

## **Disaster News Update –January 28 to February 3, 2008**

### **RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)**

- **Avalanche:** Montana, Colorado, Utah
- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky
- **Extreme Cold:** Michigan, Wisconsin
- **Fire:** Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas
- **Infrastructure:** North Dakota (Gas Leak/Loss of Heat)
- **Heavy Rain:** Pennsylvania, Hawaii, Maryland, North Carolina
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Idaho, Arkansas, Indiana, California, Montana, Washington, Oregon, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Kentucky, Tennessee
- **Strong Wind:** Texas, Mississippi, California, Illinois, New York
- **Structure Fire:** Arkansas (Commercial Center Fire)
- **Tornado:** Illinois

### **CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)**

- [Kansas:](#) Severe Winter Storms (2/1)
- [Indiana:](#) Severe Storms and Flooding (1/30)
- [Nebraska:](#) Severe Winter Storm (1/11)
- [Nevada:](#) Severe Winter Storms and Flooding (1/8)
- [Iowa:](#) Severe Winter Storm (1/4)
- Fire Declarations: N/A

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

**[Red Cross braces for staff cuts at HQ amid cash crunch](#)** (Associated Press, 2/1)  
In its freshest set of troubles, the American Red Cross is cutting a third of the 3,000 jobs at its national headquarters in an overhaul intended to eliminate a \$200 million deficit within two years. The charity's board of governors gave general approval to the cutbacks in January, and details of department-by-department layoffs will be presented to the board later this month, chief public affairs officer Suzy DeFrancis said. "This is a difficult period, when people are anxious about their jobs," DeFrancis said. "At the same time, there's a realization that the financial realities we're facing have forced us to do this ... and we can become a stronger organization by going through it." She said employees in each department are being informed of the cutbacks in individual and group meetings. The budget crisis is the latest blow to the 126-year-old Red Cross, America's foremost disaster-response organization, which was criticized for its handling of donations contributed after the Sept. 11 attacks and for an inconsistent response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In November, the board ousted the charity's president, Mark Everson, after just six months on the job for an extramarital affair with the director of a Red Cross chapter in Mississippi. A search continues for a new president, who will be the organization's sixth chief executive since 2002. Nationwide, the Red Cross has 35,000 employees and hundreds of thousands of volunteers assisting at more than 700 local

chapters. Stacy Palmer, editor of the Chronicle of Philanthropy, said the woes of the Red Cross have caused some frustration throughout the nonprofit sector.

**Maine Realtors build homes in Alabama for victims of Katrina** (ME Daily News, 2/1)

The story of an 84-year-old woman still brings tears to Mary Kuykendall's eyes. As part of a recent trip to Mobile, Ala., with members of the Maine Association of Realtors, Kuykendall attended a home dedication ceremony for families who had received new homes after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. One of those recipients was an 84-year-old woman who had never before owned her own home. At the ceremony, each of the families was given a set of keys, a toolbox, an American flag and a Bible. The elderly woman embraced the flag and declared its significance. "I don't know if I can get through the story without crying," Kuykendall of Winterport said softly. "When they gave her the flag, she talked about her grandson who had been to Iraq three times and how proud she was going to be to put up the flag." Kuykendall and 19 fellow Maine Realtors traveled south on Jan. 13 for a weeklong mission to build a home for a Hurricane Katrina victim displaced by the storm. The National Association of Realtors challenged all of its state organizations to raise money to build a home, and the Maine group collected \$70,000, Kuykendall said. The NAR partnered with Habitat for Humanity International for Operation Home Delivery, which provided victims with brand-new one-story homes with two to four bedrooms and one bathroom. Before qualifying for a home, recipients must work to build neighboring houses and complete 400 to 500 hours of "sweat equity," she said. The homeowners pay back the approximately \$83,000 mortgage at zero interest, Kuykendall said. The Maine crew built a three-bedroom home for Natasha, an African-American woman in her early 20s, and her 2-month-old daughter. Natasha stopped in to see the crew on the last day. She already had completed her sweat equity, she said.

**Medical network relies on reservists in disasters** (AR Democrat Gazette, 1/28)

The Arkansas Medical Reserve Corps was less than a month old when the state faced an influx of evacuees from Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The fledgling volunteer corps unit in Fort Smith suddenly had the task of helping state and federal officials serve evacuees arriving by plane and bus from the Gulf Coast. Some 12,000 evacuees came through Fort Chaffee those first few weeks, of which about 4,000 required some medical care, said Dr. Bryan Clardy of the Western Arkansas River Valley Medical Reserve Corps unit. "Katrina happened, and we kind of had to speed it up," said Clardy, medical professor at the Area Health Education Center-Fort Smith, part of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. "It was a big, huge effort." The Medical Reserve Corps was founded for just such emergencies. It's an initiative spurred by President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, four months after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Bush called for every American to commit to two years or 4,000 hours to volunteer service. "America needs retired doctors and nurses who can be mobilized in major emergencies; volunteers to help police and fire departments; transportation and utility workers well-trained in spotting danger," Bush said in the address. Thus the USA Freedom Corps was created, with the Medical Reserve Corps to serve its homeland security mission, sponsored by the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General. Five years later, there are 717 Medical Reserve Corps Units with 149,142 volunteers in cities and counties nationwide, said Grace M. Middleton, public information officer for the Civilian Volunteer Medical

Reserve Corps. Volunteers are physicians, nurses, anesthesiologists, veterinarians and other medical professionals. Some are retired, and others work in private practice or areas outside of emergency care.

## COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

### [Digital signs to finance emergency bins in pioneer project](#) (Newhouse News, 1/30)

A Kentucky-based advertising company plans to put storage bins filled with emergency supplies all over Mobile and pay for them through digital billboards on the sides of the containers. Mobile is the first city in America where this business plan is being attempted, according to officials with OASIS Ad Group of Lexington, Ky. Some Mobile city leaders have been critical of digital billboards in recent weeks, but Mayor Sam Jones and other council members said this week they support what this group is attempting to do. "This complements our system and gives us another tool when disasters come," Jones said. OASIS put its first storage bin, which it calls a READI-Port, on a corner behind the American Red Cross headquarters. The Red Cross is giving OASIS the spot free of charge, said the group's local executive director, Leisle Mims. In return, OASIS is putting some Red Cross ads on the billboard and paying for whatever electricity it uses, she said. The 1,280-cubic-foot bin was empty this week, but OASIS Chief Executive Officer Joe Montgomery said he expects to fill it with about \$8,000 to \$10,000 worth of supplies after getting a wish list from emergency management officials. The business plan mixes for-profit billboard advertising with nonprofit businesses, Montgomery said. OASIS started a separate nonprofit foundation that raises the money needed to buy the \$70,000 climate-controlled bins and the supplies. The OASIS Ad Group then sells ads for the billboards. The ad sales cover the costs that are incurred such as rent, maintenance and electricity and the company keeps whatever is left over as profit, Montgomery said.

### [Volunteer group forms in Tulsa to help respond to emergencies](#) (AP, 1/29)

Inspired by the so-far-unsuccessful searches in recent months for two missing females from Tulsa, a volunteer group has formed to support the efforts of authorities in such situations. The group, which has about 20 members, calls itself Core, which stands for Citizens of Oklahoma Respond to Emergencies, said its founder, Ron Van Voorhis. The group's goal is to assist authorities in situations ranging from searches for missing persons to disaster response and recovery. The group has assisted in searches for 13-year-old Cori Baker and 34-year-old Angie Tucker and will be involved in another search for the pair on Saturday. Cori disappeared on Nov. 9. She was last seen leaving school that day with a man matching the description of her sister's boyfriend, Marquis Bullock, and in a car matching the description of one owned by Bullock. Bullock has been charged with murder, even though no body has been found. Tucker went missing on Nov. 3 after leaving her mother's house in Tulsa. Police still are actively investigating both disappearances. Tulsa Police Sgt. Mike Huff said authorities welcome the search efforts of volunteers and that detectives were able to follow up on tips received during the search for Cori. Van Voorhis said his experience includes driving an ambulance, working in the security field and working with local emergency management groups. He said he learned during the searches for Cori and Tucker what resources are needed to conduct such

searches. Those needs include search dogs, horses, all-terrain vehicles and numerous volunteers, he said. He said the December ice storm, which interrupted the searches, highlighted the need for volunteers during a disaster.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

### **TX Seeks Disaster Declaration** (Disaster News Network, 2/3)

Texas Gov. Rick Perry has asked President George Bush for a federal disaster declaration after dozens of wildfires charred more than 70,000 acres last week. The fires, which were reported in more than two thirds of the state's 254 counties, destroyed 60 buildings including dozens of homes. Wind-driven flames Tuesday tore across almost 30 square miles of north and west Texas Tuesday. Many of the fires were a result of the high winds toppling power lines which then sparked fires in the drought-parched grasslands. The storm hit Tuesday morning and knocked down trees and power poles cutting power to more than 75,000 customers. The community of Paradise in Wise County was one of the hardest hit towns with more than 15 homes that were burned to the ground in fires that consumed more than 800 acres. "It's pretty devastating to everyone," said the Rev. Doug Acklie of the Flatbush Baptist Church. Fire fighters worked to control the dozens of blazes that were feeding off a combination of low humidity, pervasive droughts and high winds. Emergency officials have warned that the 2008 wildfire season may be far worse than last year. And although the wildfires in Texas were the most widespread, fires were reported in other states as well. At least 13 buildings were destroyed in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and firefighters in McIntosh County, Oklahoma, were trying to extinguish a fire that had consumed hundreds of acres.

### **WI officials don't expect federal tornado help** (Associated Press, 2/3)

Kenosha County officials are expecting to be turned down for federal funds to help rebuild after last month's tornado. "We don't have enough (uninsured loss) to qualify," said Ben Schliesman, county director of emergency management. "I fully anticipate being turned down." The Jan. 7 tornado destroyed nearly 30 homes destroyed and caused an estimated \$21.6 million in damage in the county. Most of the homes damaged were insured, Schliesman said. In Wheatland, building inspector Tim Popanda said 21 homes were destroyed, 11 suffered severe structural damage, and 55 had other damage. Five accessory buildings were damaged and three barns were lost. Five homes and one church in Kenosha and four homes in Brighton were also totally destroyed. Another 17 homes in Kenosha, Somers and Brighton suffered severe damage, 26 others sustained minor damage and 11 are classified as having been "affected." Of all those homes, Schliesman determined only five are at least 40 percent underinsured for structural damage. There needs to be 25 homes underinsured by that amount for residents to qualify for a low-income loan program through the Small Business Association. Unless 20 more homes can be identified by Tuesday, this program will not be available.

### **N. Idaho counties try to dig out before next snowstorms** (Associated Press, 2/2)

After being clobbered by heavy snow all week, highway crews, firefighters and residents in north Idaho took advantage of a break in the weather Friday to dig out and prepare for

another set of storms headed their way. Across the state, officials in six counties hit hardest by winter storms this week have declared states of emergency. On Thursday, Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter approved a disaster emergency for four of them Bonner, Kootenai, Latah and Boundary. The order clears the way for the state to provide personnel, equipment and facilities. The other two counties Shoshone in the north and Power in the southeast are awaiting Otter's declaration, state officials said. Snow accumulations in north Idaho have ranged from 4 to 7 feet, much of it over the past week, causing emergency officials to focus on clearing rural roads and easing the pressure that heavy snow is applying to buildings and homes with flat roofs. Cities and counties across the state's northern half tried to be productive Friday, knowing that three more storms are projected to sweep across Idaho over the next week. Forecasters say 2-3 inches of snow could fall in north Idaho valleys this weekend. A storm projected to move in Tuesday could bring 5 inches of snow to the valleys, and a third storm on Friday could bring a mixture of snow and rain with gusty winds and warm temperatures, creating prime conditions for significant snowmelt.

**Washington Flood Recovery a 3- to 5-year effort** (Seattle Times, 2/2)

Spencer and Connie Davis have devoted 18 years to their nursery that sells fruit trees, vegetable starts and ornamental shrubs. They hoped that after another 10 years of working their 14-acre tract, they'd earn enough for retirement. Then came the December flood, which wiped out four greenhouses and 5,000 potted plants, destroyed their delivery van and filled their home with several feet of water. Since then, dozens of volunteers from service groups, churches and schools have come to their aid, tearing out soggy Sheetrock, removing debris and shoveling mud. FEMA chipped in \$28,800, the maximum grant for home repairs. But the rush of post-flood adrenaline has faded as the couple, both in their mid-50s, grind through long days of cleanup. Recovery still appears far away and retirement even further as they contemplate borrowing money to cover more than \$140,000 in damages. "So many of our friends have gone back to their daily routines," said Connie Davis. "I wake up every morning, and I still can't believe that I have to get dressed to go put my home together." The Davises were among those hit hardest by the December wind and rain storms that hit 10 Washington counties. To date, about 9,800 people statewide have applied for federal housing assistance. So far, more than \$34 million in grant assistance and low-interest loans have been approved. The biggest struggles remain in Lewis County, where both towns and rural areas were struck by massive flooding of the Chehalis River. The flooding caused more than \$40 million in damage to public structures. County officials also estimate more than 600 homes suffered major damage, with more than 70 not worth rebuilding. At least 239 businesses also were flooded, some of which have yet to reopen. Total private-sector damage is expected to top \$200 million. Most of the initial cleanup, with grunt labor provided by unskilled volunteers, is done. The most pressing needs are for plumbers, Sheetrockers, electricians and carpenters who are much more difficult to recruit as volunteers.

**President Declares Major Disaster for Kansas** (FEMA, 2/1)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for Kansas to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms during the period of December 6 - 19, 2007. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said

the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe winter storm in Atchison, Barber, Barton, Brown, Butler, Chase, Cherokee, Clark, Clay, Cloud, Comanche, Crawford, Dickinson, Doniphan, Edwards, Ellis, Ellsworth, Ford, Geary, Graham, Harvey, Hodgeman, Jackson, Jefferson, Jewell, Kingman, Kiowa, Labette, Leavenworth, Lincoln, Lyon, Marion, Marshall, McPherson, Miami, Mitchell, Morris, Nemaha, Osage, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Pottawatomie, Pratt, Reno, Republic, Rice, Riley, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Saline, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Smith, Stafford, Wabaunsee, Washington, and Woodson counties. The federal declaration clears the way for necessary public assistance to state and local governments. Federal funding is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulson named Thomas A. Hall the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Hall said additional designations and types of assistance may be made at a later date after further evaluation.

**Response to MO Twisters Planned** (Disaster News Network, 2/1)

Efforts are being made to find ways to help survivors of the January tornadoes are continuing January tornadoes that destroyed hundreds homes in southwest Missouri. At the same time response plans are set up, emergency managers are holding their collective breaths to see if President George W. Bush grants a disaster declaration. Earlier this month, deadly tornadoes killed two and injured 30 and destroyed several businesses and more than 400 homes in that mainly rural area. Officials report some 31 percent of those homeowners were uninsured, a number that Dante Gliniecki, the statewide volunteer coordinator for Missouri's Emergency Management Agency, called "significant." "If we don't get that declaration, we're going to have to rely totally on our volunteer and faith-based groups to help these people rebuild – and that's a lot of rebuilding," he said. "We've always had an excellent response to calls for help – most people just don't realize that the faith-based groups are the lynch pin of our relief efforts – but with all the hurricanes, fires, floods and tornadoes that we've been experiencing around the country, our volunteer and faith-based groups are getting spread thinner and thinner. If things keep going the way they have, they could soon be tapped out. We really need to get this declaration."

**Flooding on AZ Navajo Nation prompts evacuations** (AP, 1/31)

Navajo police have blocked off roads leading into Leupp because of flooding and 14 families in the area have been evacuated, tribal emergency management officials said. "There's a lot of mud, and then the storm coming in dumped more snow, so we're in a bad situation in the remote areas," Selena Manychildren, a spokeswoman for the tribe's Department of Emergency Management, said Wednesday. The families living south of the Little Colorado River which overflowed from runoff have been staying in Winslow hotels since Monday. The nearby Birdsprings Chapter is covering their expenses. Work will be done over the next five days to stabilize the river, Manychildren said. The Navajo Nation declared a state of emergency Monday, and tribal officials say communities in the mountainous regions and low-lying areas are being impacted by snow melt and runoff.

Tribal employees in the executive branch were released at 3 p.m. Wednesday because of bad weather, and all tribal employees are on a two-hour delay Thursday, Manychildren said. Two emergency operations centers in Crownpoint, N.M., and Window Rock have been opened to assist chapters. Incident commander Jimson Joe has requested that each chapter use emergency funding to help their communities. Calls for assistance must be made to the chapters, and the information will be forwarded to the emergency operations centers, Manychildren said. Tribal lawmakers on Monday passed a bill that would provide \$25,000 in emergency funds for each of the 110 chapter houses. On Wednesday, the Tribal Council issued a directive to the tribal president, controller and Office of Management and Budget to issue checks to the chapters.

**Tulsa storm recovery turns to trees** (Tulsa World, 1/31)

The goal is to reforest the city by planting 20,000 saplings by 2010. Mayor Kathy Taylor kicked off the third phase of the city's ice storm recovery by planting a native whitebud tree Wednesday in Owen Park, the oldest public park in Tulsa. "We have been known as the Tree City and we must continue that important Tulsa heritage," Taylor said during a news conference at the park, just northwest of the Inner Dispersal Loop. The goal is to plant 20,000 trees by 2010 on public and private land with the aid of Up With Trees, the city's Tree Advisory Committee and private funding. The December ice storm was the most significant natural disaster the city has ever experienced, Taylor said. It knocked out power to more than 250,000 customers in the metropolitan area and killed or damaged nearly 20,000 trees. Taylor said her recovery plan has three phases: first, restoring electricity; second, removing storm debris, and, third, regreening the city. The first has been completed and the second is well under way. Phase three, named "Re- Green Tulsa 20,000 by 2010," is adapted from programs in Atlanta, Austin, Texas, and Indianapolis. "Thanks to the generosity of Tulsans, many of whom supported beautification and development of our river, we have raised a \$1.5 million challenge grant to apply to this program," Taylor said.

**Cleanup Continues After Kentucky Storm** (Associated Press, 1/31)

More than 27,000 down and just over 4,000 to go as LG&E crews continue restoring power lost during Tuesday night's storm. Those crews have been working around the clock to get the job done, but outages still remain in the hard-hit areas like the Highlands and St. Matthews. Hycliffe Avenue was hit with a little bit of everything Tuesday night "It's just a mess. It's a war zone over here, really." It's been nearly 48 hours since a powerful storm passed through Louisville, but parts of Hycliffe Avenue are still stuck in that moment. Several large trees are still down, and though power has been restored to half the street, as of Thursday morning, the other half of its residents are still in the dark. Mac Brown and his household are some of the thousands of LG&E customers left without service. Brown and his family are staying with relatives, managing to get through their daily routines, but he said it'd be nice to sleep in his own bed. "Our main goal is to get this tree here in a situation where it's not going to fall and hit this house," said landscaper Jim Evans. Evans and his crews from Treez are trying to help other residents on the street get to their stuff by getting through the gigantic oaks that have fallen, sawing the trees, shredding them and even planting his men in upper branches to get the job done. "My deal with the city of St. Matthews is I'm on call storm damage, and that's

what we're doing," Evans said. "While we're in this situation, we're working daylight to dark."

**Thousands without power after severe storms sweep through TN** (AP, 1/31)

Thousands across Tennessee remain without power after a line of severe thunderstorms and gusting winds swept across the state, downing power lines in their wake. Forecasters say skies will be clear on Wednesday, but temperatures will plunge. Knoxville Utility Board is working to restore power to 3,000 homes. As many as 10,000 customers lost power early Wednesday morning. Memphis Light, Gas And Water says they've been working to restore power to the approximately 30,000 customers in the Memphis area. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency is also investigating whether a tornado was responsible for damaging eight homes and one business in Henry County.

**President Declares Major Disaster For Indiana** (FEMA, 1/30)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Indiana to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding during the period of January 7, 2008, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Carroll, Cass, Elkhart, Fulton, Jasper, Marshall, Pulaski, Tippecanoe and White 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 is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Michael H. Smith as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Smith said that additional assistance may be designated after further evaluations.

**Storm buries much of nation's midsection in snow** (Associated Press, 1/30)

A powerful storm system pounded a large swath of the nation's midsection on Tuesday, spawning everything from heavy snow and numbing cold to hail and possible tornadoes, and forecasters warned more could be on the way. Thousands of people lost power, and some government offices, schools and highways closed because of snow. Avalanche warnings were issued for some Western mountainous regions. About 3 feet of snow has fallen in the area since Sunday morning, said Kyle Fredin of the National Weather Service. Snow began to taper off Tuesday, but up to a foot more was expected before the weather clears up by the weekend, Fredin said. The system also dragged bitterly cold air across the northern Plains, with the National Weather Service reporting a midday temperature of minus 24 at Glasgow, Mont. North Dakota registered wind chill factors of minus 54 early Tuesday at Garrison, with an actual low of minus 24 at Williston. "Now's when you need to have your winter survival kit," North Dakota Highway Patrol Sgt. Aaron Hummel said. The Weather Service posted heavy snow warnings for parts of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, with a blizzard warning for the Snowy Range area in southern Wyoming. Heavy snow Monday pummeled mountain areas from Washington

state to northern Arizona as two storms converged, one from hard-hit California and another from the Gulf of Alaska, meteorologists said.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

### **Federal Pandemic Plan Called Inadequate** (Washington Post, 2/3)

The federal government's voluminous plans for dealing with pandemic flu do not adequately account for the overwhelming strain an outbreak would place on hospitals and public health systems trying to cope with millions of seriously ill Americans, some public health experts and local health officials say. The Bush administration's plans, which run more than 1,000 pages, contemplate the nightmare medical scenarios that many experts fear, but critics say federal officials have left too much of the responsibility and the cost of preparation to a health-care system that even in normal times is stretched to the breaking point and leaves millions of people without adequate access to care. "The amount going into actually being prepared at a community level is not enough," said Patrick Libbey, executive director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials. "We are still talking about rearranging with little additional resources the assets of a system that are built on such a thin margin now that you have significant amounts of people without access to care, and hospitals that are periodically shutting down their ERs and the like." The Bush administration argues that it is doing a lot to help communities as part of its three-pronged strategy for dealing with the flu threat. The government has doled out hundreds of millions of dollars in preparedness grants for hospitals and public health systems every year, subsidized the stockpiling of antiviral drugs, conferred with governors and encouraged the development of resource-sharing plans among hospitals.

### **National Guard Forces lack vital resources** (Boston Globe, 2/1)

After years of serving overseas on active-duty combat tours, the Massachusetts Army National Guard has less than half its allocated combat equipment on hand, and is experiencing an even more acute shortage of gear, including heavy-duty trucks and medical equipment, it would need to respond to a domestic emergency, a national commission reported yesterday. The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves found that by late 2007 Bay State Guard units had an estimated 46 percent of Humvees, helicopters, and weapons it needs to fight or defend the homeland, with the rest on loan to other units overseas, in disrepair or lost in combat. At the same time, it had just 40 percent of its trucks, radios, generators, and medical gear - "critical dual-use items" that can be used in combat or in a civil emergency. The figures were part of a sweeping review that found Army National Guard units nationwide are not adequately prepared to respond domestically to natural disasters or terrorist attacks, the Guard's core mission. The commission's report showed that National Guard units in the five other New England states are all facing severe equipment shortages: Connecticut had just 34 percent of its total equipment allotment on hand; Rhode Island had 58 percent; Maine had 56 percent; New Hampshire had 67 percent; and Vermont had 53 percent.

### **Plans being developed in case defunct device hits U.S.** (Grand Rapids Press, 1/30)

The U.S. military is developing contingency plans to deal with the possibility that a large

spy satellite expected to fall to Earth in late February or early March could hit North America. Air Force Gen. Gene Renuart Jr., who heads U.S. Northern Command, said Tuesday the size of the satellite suggests that some pieces will not burn up as the orbiting vehicle re-enters the Earth's atmosphere and will hit the ground. "We're aware that this satellite is out there," Renuart said. "We're aware it is a fairly substantial size. And we know there is at least some percentage that it could land on ground as opposed to in the water." A U.S. official confirmed that the spy satellite is designated by the military as US 193. It was launched in December 2006 but almost immediately lost power and cannot be controlled. It carried a sophisticated and secret imaging sensor but the satellite's central computer failed shortly after launch. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the information is classified as secret. Renuart added that, "As it looks like it might re-enter into the North American area," then the U.S. military along with DHS and FEMA will either have to deal with the impact or assist Canadian or Mexican authorities. Military agencies, he said, are doing an analysis to determine which pieces most likely would survive re-entry. But he cautioned that officials won't have much detail on where or when it will crash until it begins to move through the atmosphere and break up.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Chertoff suggests president veto home-elevation grants**

The proposed \$1.2 billion in home-elevation grants Louisiana officials hoped would be the final patch to its Road Home rebuilding program is under attack by a Bush administration official. DHS Secretary Chertoff said Friday he will recommend that President Bush veto legislation - currently tied up in the Senate - that would allow Louisiana to tap the money. Introduced last year, the elevation-grant funding was ready for a vote on the last night of the session when it got tied up in a squabble between Louisiana's senators and U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. Shelby put a procedural hold on approving the Louisiana money until the Louisiana senators, Mary Landrieu and David Vitter, support his overhaul of the National Flood Insurance Program. Landrieu, a Democrat, and Vitter, a Republican, have refused to back off their contention that Shelby's proposed changes to the flood insurance program would result in a premium increase of 25 percent on businesses, second homes and homes that repeatedly flood. Chertoff's concerns with the elevation-grant proposal center on the timing of the grants. Traditionally, homeowners wishing to elevate their homes in flood-prone areas first complete the projects and then get reimbursed by the federal government. But under the Road Home program, the state wants to provide the up-to-\$30,000 grants upfront to enable homeowners to then rebuild. "The bill would commit more than \$1 billion in federal taxpayer funds while, at the same time, partially circumventing the pre-screening process," Chertoff wrote in a letter to U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Ct., who chairs the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

### **Federal post-disaster housing programs come under fire** (GovExec, 1/30)

What did FEMA officials know and when did they know it? That was the crux of the questioning at a contentious hearing Tuesday of the House Homeland Security Committee. The committee faulted the responsiveness of federal agencies to concerns

about the health consequences of high formaldehyde levels in travel trailers provided by FEMA to temporarily house victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the fall of 2005. Concerns about formaldehyde were first raised publicly in April 2006, Committee Chairman Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said. "However, it was not until Dec. 21, 2007, that the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] actually began testing formaldehyde levels in travel trailers and mobile homes -- over a year and a half after the first reports of high formaldehyde surfaced." Even more troubling, said Thompson, was the "recent discovery that FEMA directed the CDC to not investigate, or communicate, the health effects associated with prolonged exposure to formaldehyde."

**Progress on housing for storm victims hit** (Houston Chronicle, 1/30)

Two Houston lawmakers upbraided federal and Texas officials for their slow response to finding replacement housing for victims of hurricanes Rita and Katrina. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, called the efforts "a complete failure." Rep. Al Green, D-Houston, went further. "Some heads really should roll for letting this go on and on and on," he said at an investigative hearing held by the House Homeland Security Committee. Jackson Lee and Green noted that thousands of Texans have been housed for more than three years in trailers laced with the cancer-causing chemical formaldehyde. "HUD and FEMA are wrapped around this failure," Jackson Lee told state and federal emergency response officials. "The state of Texas has failed, plain and simple." "The simple question I ask you: Why are people still in trailers in 2008?" Jackson Lee demanded. "Madam, you are correct," said Nelson Bregón, of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. "There are people still residing in trailers who should not be living in trailers." During the afternoon-long hearing, there were several examples of federal agencies and Texas officials pointing the finger of blame at somebody else. HUD's Bregón testified that the housing situation "is FEMA's responsibility." He said HUD is "very concerned" and is "working with the states." He called the situation "a travesty." A Texas official defended the performance of Gov. Rick Perry, a target of Jackson Lee's ire.