steve McCoy, mayor of Pontiac. Several dozen residents are still out of their homes. The amount of homes effected is still being calculated, according to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). Four hundred eighty two homes in the two counties were listed as impacted, 118 were originally determined to have major damage. Pontiac, Watseka and many other towns were badly effected by the rain and the flooding that followed and are now working together to get federal assistance for the cleanup, McCoy said. Both Iroquois and Livingston counties requested a federal disaster declaration on Jan. 18, but the request was denied Wednesday, said Cat Lengel, external affairs specialist for FEMA's region 5.

High winds batter Virginia (Richmond Times, 2/11)

Severe windy conditions yesterday triggered dozens of traffic accidents, power outages and brush fires that caused dozens of home evacuations across the state, prompting Gov. Timothy M. Kaine to declare a state of emergency. The high winds downed trees and wires across the region, keeping local emergency crews busy and pressing them to request state aid as conditions worsened throughout the evening hours. In central Virginia, Louisa and Henrico counties appeared to have been hit the hardest, according to the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Some Louisa residents along Spring and Johnson roads east of Mineral were evacuated because of a 400-acre fire, county spokeswoman Amanda Lloyd said. Along the Henrico-Hanover county line, firefighters responded to a massive blaze north of Virginia Center Commons mall. Emergency crews last night were still fighting a fire on 70 to 80 acres over a 2-mile area. At one point, the fire spread to the street across from the shopping center, but firefighters were able to control that, Henrico's Fire Department Deputy Chief Rick McClure said. More than 45 firefighters from Hanover and Henrico were on the scene, McClure said. They couldn't get any assistance from other jurisdictions because other localities were busy fighting their own fires, he said. "It's extremely rare for Henrico to have a fire this size, and obviously the wind has caused tremendous problem," McClure said. The high winds caused a tractor-trailer to overturn in the southbound lanes of Interstate 295 at the Varina-Enon Bridge about 4 p.m., closing all lanes for several hours. The truck driver, Melissa Alley of Kentucky, suffered non-life-threatening injuries, state police Sgt. Thomas A. Cunningham said. As of 8 p.m., about 27,000 area residents were without power in central Virginia, Dominion Virginia Power spokesman Richard Zuercher said. More than 85,000 Dominion Virginia Power customers across the state didn't have electricity. The power outages were expected to remain through this morning because high winds were still knocking down power lines last night, Zuercher said. He said Dominion crews worked overnight to restore power. Appalachian Power, which offers power service in the western part of the Virginia, reported that 77,000 of its customers were without power last night.

Finding Hope in Arkansas Town (Disaster News Network, 2/11)

This small town is nestled along one of the state's recommended scenic driving tours and until last Tuesday, the town was surrounded by lush Ozark mountain forests. Saturday Clinton was a destination but none of it was scenic. Last Tuesday, a half-mile wide EF-4 tornado, barreled through Clinton, stripping away most of the forest and flattening many houses in its path. This weekend, with help from dozens of volunteers, Clinton residents were clearing what's left of the trees, and were trying to find what they could of their lives. Some of the volunteers are part of organized response teams from Arkansas and surrounding states that have been trained by faith-based organizations, others like Darrell Sansom of Conway drove to Clinton the day after the storm and has been helping every day since. Clinton resident Jean Miller's yard, which was once filled with flower gardens, shrubs and more than 50 trees, now has one lone, branchless trunk poking up from the mud. However, she said she's not complaining because, even though she carried no insurance on her paid-off home, she and her husband, Charles survived the ordeal – something she initially didn't believe was possible. "When we heard that a tornado was heading this way, we started watching out the windows. All of a sudden, this huge funnel cloud came over the horizon and all you could see was a wall of black heading towards

us. The tornado was so wide there was only a little sliver of white sky on each side of it. We were scared to death," she said.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Hepatitis Scare Offers glimpse into flu pandemic nightmare (Buffalo News, 2/15)

Erie County this week stretched its resources to inject 10,153 people over five days in a hepatitis A scare that offered a real-world test of the community's readiness for a far more serious disaster. It left an uncomfortable illustration of the nightmarish scenario confronting even the best-run health department if pandemic flu strikes, and many scientists believe it is only a matter of time before that happens. The county pandemic flu plan, put together under federal guidelines, calls for vaccinating 950,000 people in less than a week if a new, deadly strain of influenza spreads around the globe. The goal is overwhelming. "We've been sending messages back up the chain to the federal government that the plan is not realistic. What we just experienced proves our point," said Dr. Anthony Billittier IV, the county health commissioner. Hundreds of county and state workers, backed up by volunteers, pitched in at the mass vaccination clinics for hepatitis A at Erie Community College North. By most accounts, they coped well with the challenge. Their training and preparations paid off. As a result of lessons learned, officials already see potential improvements to avoid problems that did arise. But the response raised a larger question that isn't easily answered. What price are residents here and elsewhere across the nation willing to pay for greater disaster preparedness? It's roughly estimated the hepatitis A clinic cost more than \$500,000, yet risk of exposure to the disease was considered low, and it generally causes only flulike symptoms that clear up. So far, there is just one reported case.

FEMA looks at expanded use of trains in hurricane evacuations (AP, 2/12)

FEMA may expand the use of passenger trains to evacuate the sick and elderly in advance of hurricanes across the Gulf Coast, a FEMA official said. Glenn Cannon, a FEMA assistant administrator, told a congressional subcommittee meeting in New Orleans on Monday that his agency is looking at passenger trains as a method of getting people out of harm's way. After Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005, Amtrak was hired to be on hand to evacuate people with special needs if another disaster hit. Cannon said FEMA is now devising disaster plans for other Gulf Coast cities based on the New Orleans model. "We're changing our whole planning focus now from Louisiana-centric to Gulf Coast-centric," Cannon told the subcommittee. But, he said, turning railways into evacuation routes won't be easy. Rights of way for most railroads are privately owned by freight companies, and there is no congressional mandate to use railroads for evacuations. Also, the existing stock of passenger cars cannot accommodate evacuees unable to walk, he said.

Poway (CA) School Kids Get Prepped for Distasers (DHS, 2/12)

A valuable classroom project to teach emergency preparedness to elementary school children was presented in the Poway Unified School District today. The hands-on course, called FEMA for Kids, was shared with fourth graders at Painted Rock

Elementary School by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and several preparedness partners. The message FEMA brought to school is "Be aware-prepare." The kids got it. "These kids really took to emergency preparedness planning," said Mike Hall, head of FEMA's wildfire recovery office in Southern California, "and we hope they will share the important things they learned with their friends and families." Principal Jack Troxell and dozens of enthusiastic youngsters and teachers participated in the two-hour curriculum. Not only did students work online, they also got a physical and mental workout as well. Poway firefighters taught the class to stop, drop and roll in case of fire and to duck and cover in an earthquake. Red Cross workers demonstrated First Aid techniques. Other instructors showed the items that go into an emergency supply kit, and taught students how to care for pets during stressful times. The kids jumped in and learned quickly. "This is a valuable program for youngsters of all ages," said Hall. "The more work we all do to become prepared, the more informed we will be-and the better prepared-when big disruptions happen."

Cities prepare for bio attack (Portland Press Herald, 2/12)

Portland health officials have a plan to distribute life-saving medication within 48 hours to everyone who lives and works in the city, in preparation for a bio-terrorism attack that spreads deadly anthrax spores throughout Maine's largest city. The Cities Readiness Initiative is being expanded to include South Portland and Biddeford, part of a metropolitan statistical area where there are 300,000 people at the height of a busy workday. "It's really trying to lessen the impact a disease agent would have," said Michael Russell, program manager for epidemiology and emergency preparedness in the Portland Department of Human Services' public health division. "These agents don't really know any geographic boundaries." Plans are in place in 36 of the country's major cities and are being developed in 36 more metropolitan areas to include at least one city in each state. Maine was awarded \$200,000 from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop its plan, most of which was distributed to local agencies that were involved in the work. The initiative was developed in case of a terrorist attack that uses germs as a weapon. Deadly incidents involving letters laced with anthrax bacteria right after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks raised fears about the country's ability to respond to a more widespread germ attack. The Cities Readiness Initiative also reflects a growing awareness that a catastrophic medical emergency would overwhelm a city's medical facilities. Federal officials determined that getting medicine to large numbers of people quickly is easier with multiple distribution points staffed with a large number of volunteers.

Oregon Plans for Pet Rescue in Disasters (The Oregonian, 2/11)

Next time a tsunami, flood or earthquake strikes Oregon, rescuers will try to save pets and livestock as well as people. As required by a 2007 state law and post-Hurricane Katrina federal grant rules, public agencies across Oregon are adding dogs, cats, cattle, horses, sheep, chickens -- possibly even snakes and rats -- to emergency-management efforts. Some plans call for animal refugee camps set up next to Red Cross shelters. The changes will increase costs and the demands on emergency workers, but proponents say rescuing animals is the responsible and ethical thing to do -- for people as well as animals. Hurricane Katrina provided several lessons. Many residents might refuse to

leave without their pets. People forced to evacuate without their animals tend to return before it is safe. Dogs left to fend for themselves could become vicious and attack rescue workers, disaster victims or other stranded pets. The humane treatment of animals, even in times of emergency, has become a mainstream American value. "Now people take animal rescue seriously," said Oregon Humane Society spokesman David Lytle. "Katrina was a wake-up call, and this is one of the things we learned." Clackamas County is one of the first counties in Oregon to rework its disaster plan. "Helping pets during disasters is helping people during disasters," declares the county's updated plan. "No one should have to choose between evacuating to safety or remaining with their pets in harm's way." County officials hope to team with other Portland-area agencies to buy a mobile emergency animal shelter (basically a big truck with kennels), an animal ambulance and supply van, and three giant tents to create animal refugee camps near Red Cross shelters, which forbid pets.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

FEMA plans hurricane trailer exodus over chemical (Associated Press, 2/15)

After downplaying the risks for months, FEMA said Thursday it will rush to move Gulf Coast hurricane victims out of roughly 35,000 government-issued trailers because tests found dangerous levels of formaldehyde fumes. FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison said the agency hopes to get everyone out and into hotels, motels, apartments and other temporary housing by the summer, when the heat and stuffy air could worsen the problem inside the trailers. "The real issue is not what it will cost but how fast we can move people out," he said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said fumes from 519 tested trailers and mobile homes in Louisiana and Mississippi were, on average, about five times what people are exposed to in most modern homes. Formaldehyde, a preservative commonly used in construction materials, can lead to breathing problems and is also believed to cause cancer. The findings stirred worry and anger across the Gulf Coast, where FEMA is already a dirty word and housing has been scarce since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck in 2005. "Am I angry at FEMA? Of course I am. They should have started moving people out of these trailers once they first started finding problems," said Lynette Hooks, 48. She said that since she began living in her trailer outside her damaged New Orleans home in October 2006, she has suffered headaches and sinus problems, in addition to the asthma she had before. The CDC findings could also have disturbing implications for the safety of other trailers and mobile homes across the country, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said on Capitol Hill on Thursday. But the CDC study did not look beyond the FEMA housing. Paulison vowed that the agency will never again use the flimsy, cramped travel trailers to shelter victims of disasters. Mobile homes are generally roomier than trailers and considered less susceptible to buildups of fumes. FEMA will press ahead with plans to supply leftover, never-used mobile homes from the twin disasters to victims of last week's tornadoes in the South, Paulison said. But the mobile homes will be opened up, aired out and tested first, he said.

Katrina recovery chief visits MS, praises volunteers (N.O. Herald Tribune, 2/15)

The federal coordinator of Gulf Coast rebuilding said the government didn't anticipate the need for mental health professionals in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and has had trouble bringing qualified therapists to the area. Donald Powell spoke Thursday at the Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster's annual conference. Responding to a question, Powell said Katrina's victims, and especially children, needed immediate care after the storm and didn't get it. Some, he said, are turning to drug and alcohol abuse to deal with their problems. "It's almost a forgotten need," Powell said Powell, whose office coordinates federal, state and local recovery efforts, lauded hurricane recovery volunteers for their work over the past 2 1/2 years and urged them to stay ready for the next disaster. "It's that smile, that hug, that tap on the shoulder, that lifting someone up when they were really on their knees," Powell said. "It's wiping away that tear; it's holding that baby that makes you special."

Problems plague government buyouts of Katrina property (Associated Press, 2/13)

An effort to take possession of thousands of lots from Hurricane Katrina victims who chose to sell their property to the state has run into numerous problems including the eviction of 50 people who claimed they still own the parcels. Other problems: FEMA trailers still sit on 156 of the properties and at least 40 addresses did not exist, the state official in charge of the program said Tuesday. Nadine Jarmon, the head of the Louisiana Land Trust, outlined the problems in a meeting of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, saying some of the issues stem from a lack of information provided by ICF International, a private contractor that administers the state's troubled Road Home program. The program offered the buyout option to residents who chose to relocate after the 2005 storm. Raymond Allen, a contract administrator with the LLT, said the evictions in some cases involved renters and owners who continued to live on the property after selling it. In at least two cases, those living on the property were the victims of bookkeeping errors and did indeed still own it. Allen also said ICF was not at fault for the FEMA trailers still being on land bought by the state. A FEMA spokesman, Andrew Thomas, said the agency would look into the matter. At least 40 people are still living in trailers, according to Allen. Thomas said it would determine if the people were original occupants and provide them alternate housing if they proved to be so. So far, an estimated 5,150 properties have been bought-out, the bulk in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. But officials estimated Tuesday that the number could double or even triple as more residents finalize their plans for what they want to do with their hurricane-damaged homes and their paperwork is processed. The property numbers are only an estimate because ICF has yet to provide complete ownership documents on the parcels. ICF spokeswoman Gentry Brann said the company has been forthcoming with its information and pointed out that the other problems "are not the responsibility of ICF." The properties will ultimately be handed over to individual parishes, which will then decide how they fit into their recovery plans. Before the transfer, the state intends to do environmental reviews on the lots, many of which have been abandoned and overgrown with weeds since Katrina hit nearly 2 1/2 years ago.