

Disaster News Update – February 18 to 24, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Avalanche:** Alaska
- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland
- **Earthquake:** Utah, Nevada
- **Fire:** Oklahoma, Texas, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia
- **HAZMAT:** North Carolina (Gasoline Tanker Accident), Georgia (Chemical Tanker Accident), New York (Acid in Water Treatment System)
- **Heavy Rain:** California, Florida
- **Ice Storm:** Missouri
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Kansas
- **Strong Wind:** Georgia, Colorado, California
- **Tornado:** Alabama, Florida

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Kentucky:](#) Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding (2/21)
- [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)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(2/13\)](#), [Texas \(2/8\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Red Cross planning to stay on in Wells (Deseret Morning News, 2/24)

Local Red Cross volunteers have been working tirelessly to provide relief for residents after Wednesday's earthquake. More than 200 people have been affected by the quake and are unable to stay in their homes. The Red Cross opened a shelter at Wells Elementary school to meet people's emergency needs of food, clothing, shelter and basic first aid. The shelter will remain open until all those who need housing can return to their homes or can arrange for other suitable accommodations. "Volunteers have been out in the affected areas since it was safe to do so, meeting the basic needs of the earthquake victims," said Red Cross Relief Operation director Megan Chamberlain. Nearly 40 Red Cross volunteers, many from Utah, are on the scene helping those affected by the disaster. "Several Red Cross workers were out in the neighborhoods Friday to assess the damage, deliver food and water. A licensed Red Cross nurse was with one group to provide health services to those who needed it," Chamberlain said. Saturday, a team of mental health professionals trained by the Red Cross will be on hand to assist victims. The mental health workers can provide emotional support to those affected by this

disaster. They will work with local community service professionals to help victims cope with the emotional strain. Other Red Cross workers work today distributing supplies like gloves, shovels, garbage bags and tarps to help residents begin the cleanup process. In the coming days and weeks of recovery, the Red Cross will provide one-on-one casework assistance to individuals and families affected by the earthquake. Trained workers will help disaster victims as they begin the long process of rebuilding their lives by identifying emergency needs and locating resources to help meet those needs.

100th, 101st Habitat homes under construction in Slidell (N.O. Times Picayune, 2/24)

East St. Tammany Habitat for Humanity raised the walls on its 100th and 101st homes on Presidents Day, preparing for an endeavor that former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, will lead in late spring along the Gulf Coast. The Slidell-based nonprofit organization, families and other volunteers are building the homes at the corner of Harris Avenue and Stanley Street in Slidell. They plan to dedicate the neighboring homes sponsored by Merrill Lynch during Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project 2008. The local Habitat affiliate, which incorporated in 1992, celebrated its accomplishments and future goals with the wall-raising ceremony. East St. Tammany Habitat for Humanity, in partnership with local families and sponsors and volunteers who have come from across the nation and world, built 24 homes prior to Hurricane Katrina, finished 65 homes since the devastating storm, and is currently working on 10 additional homes. East St. Tammany Habitat for Humanity also commemorated a "Gulfwide partnership" with the Carters, who will hold the internationally recognized Habitat event from May 11-16 in Mississippi, said Kimberley Fraser, the local Habitat executive director. The project host affiliate is Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, headquartered in Biloxi, but other affiliates in the area and region are invited to build as participating affiliates. Volunteers will build additional homes in other communities in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, the information states. During the special week, Carter Work Project volunteers will build 10 new houses in Biloxi and 20 in Pascagoula and do other work, such as repairs and framing. More than 1,500 volunteers, including AmeriCorps members, are expected to participate, the release states. Volunteers through Habitat Gulf Coast recovery programs already have begun or built more than 1,300 homes in hurricane aftermath, the release states.

Spring break alternatives gain clout (University Wire, 2/21)

Indiana University and organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Cross-Cultural Solutions and United Way are teaming up to offer affordable spring break options to students interested in making a difference on a national level or possibly worldwide. Travel destinations include (but are not limited to) the Bahamas, Asia, Europe and Africa, as well as a number of more local opportunities. Through these experiences students get a chance to help others by building homes for those who are less fortunate, helping to rebuild areas that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina or preserving endangered species while taking part in an experience that will stick with them forever. "It is the real hands-on experience that cannot be taught in a classroom," said Staci Lichterman, a spring break specialist at STA travel. Last year MTV partnered with United Way to help repair the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Nearly 100 young adults spent their spring break helping rebuild homes for Katrina victims.

Hands On Disaster Response Coordinating Efforts in Arkansas (PR Newswire, 2/20)

Hands On Disaster Response (HODR) is entering its second week of Project Gassville a volunteer project to help the devastated city of Gassville, Arkansas. Gassville was one of the many cities hit by a band of tornados that struck five states on February 5th. Tornado damage in Gassville is severe with 70 homes destroyed and many more having suffered major damage. HODR's assessment team spent time evaluating the damage and overall response in Tennessee as well as Arkansas before choosing Gassville as a home for the next three weeks. After talking with local churches, other volunteer organizations working in the areas and city officials it became clear that there was a big need for overall coordination of the recovery effort in Gassville. This project marks HODR's first micro-deployment and will last about three weeks. Previous projects have ranged from three to five months. HODR has hosted over 90 local area volunteers so far. Volunteers are engaged in a number of different tasks in Gassville. Projects include staffing and coordination center support, community needs assessment support, tree and debris cleanup, roofing and general home repair. As always, we welcome skilled volunteers and will do our best to put trade skills and talents to work in the community. Our volunteers only need to get transportation to the volunteer base. In exchange for volunteer time and resources, HODR provides food, shelter, and a dynamic, rewarding work experience.

Volunteers Say They Are Called to Help (Disaster News Network, 2/20)

Volunteers working to help Arkansas residents impacted by the early February tornadoes say they have been called to help those less fortunate. "It really is a blessing to be able to help folks who are suffering," said Betty Geurink who with her husband Glen acts as a project coordinator for Christian Reform World Relief Committee (CRWRC). The couple spent four days traveling throughout Arkansas and Tennessee earlier this month, acting as the "eyes and ears" for the organization, locating communities that need help, then making arrangements that will allow a 10-man chainsaw crew out of Michigan to come to the area and stay for an extended period of time. "There's a rather poor community about 17 miles south of Mountain View that has an extraordinary number of trees down, but no way to get rid of them. I met with the pastor at the Antioch General Baptist Church and he's agreed to allow the men to stay there for a week. The church is going to feed them and I was also able to locate a place for them to shower. Organizing all the details may sound a little mundane, but it's required," she said, adding that since signing on with the organization in 1992, she has done everything from helping fill out paperwork to building houses.

First Mississippi VOAD Conference (FEMA, 2/20)

The Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) annual conference kicked off Feb. 14. The two-day event marked the first time many Mississippi voluntary agencies gathered in one place to share ideas, exchange war stories, and prepare for the next disaster. More than 100 attendees listened to various speakers and participated in special seminars. Donald Powell, federal coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding, delivered the keynote address in which he saluted the attendees and their organizations. "Any success achieved in the recovery effort is due to the spirit of volunteers and love for their fellow Americans," said Powell. "The rest of the world speaks not of the failure of

government but the spirit of the volunteers who gave time and effort to help their fellow man." Powell conducted a brief question and answer session where he addressed various issues, including the need for additional funding and new case managers, availability of mental health services, and resource availability for case managers. Jay Huffstatler, project manager of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation's Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund, spent six months coordinating the conference. "We're tremendously excited and overwhelmed by the response," said Huffstatler. "We received a lot of support from various agencies, including FEMA, to make this event a reality."

Relief groups to cooperate (San Bernadino County Sun, 2/19)

Government agencies and relief organizations need to collaborate to better assist disaster victims, members of a panel said Tuesday. Rebuilding Mountain Hearts and Lives, a nonprofit formed in the wake of the Old Fire in 2003, brought together about 60 representatives from throughout the country for a daylong forum at the UCLA Conference Center in Lake Arrowhead. The event was intended to be the first step in a unified effort to provide long-term recovery assistance to victims of the Grass Valley and Slide fires in October in the Running Springs and Lake Arrowhead areas. The fires destroyed 448 homes and damaged 80 homes. Eight businesses were lost. Property damage from the fires is estimated at \$155 million, according to information provided at the forum. But many mountain residents who suffered losses didn't have enough insurance. Even with the help of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Small Business Administration and other support groups, there is a \$19 million shortfall to meet the complete rebuilding needs of full-time residents, said David Stuart, executive director of Rebuilding Mountain Hearts and Lives. Participants at the meeting agreed to form a committee to find ways to bridge the funding gap. Representatives from the American Red Cross, United Way, Habitat for Humanity, Salvation Army, FEMA, the state Office of Emergency Services and several faith-based organizations took part in the forum. Stuart said his nonprofit would serve as a "matchmaker" with other agencies to coordinate the delivery of food, shelter and other essential services.

Emergency response team looks to Scouts for help (Manchester Union Leader, 2/19)

The local Community Emergency Response Team is bolstering itself and its capabilities by tapping into a group known to "be prepared." Partnering with the Venture Division of the Boy Scouts of America, Salem's Citizen Corps Council will be expanding its network to include 14- to 20-year-old Scouts in its response team network. "The mixture of the Scouts is a great addition to the training," said Fausto Molinet, Salem's Citizen Corps chairman. The relationship with the Scouts is the first of its kind in New England, according to Molinet, who observed similar CERT models in Illinois. In 2002, Salem organized a Citizen Corps Council under the direction of the Department of Homeland Security to offer a channel for local volunteers to help during disasters. CERT, which is a chartered group within the Citizen Corps, was successfully deployed during the Mother's Day flood in 2006 when about 25 volunteers helped with response tasks in the community. "We've been active but we wanted to get this team formally together and working with the Venture Scouts," Molinet said. On the first of two day-long training classes for new members at the Salem Fire Department on Saturday, about a third of the participants were Scouts or leaders. "There's a lot to learn with CERT," said Tricia

Wynne, a group instructor from Goffstown. "The first is that none of this makes them a first responder." It's common for new volunteers to act on the desire to help during storms or conditions, even when fire and police do not need them, Wynne said. "If the town thinks it's something the CERT can do, they'll be deployed to do that," she said. "Always respond to the town's emergency manager."

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Seminar is for disaster planning](#) (Biloxi (MS) Sun Herald, 2/22)

Helping small businesses be better prepared for disasters is the purpose of Open for Business week, launched by the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce. The seminar will be held next week at the Chamber's office at 11975 Seaway Road, Gulfport. Times are: Tuesday, 11 a.m.; Wednesday, 8 a.m.; and Thursday, 4 p.m. "Open for Business by the Institute for Business & Home Safety" serves as a disaster-planning toolkit for small to midsize businesses. The instructor will be Charlotte Franklin, deputy coordinator, Business Preparedness and Public/Private Partnering, Arlington Office of Emergency Management in Arlington, Va., where she is responsible for programs on business preparedness, public/private resource partnerships and business resiliency and resumption after a disaster. She spearheaded the design of the first workshops in the country after 9/11 on business recovery and building threat mitigation and assessment. She will provide free consultations to help navigate business owners through their disaster planning. This program, created by the Institute for Business and Home Safety, has been a part of the Chamber's work since Hurricane Katrina. The services are available to any business on the Gulf Coast. "You don't have to be a Chamber member to participate," said Chamber CEO Kimberly Nastasi. In addition, for small-business owners who are unable to attend any of the seminars, Franklin can visit a business for a one-on-one appointment. Call the Chamber at 604-0014 to schedule an appointment.

[FEMA urges community approach to combat fire deaths in rural areas](#) (AP, 2/19)

They're among the most effective lifesaving devices a homeowner can have, cutting the risk of death from a fire nearly in half. But rural communities where people are at greatest danger of dying by fire usually lack programs for free distribution of smoke alarms, a new federal report says. The report advises rural fire companies to partner with churches, senior centers, civic leaders and health-care workers to help prevent fire deaths in America's smallest communities. The report funded by FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration aims to reduce fatalities in rural communities of less than 2,500 people, which have a fire death rate twice that of larger population centers. Many such communities are poor and depend on volunteer fire departments, researchers from the National Fire Protection Association found. Only 20 percent of those companies give away free smoke alarms, compared to 70 percent of fire departments serving communities of 100,000 or more. The researchers looked at government-funded projects that have installed thousands of smoke alarms in poor, rural communities in the Southeast and Southwest. They found that a key common denominator was the involvement of local groups, civic leaders and volunteers.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

NV Town Cleans Up After Earthquake (Disaster News Network, 2/25)

More than 175 people were told Friday they can not return to their homes until further inspections are completed, following Thursday's unusual earthquake that hit this small northeastern Nevada town. Those homes that have been declared unsafe, were amongst hundreds of buildings reported with some sort of damage following the magnitude 6.0 quake. It was the first moderately strong quake to hit the region in 150 years and many of the residents do not have earthquake insurance. Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons said Thursday night he was asking for a federal disaster declaration and preliminary damage assessments, the first step in qualifying for federal aid, were completed Sunday night according to Kim Toulouse, the public information officer with Nevada's Emergency Management Division. This year's major snowstorms complicated inspections. Wells had received 58-inches of snow so far this year and another major storm is predicted for this week. With buildings weakened in the earthquake, officials said they were concerned a significant snowfall could cause roof damage.

Jackson's ice storm expected to cost \$1.2 million (Associated Press, 2/24)

This month's ice storm in Jackson will cost the southeast Missouri city \$1.2 million. Trees, electric wires and more than 50 poles buckled and snapped under the weight of up to an inch of ice that fell Feb. 11-12. City administrator Jim Roach said Jackson has applied for some reimbursement from FEMA. In the meantime, bills will be paid from the city's electric surplus fund of \$6 million. Poles and wires were damaged in the 2003 tornado, but insured buildings bore the brunt of destruction.

Nevada residents assessing damage post-quake (Deseret Morning News, 2/23)

About 9:30 a.m. Friday, the old Wells City Hall, built in 1920, shook yet again, taking the latest temblor in stride, even if workers inside still couldn't. Friday was being called by first responders as a day for the city's 1,800 residents to recover and assess the damage following Thursday's 6.0 magnitude earthquake. By noon, all roads leading in and out of the small community had reopened. FEMA officials arrived Friday evening and will be evaluating the damage today to determine if Wells qualifies for federal emergency relief funds, said Elko County undersheriff Rocky Gonzalez. Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons gave Wells a state disaster area designation Thursday, which Toulouse said should help speed up the process of getting a potential federal designation. State and local officials spent much of Friday re-evaluating damage in Wells and outlying areas because of the aftershocks, Gonzalez said. "We're finding more damage to homes," he said. It could take up to 48 hours to get the needed damage information to the state's governor, who then forwards a report that eventually could reach President George Bush for his approval to release federal monies. Toulouse said there may be public and individual federal assistance available, along with federal grants of up to \$28,000 to help people recover and repair. Wells High School was one of several large buildings that sustained significant structural damage, leaving school officials planning Friday on how, when and where students can return to class. Overall, telephone lines, power, drinkable water supplies for residents and heat sources were all operating throughout Wells on Friday.

The next step for multiple agencies was to go door to door, checking each home in the town for structural damage, unsafe water heaters or problem propane lines. "There is a stress level there," said Wells Mayor Rusty Tybo. "I don't think there's a residence in the city that didn't suffer some kind of damage." Particularly hard hit was the historic downtown district, which Tybo said the community was pinning its hopes on to further the city's recent economic development.

Cleanup's end near for some neighbors (Tulsa World, 2/23)

Area towns are only days to a few weeks from finishing; Owasso already has. While the city of Tulsa still struggles to dispose of mountains of fallen tree limbs from December's ice storm, many suburban towns are nearing the end of their debris-removal nightmares. At Sand Springs, final cleanup work on the north side of town was expected to be complete by this weekend, and the south side is scheduled to be complete by next week. The cleanup price tag in Sand Springs -- which has contracted for the work -- is about \$1 million, according to Assistant Police Chief Mike Carter, who is coordinating recovery efforts. FEMA's public assistance program to state and local governments pays 75 percent of approved costs. The remaining 25 percent is split between the state and the city. Carter said cleanup crews are planning another pass through the golf course and city parks to get the last of the debris. City officials will meet with FEMA agents on Saturday to discuss the cleanup of area creeks and streams, which are clogged with fallen tree debris and must be cleaned out to prevent flooding, Carter said.

FEMA to fund entire cost of storm cleanup (Buffalo News, 2/22)

A federal agency has reversed its previous stance and will reimburse the City of North Tonawanda for all of its cleanup costs incurred following the October 2006 snowstorm, officials announced Thursday. FEMA will pay the city \$845,127, which covers more than half of the \$1.5 million cleanup bill it faced after the surprise blast. Agency officials initially denied the reimbursement request -- and its first appeal -- because they believed the city paid too much per tree limb removed. So it previously paid the city only \$570,000 for cleanup work. Only after the city's second appeal did FEMA officials change their tune. "I believe we did nothing wrong in the process, and we appreciate the help of all of our federal representatives," said Common Council President Brett M. Sommer. North Tonawanda paid contractors to remove about 70,000 "dangerous hanging limbs" from its 10 1/2 square miles. Cleanup work began 10 days after the devastating storm hit, and only 69 whole trees had to be removed from public property, city officials have said. Instead of borrowing the money, the city took money from its savings to pay for the cleanup, Sommer said. Mayor Lawrence V. Soos said in a statement that he knew he would need to enlist help from federal representatives to convince FEMA officials.

Governor appeals denial of flood aid (Illinois Pantograph, 2/22)

Gov. Rod Blagojevich has appealed a federal denial of disaster assistance for Livingston and Iroquois counties. "More than a month after flooding forced hundreds of people from their homes, many families still can't return because they can't afford to make necessary repairs," Blagojevich said in a statement issued Thursday. "I urge President Bush to review our new information ... and quickly approve our appeal so people can repair and return to their homes." The Vermilion River flooded to record heights in early

January, causing damage to homes and businesses and forcing residents to evacuate in Pontiac, Watseka and other areas of Iroquois County. Illinois' Democratic U.S. Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama and U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, an Urbana Republican, sent a letter to Bush on Thursday in support of the declaration. State Rep. Dan Rutherford, R-Chenoa, also has been lobbying the governor for the appeal. A preliminary assessment was done in mid-January by local emergency officials, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and FEMA. Blagojevich then asked for federal disaster declaration, but that request was denied this month, with officials saying the damage could be handled by state and local agencies. The original denial prompted a new assessment of all the flooded areas, and officials hope it will convince the federal government to reverse its decision. In the new review, an additional 520 homes were found to be damaged by the flooding, and 120 of those sustained major damage. They included 98 homes in Iroquois County and 21 in Livingston County. The release also noted that 50 businesses suffered flood damage and several of those remain closed more than month later.

President Declares Major Disaster For Kentucky (FEMA, 2/21)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the commonwealth of Kentucky to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms, tornadoes, straight-line winds, and flooding during the period of February 5-6, 2008. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the commonwealth by President Bush. Paulison said that the President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Allen, Christian, Fayette, Hardin, Hart, Meade, Mercer, Monroe, and Muhlenberg counties. The assistance, to be coordinated by FEMA, can include grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. Low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration also will be available to cover residential and business losses not fully compensated by insurance. Federal funding also is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties within the commonwealth. Paulison named Michael Bolch as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Bolch said that damage surveys are continuing in other areas, and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are fully completed in the affected areas.

More Counties Added to Disaster Declaration (FEMA, 2/21)

FEMA announced today that disaster assistance has been made available for 12 more Indiana counties to help residents recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding that occurred during a period beginning Jan. 7, and is continuing. The additional counties are: Allen, Benton, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, Lake, Laporte, Newton, Noble, St. Joseph, Starke and Whitley. Individuals and business owners in these counties are now eligible to apply for a wide range of state and federal disaster assistance programs under the major disaster declaration issued by President Bush on Jan. 30. Other counties previously designated as eligible for individual assistance are: Carroll, Cass, Elkhart, Fulton, Jasper, Marshall, Pulaski, Tippecanoe and White

Recovery under way in storm-damaged South (Associated Press, 2/19)

Homeowners, utility crews and others worked Monday to clear away wreckage and restore services after the latest round of winter tornadoes to smash through the South. Alabama Gov. Bob Riley toured part of Prattville and said he was impressed by the community's response to the twister that struck the town. "One of the great things about living in Alabama and I say this after every major emergency we have it truly is amazing to see what's happening out there with all the families in this state," Riley said. At least 50 people were injured, and about 200 homes and 40 businesses were damaged in the Prattville area, according to the National Weather Service. No deaths were reported. Two people who were critically injured were upgraded to serious on Monday, said Todd Stacy, a spokesman for the governor. At least 11,000 homes and businesses in Prattville lacked power after the storm. The tornado was part of a system that swept across the Southeast on Sunday, damaging homes elsewhere in Alabama and in parts of Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. The violent weather continued into early Monday, when a tornado ripped apart a house in Hookerton, N.C., slightly injuring three people. "It sounded like a train came through my window," said Shannon Edwards, 19, who was trapped under debris for about an hour at her family's home. "My whole bed just flipped up. I didn't know where I was going to end up. I didn't know what was going on." Scattered damage to buildings and trees was reported elsewhere in North Carolina. The tornado that struck Prattville tore up a path about a quarter-mile wide and had winds of 140 to 150 mph, said meteorologist Jim Stefkovich at the National Weather Service's Birmingham office.

Iowa agencies, organization to get aid after winter storm (Associated Press, 2/18)
State and local agencies and some nonprofit organizations will get more than \$3.2 million in federal aid after a severe winter storm last December. FEMA and Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division announced the grants on Monday. They come after President Bush declared a major disaster for 30 counties that experienced damage during a severe winter storm that began Dec. 10. The money is used to reimburse the agencies and organizations for projects such as debris removal, rescue of motorists and emergency salting and sanding of roads. Officials said more funding could be on the way as eligible applications complete paperwork on their storm-related efforts. The counties that were part of the disaster declaration include: Adair, Adams, Appanoose, Cedar, Clarke, Clinton, Davis, Decatur, Fremont, Iowa, Jefferson, Johnson, Jones, Keokuk, Linn, Lucas, Madison, Mahaska, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Page, Ringgold, Taylor, Union, Van Buren, Wapello, Warren, Washington and Wayne.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Professional 'two-hatters' fill department gaps (Advocate, 2/24)
The Livingston Parish Fire Protection District, based in Walker, is one of many suburban or rural departments facing a burgeoning population and fewer volunteer firefighters. Needing trained workers available at odd hours - especially weekday mornings, when many volunteers are at their real jobs - departments are increasingly depending on paid part-time workers, many of them career firefighters. In Walker, the fifth-fastest-growing city in the state, Livingston Parish Fire Protection District 4 hired its first part-time employees nine years ago to bolster the volunteers. The number of part-time workers has

grown steadily since. Trey Jackson, who started volunteering at District 4 after moving to the area in 2001, was hired as a part-time firefighter four years ago. Twice a week he leaves a St. George fire station after a 24-hour shift, then stops to put in 12 hours at the Walker station. The only real difference in the two jobs is the names on the helmets. "It's all pretty much the same job - just a different truck and a different uniform," Jackson said. "That's really the only difference." "Two-hatters" - firefighters who work for two departments - are an important part of fire protection in small communities, said Dave Finger, director of government relations for the National Volunteer Fire Council. A 2006 grant application provides a picture of their numbers. Nationwide, departments applying for Homeland Security grants reported 27,734 two-hatters, with 341 in Louisiana, statistics provided by Finger show. But he said the actual number is probably higher, since many departments with two-hatters didn't seek a grant. The phenomenon has tracked a national decline in the ranks of volunteer firefighters, Finger said. While 72 percent of the nation's firefighters are volunteers, their numbers have dropped more than 8 percent since 1984, mostly because of the increased time demands on volunteer firefighters, he said. Fire departments that rely wholly or partly on volunteers have traditionally been training grounds for firefighters who go on to be full-time professionals. Now those volunteer and so-called "combination" departments are recruiting career firefighters back for part-time work, Finger said.

EU OK's first bird flu pandemic vaccine (UPI International, 2/21)

The European Medicines Agency Thursday recommended approval of the first vaccine designed to protect humans against H5N1, the virus that causes bird flu. Prepandrix, made by GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals, is a pre-pandemic vaccine "intended to trigger an immune response against the H5N1 strain of the influenza virus before or during an officially declared influenza pandemic," the agency said in a statement. The statement said the recommendation had been sent to the European Commission, which would decide whether to authorize its sale. The commission generally approves such recommendations within a month or two. H5N1 is a virus that causes flu in birds and has killed millions of them around the globe. Currently, although humans can catch the disease from birds -- and most who do so die -- it is not transmissible between humans. Scientists fear that a mutated strain might become transmissible between humans and spark a new global influenza pandemic. Although the new drug is designed to protect against existing strains, the agency said it was working on "the assumption that vaccination with Prepandrix will provide a clinically useful degree of cross-protection against the strain that causes the next pandemic." "No one knows how effective (pre-pandemic vaccines) will be," Dr. Joan Pfingst told United Press International.

FEMA Region I Announces First Federal Preparedness Coordinator (FEMA, 2/20)

FEMA announced the selection of Captain W. Russell Webster, USCG (Retired) as FEMA Region I's (New England) first Federal Preparedness Coordinator (FPC). The FPC position is a newly created job that is emblematic of FEMA's acknowledgment of and renewed emphasis on establishing and maintaining relationships with state, federal and tribal partners. FEMA has designated one FPC for each of its ten regions.

US: States better prepared for disasters; 'enormous' work ahead (AP, 2/20)

In the first report of its kind, U.S. health officials said the nation's states and cities made a strong effort to prepare for a flu pandemic, bioterrorism or other emergency health crises, but big challenges remain. "I think in terms of effort and progress, an 'A,'" said Dr. Richard Besser of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, when asked to assign a letter grade. "In terms of amount of work to be done, I would say that's absolutely enormous," he added. It was the government's first assessment of the payoff from its investment of more than \$5 billion since the terrorist attacks of 2001 to make the country better prepared for a variety of public health emergencies. The report looked at the staffing, laboratory capability and other resources of state, local and territorial health departments for handling bioterrorism or other disasters. The number of state and local health departments able to detect biological agents grew to 110 in 2007, up from 83 in 2002. Labs able to detect chemical agents increased to 47, from zero in 2001, the CDC found. All states are now doing year-round flu surveillance an important measure if the bird flu virus in Asia mutates into a more dangerous form easily spread among people, unleashing a worldwide epidemic. Information sharing between labs and public health professionals has grown tremendously. And the count of illness-investigating epidemiologists assigned to emergency response rose to 232 in 2006, from 115 in 2001.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

City Hall plans for 35 projects in N.O. (Associated Press, 2/23)

Officials say design work is about to begin on 35 rebuilding projects in the city, including a park, community clinics and fire stations. City recovery director Ed Blakely said the projects will cost an estimated \$100 million total, with most of that expected to be reimbursed by FEMA. He said the list represents a new, bundling-approach to projects, rather than one in which projects are handled individually. He said the city will be working more quickly with \$200 million from the state Legislature for infrastructure projects. There's also been a reorganization at City Hall, with staff and resources focused solely on seeing projects to completion as part of a "project delivery unit." Officials plan to announce another 30 projects in a couple weeks, Blakely said. Blakely, who on Thursday said about 50 projects would be put out to architects, said 22 architectural and design firms had been assigned to the 35 projects, but he declined to identify them, saying many contracts are still being negotiated. Since Hurricane Katrina, City Hall has started 46 recovery projects, he said.

Louisiana's Road Home restarts home elevation grants (N.O. CityBusiness, 2/23)

Homeowners will begin receiving funds through Louisiana's Road Home program this spring, with some homeowners eligible to receive an additional elevation grant later this year, state officials said Friday. Homeowner elevations had been on hold since April because of the anticipated shortfall in the Road Home program, which provides grants to homeowners to rebuild homes which were affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "We want homeowners to know we are officially beginning the elevation program again and that they will be getting the money they need to elevate their homes and protect themselves from future property loss," said Walter Leger, chairman of the Louisiana Recovery Authority's Housing Task Force. "This spring homeowners will begin seeing

these funds hit their bank accounts. " Gov. Bobby Jindal directed the Louisiana Recovery Authority and the Office of Community Development to begin distributing homeowner elevations so residents can rebuild safer, smarter and stronger than before. On his first day in office, Jindal named new LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater to be his authorized representative to FEMA on the state's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which is funding part of the grants. "The state has always been committed to rebuilding homes safer than before, but we haven't always had the means to do so," Rainwater said. "Not only are we providing homeowners with the option to receive Road Home elevation money, but we are also launching a second program later this year because we know homeowners have additional costs that cannot be covered with only \$30,000 in elevation money. " Homeowner elevations will come through two programs. The first round of funding is through the Road Home program, using Community Development Block Grant funds. Applicants of the program indicated in their initial paperwork whether they wanted to be considered for an elevations grant. The grants will provide up to \$30,000 to eligible Road Home applicants as an incentive to elevate their homes to meet the current flood guidance for their parishes, including the Advisory Base Flood Elevation.

Residents get a look at flood maps (The Advocate, 2/23)

Several hundred people showed up Thursday to take a look at the proposed flood maps for Lafayette Parish and ask questions of local and FEMA officials. The proposed maps are slated to become official later this year. Lafayette Parish is in the middle of a 90-day public comment period - set to end in April - during which the public can tell FEMA if they think the maps are in error. The maps are used to administer the National Flood Insurance Program. The proposed maps show a great deal more areas in the parish in so-called floodways, which are much more difficult to develop inside than are flood zones. Every home and business owner should take a look at the proposed maps now, in order to make decisions about the future, FEMA spokeswoman Barb Sturner said. If the proposed maps show your property in a higher-risk flood zone than it is now, it might be a good idea to buy flood insurance at your current, low-risk rate, Sturner said. Existing, current policies are "grandfathered in" once the proposed maps become effective - waiting until the new maps become official could mean you will pay more for flood insurance, Sturner said. Conversely, if your property will be in a lower-risk flood zone than it is now, it could pay off to wait until the new maps are accepted, when the new, lower rate will be available, Sturner said.

Children of 2001 terrorist attack help victims in N.O. (N.O. Times Picayune, 2/19)

Nineteen young people who lost a parent during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 are in town this week to pitch in with volunteer work at Habitat for Humanity's Musician's Village residential development in the Upper 9th Ward. The visit was organized by Tuesday's Children, a 9/11 family support organization, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, the Hope for Stanley Foundation and City Council President Arnie Fielkow. The Stanley Foundation is a rebuilding support group created in honor of Stanley Stewart, who played a lead role in helping evacuate Hurricane Katrina victims from the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center after the storm. "Bringing together the children who lost their parents on Sept. 11th to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina is an emotional event that will help the healing process for the victims of the two greatest catastrophes in

recent American history," said Richard Lapchick, one of the Stanley Foundation's founders. The New Orleans itinerary for the young visitors includes touring flood-damaged neighborhoods, attending a Tulane University basketball game and touring Tulane's Uptown campus, according to Fielkow's office.