Disaster News Update – March 10 to 16, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Building Collapse:** New York
- **Drought:** Oregon, Nevada, California, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, New Mexico, Utah
- **Explosion:** Missouri (House)
- **Fire:** Texas, Oklahoma, Montana, Colorado, Missouri
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Iowa
- **HAZMAT:** Missouri (Propane Tanker), Texas (Fuel Truck)
- **Heavy Rain:** New Jersey, Maine
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Ohio
- **Strong Wind:** Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, New Jersey, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, California
- **Structure Fire:** Washington, DC
- **Tornado:** Georgia

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- Texas: Wildfires (3/14 – Emergency Declaration)
- Illinois: Snow (3/13 – Emergency Declaration)
- Missouri: Severe Winter Storms and Flooding (3/12)
- Illinois: Severe Storms and Flooding (3/7)
- Kentucky: Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding (2/21)
- Fire Declarations: Texas (3/12), Texas (3/4), Texas (2/28), Texas (2/25), Oklahoma (2/25), Texas (2/25b), Texas (2/23), Texas (2/13),

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

National Parks in Northwest seek volunteers for disaster (Associated Press, 3/16)
Hundreds of trees blown down by wind exceeding 100 mph. Roads and campgrounds washed away by swollen rivers. Damages still unknown to be repaired on backcountry trails. Winter storms have devastated the Pacific Northwest's popular national parks each of the past two years, causing damage that has run into the millions of dollars. After last year's enormous repair effort in nearby Mount Rainier National Park, the major repairs this year are taking place in Olympic National Park, which offers visitors miles of Pacific coast in addition to craggy alpine peaks and forested lowlands. But while Olympic is the focus of the major storm repairs this year, teams also have new damage to fix at Mount Rainier and North Cascades national parks, hopefully before summer visitors arrive. This season's biggest storm struck in the first week of December, pouring more than 10 inches of rain on some areas in 24 hours. Two people were killed, dozens were stranded in flooded homes, thousands were left without power. The deluge even overwhelmed Olympic National Park, accustomed to receiving as much as 14 feet of rain annually. Campgrounds flooded, slides swept away stretches of road and wind up to 100 mph blew

down hundreds of trees along a single 2-mile stretch of the scenic North Fork Road. Some areas may remain closed for the near future.

University group using spring break to help Gulf Coast (Press Enterprise (CA), 3/14)
East Los Angeles is a world away from Biloxi, Miss., but opportunities for community activism are universal. That's what George Luna, a UC Riverside student who was raised in East LA, found out in 2006 when he spent a month on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast scraping mold and framing houses. Luna, accompanied by nine other UCR students, will return to Biloxi over spring break to continue where he left off. They will join thousands of college students helping repair the damage wrought by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Participation in so-called "alternative spring breaks" among college and high school students has mushroomed since August 2005, when 270,000 residents of the Gulf Coast were driven from their homes in the wake of one of the nation's deadliest hurricanes. "Hurricane Katrina has been the ground zero of alternative spring break," said Sandy Scott, of the Corporation for National and Community Service. "Until you see it firsthand, you really don't have any idea how devastating Katrina really was and how much work is yet to be done." Samantha Giacobozzi, programs director for Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, a national nonprofit organization that provides training and information to colleges and universities, estimated that as many as 7,200 students will be volunteering on the Gulf Coast over spring break. Chris de Veer, director of Hands On Gulf Coast, said 500 students including those from UCR had signed up with his group alone.

York County teens find meaning in Katrina missions (3/12)
The house in New Orleans was deserted when Sarah Sullivan and the other teenagers from York County climbed into their plastic jumpsuits and started swinging their hammers. Hurricane Katrina had done a thorough job, ransacking the home with a fury that savaged walls, floors, ceilings and everything in between. Except for one thing. Hanging in a closet, relatively undamaged, was a long white wedding gown. In details like these lay the lessons of devastation and survival, despair and hope that Sullivan and her friends have learned on relief missions to Louisiana. Some of the teenagers have traveled south three times since January 2007, gutting and rebuilding storm-ravaged homes on trips organized by United Church of Christ congregations in York County. Their most recent mission ended just a few weeks ago, and on the flight back, some of the youths were already hatching plans for their next trip. These expeditions offer support to New Orleans residents as they struggle to restore their battered city 2? years after Katrina struck. The students will tell you that their lives are also being changed. "I see the world as a different place now," said Lauren Roedner, 17, of Saco. "Even though we're 16, 17 and 18 years old, we really can make a difference in someone's life." UCC congregations sponsored missions in January and June of 2007 and again in January of this year. Each trip lasts for a week, and the congregation holds fundraising events to defray the $600 cost of travel, rooming and meals for each person. The missions include adults as well as teenagers no younger than 16, and while there are no specific intentions to send young people to New Orleans, they have made up a large part of each group.

Hands On Gulf Coast on the move (Biloxi (MS) Sun Herald, 3/11)
Hands On Gulf Coast has taken on a life of its own, emerging from immediate Katrina recovery to take a bead on continual local involvement. It started out as a **disaster**-response extension of the national Hands On Network, and its director told the Sun Herald on Monday it strives to engage not only out-of-the-area volunteers (more than 150 on the ground today) but locals as well. One day, Chris de Veer said, it hopes to become a local non-profit. "Volunteering builds social capital (connectedness)," he said, and that can impact education, health and economic prosperity. The organization arrived on the scene six months after Katrina and in the interim has provided 645,000 hours of service worth about $11.5 million. Hands On puts volunteers to work fully rebuilding homes (a dozen to date), gutting and demolding others (600 restored thus far using a fairly cost-effective process) and through an association with AmeriCorps, devises programs for the Coast's school children, its elderly, single parents and Latino community. Hands On's mission, de Veer said, is not only to train volunteer leaders and provide community service. They want to inspire Coast dwellers to civic action. He talks about community development that goes beyond peaceful coexistence to bonding and bridging, "Contacting with people you might not ordinarily encounter," he said. Anyone of a mind to volunteer need only visit the Hands On Web site (handsongulfcoast.org) "where opportunities are posted." They even found a one-day project to engage employees of Kaiser Permanente who were on the Coast convening at Beau Rivage. It would seem to be a concept that dovetails into the "voluntourism" aspect of recovery.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Washington, DC groups offer support to victims of blaze (Washington Times, 3/15)
Community groups and D.C. government agencies yesterday were rallying to provide food, shelter and clothing to roughly 200 displaced tenants of 85 apartments damaged or destroyed Thursday in a five-alarm blaze on Mount Pleasant Street in Northwest. Fire officials, community members and former residents asking about their possessions swarmed around the charred four-story apartment building. A crane was parked in front of nearby Meridian Hill Baptist Church, already starting to rebuild its damaged parts, and a block away, volunteers carried plastic bags filled with items for donation into a community center. "The community at large has really come out to help us out," said Ginny Herebia, a social worker at Neighbor's Consejo center, noting that more than 30 volunteers worked late Thursday night and early yesterday morning to sort bags of clothing and other donations. By noon yesterday, donations of clothing, canned food and children's toys flooded the rooms of the Neighbor's Consejo center, and poured out the door, down the steps and along the sidewalk leading up to the center. Darrell Darnell, director of the D.C. Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, said that about 80 residents were provided rooms at a local hotel. He said the American Red Cross will fund three days of housing, and D.C. government agencies will take over the next phase of housing. Firefighters yesterday set up a table on Mount Pleasant Street and took requests from residents to retrieve their belongings. The cause of the fire has not been determined.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Ga. Storms Kill 2 After Atlanta Twister (Associated Press, 3/16)
About 18,000 people were watching the Southeastern Conference men's tournament Friday night at the Georgia Dome when its fabric roof began rippling, the catwalks above the court started swaying and chunks of insulation rained onto the players. The National Weather Service issued a tornado warning about eight minutes before the twister hit. The tornado, with wind up to 130 mph, cut a 6-mile path through downtown Atlanta, smashing hundreds of windows in and around the CNN Center, blowing furniture and luggage out of hotel rooms and crumbling part of an apartment building. At least 27 people were hurt, though no injuries was believed to be life-threatening, and no injuries were reported at the arenas. Elsewhere in Georgia on Saturday, storms killed one person in Polk County and another in Floyd County, both near the Alabama line, emergency management officials said. Storms in South Carolina and Alabama left thousands without electricity. Crews hauled broken glass and furniture out of streets in downtown Atlanta, where all events scheduled for Saturday were canceled, including the St. Patrick's Day parade. More thunderstorms passed through the Atlanta area Saturday, but the city's downtown appeared to have been spared any more substantial damage. Oxendine estimated damage from Friday night's storm at $150 million to $200 million, most of it at the Georgia World Congress Center, a state convention facility near the CNN Center and the Georgia Dome. A loft apartment building had severe damage to one corner and appeared to have major roof damage. Property manager Darlys Walker said there was one minor injury. A vacant building also collapsed, with no apparent injuries, Fire Capt. Bill May said. Grady Memorial Hospital, the city's large public hospital where many of the injured were taken, had broken windows but was operating as usual.

Wildfires continue raging across the state, threaten some homes (AP, 3/16)
Twenty homes were evacuated Saturday in Dimmitt County as the Texas Forest Service continued battling wildfires raging across thousands of acres of the Lone Star State. No injuries were immediately reported, but up to 100 more residences were threatened in Dimmitt County in Southwest Texas from the fire covering 64,500 acres, said Lewis Kearney, spokesman for the Texas Forest Service. Firefighters were also battling two fires in sparsely populated King County in West Texas. One covered about 10,000 acres, and the other about 9,000 acres. In Pecos County, a wildfire about 25 miles south of Fort Stockton covered about 30,000 acres. High winds and warm temperatures have made it an active time for firefighters in Texas. About 460 Texas Forest Service workers, including logistical and support personnel, were called into action because of the fires. In Texas' wide-ranging rural areas, volunteer firefighters are the first responders, and they call in the Forest Service when they need help. President Bush is making federal aid available to more than 70 percent of counties in Texas after wildfires spread across the state. State officials said Saturday that more than 133,000 acres have burned since high temperatures and strong winds made Friday one of the worst for wildfires in recent years.

A Year Later, Lives Still Upended by a Storm's Damage (New York Times, 3/16)
Last April, Leo Fuentes returned home from work to find a red notice tacked to the front

door, telling him it was no longer safe to live there. A vicious northeaster 10 days earlier had damaged the retaining wall on the hill above his property, and town authorities feared the situation could set off a mudslide. Mr. Fuentes left with his family, and still hasn't returned. "It's almost like taking a drawer that contains all of our lives, and turning it upside down," Mr. Fuentes said recently. "You try and make do as best as you can, but the sense of security is totally gone." Along the parallel streets of Farnham and Harrison Avenues, in backyards and on property lines, other retaining walls remain in various states of disrepair after last April's storm submerged portions of Lodi in eight inches of water. In some cases, plans to fix the walls have been mired in lawsuits or slowed by tensions between neighbors. Most owners just can't afford to pay the hundreds of thousands of dollars in construction costs, and do not have insurance policies that cover this kind of damage. Last spring's storm caused devastation all along the East Coast, from the Carolinas to Maine, with the weather blamed for the deaths of at least 18 people. In New Jersey, officials estimated the damage to structures and property at $180 million. Throughout the region, other areas were also affected, including Westchester, Long Island and Manhattan. In communities like Lodi, people have still not recovered from the losses and the disruption to their lives. That has left people like Joel Lavin, Lodi's buildings inspector, nervous every time the forecast calls for heavy rain.

House, business destroyed as storm buffets Miss. overnight (Associated Press, 3/15)
High winds destroyed a home and a business in Prentiss County overnight and caused major damage to two other structures. A Mississippi Emergency Management Agency spokesman said Saturday that it's not clear if the damage was caused by a tornado or high winds. The storm has left 3,000 without power in Tunica County where 60 power poles were downed. Power may not be restored until Sunday, though MEMA's Jeff Rent says 75 trucks have been dispatched to help with repairs. Four people reported minor injuries after the car they were riding in struck a downed tree in Prentiss County. They were treated at the scene. Pictures at http://www.djournal.com show that the Jumpertown Grocery in Prentiss County was destroyed and that a local church suffered damage.
The same storm system caused damage across Alabama and spawned a tornado that killed one in Georgia.

Georgia Governor Declares Emergency (Governor's Office, 3/15)
Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue issued an executive order declaring a state of emergency in the affected Atlanta area damaged by a tornado that struck last night. Last night's storms struck our capital city, a center for business, tourism and government, and we are working with city officials to support them during this disaster, said Governor Perdue. State resources are being made available to assist in the cleanup efforts. I have also spoken to FEMA Administrator David Paulison, and we will continue to coordinate closely to marshal federal, state and local resources as we recover. he executive order allows for state resources to be available for response and recovery activities, and calls for the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) to activate the state's Emergency Operations Plan. he Georgia Emergency Management Agency has activated the State Operations Center (SOC) to support the City of Atlanta in its response and recovery efforts to a severe weather system that hit downtown Atlanta on Friday night.

The system produced one tornado, injuring at least 20 people and damaging dozens of homes and businesses.

Thousands Still Seeking Help in Tennessee (Disaster News Network, 3/12)
Hal Shope, a regional coordinator for Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), said he was stunned by the devastation caused by February tornadoes in northeastern Tennessee. "As far as you see across the hills, you could see damage." The devastation, Shope said, was massive and random, with many homes damaged– while some went untouched. "Those people (whose homes and/or lives were not impacted) have survivor's guilt that is horrific." LDR is just one of many faith-based organizations that are responding to the devastation left behind following the February tornadoes. On Feb 5-6, violent storms raced across Arkansas and Tennessee, touching down around Memphis and heading eastward. Nashville was spared, but storms landed northeast in Macon County and devastated communities like Lafayette. There were 32 fatalities statewide, and 13 in Macon County. As many as 4,000 homes were damaged in the Tennessee tornados, and 587 were destroyed. Shope came to the area to help organize an early relief effort to ensure there was enough food and shelter. "Early on, we made sure people were comfortable and they had food," he said. Shope said many residents sought out churches in the community and that an organized cleanup included about a couple hundred volunteers helping them clear out lots for the replacement trailers. Now the long term recovery program includes simple preparation for similar storms.

County cleans up from fierce winds (Intelligencer Journal (PA), 3/10)
Cleanup efforts continued Sunday after devastating winds Saturday toppled trees, downed power lines and ripped several roofs off homes in Lancaster County, officials said. Winds continued to blow across the county Sunday, but officials said the strongest had passed. On Saturday night, Lancaster County emergency dispatchers received between 700 and 800 wind-related calls during a 90-minute period, officials said. "They were extremely busy," said Randy Gockley, director of Lancaster County Emergency Management Agency. "The calls were countywide. It was a pretty extensive storm." The strongest winds arrived in the county shortly after 5 p.m. Saturday, officials said, and severe gusts lasted for almost two hours. The gusts continued overnight into Sunday. One of the strongest gusts was measured at 61 mph at Lancaster Airport just after 6 p.m. Saturday, AccuWeather meteorologist Shawn Smith said. Meanwhile, PPL continued their efforts Sunday to restore power to customers across the county. Nearly 15,000 homes lost power from the storm, but fewer than 1,000 customers were still in the dark Sunday night. The sporadic outages were countywide, reported mostly at individual homes, Gockley said. By Sunday night, PPL had restored power to 14,120 Lancaster County customers, according to its Web site. Late Sunday, 608 customers were still without power. A low-pressure storm system brought straight-line winds from the west, officials said.

FEMA Community Relations Teams Visit KY Disaster Areas (FEMA, 3/10)
Community Relations specialists from FEMA are fanning out today (Monday, March 10) for door-to-door contacts throughout six more Kentucky counties that were added last week to the list of disaster areas following the early February storms and tornadoes,

bringing to 15 the number of designated disaster counties. People who suffered uninsured or underinsured losses in the nine initial designated counties were eligible to be considered for assistance. Last Wednesday, six new counties - Bath, Harrison, Hopkins, Nicholas, Shelby and Spencer counties - were added to the Feb. 21 major disaster declaration. The 15 counties now identified as disaster areas are Allen, Bath, Christian, Fayette, Hardin, Harrison, Hart, Hopkins, Meade, Mercer, Monroe, Muhlenberg, Nicholas, Shelby and Spencer. Community Relations teams have streamed into Kentucky from 12 states, the first arriving a day following the declaration. They have been meeting with officials, with storm survivors at recovery centers, senior centers, at community organizations and with all local officials to explain the recovery process and provide information. In just the first nine designated counties, teams have distributed more than 19,000 flyers and worked in the affected counties to help identify and assist disaster survivors. They have visited with more than 850 residents, 400 businesses, 70 faith-based groups, 20 community organizations, 25 social service organizations, all local officials and 20 schools.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Virginia updates its plan for storms (Richmond Times, 3/16)
Virginia is updating its plan for evacuation because of a hurricane and now expects about twice as many people to evacuate the Hampton Roads area as previously estimated. The update is based on the preliminary results of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study that was begun in 2000. Virginia has updated the evacuation plan periodically but has been awaiting the results of this study to conduct a more thorough overhaul. The study estimates that about 100,000 people could evacuate the Hampton Roads area for a Category 1 hurricane and up to 890,000 for a much more severe, or Category 4, storm. Those figures are worst-case scenarios and are about twice what the 1992 study estimated, the Department of Emergency Management said. About 10 percent of evacuees would be expected to seek public shelter, the management agency said. Population growth during the past 15 years and a change in the way potential storm surges are measured contribute to an increased number of expected evacuees. The new study uses high tide instead of mean tide as a key measure, and that adds 2 to 3 feet of potential storm surge per hurricane category. The current plan calls for an evacuation order 14 to 24 hours before the onset of tropical-storm-force winds, but when Virginia updates the evacuation plan using the new data, the timetable for starting an evacuation could change to compensate for increased traffic.

283,000 people participate in tornado practice (Daily Press (VA), 3/15)
While getting ready for hurricane season is an annual ritual in Hampton Roads, there's no such thing as tornado season. According to the Virginia Department of Emergency Management**,** tornadoes have struck in every part of the state in every month of the year. That's why the department is encouraging schools, businesses and families across the state to participate in a tornado preparedness drill Tuesday. "The problem is, it can happen very quickly," said Alan Robertson, facilities manager for the Williamsburg-James City County School District. "Sometimes, you might get five, six minutes

warning." Robertson said Williamsburg-James City County schools will hold its drill at 10 a.m. Monday, because of a conflict with state testing at some elementary schools on Tuesday. York County Schools will hold a drill 9:30 a.m. Wednesday. Suffolk schools will hold the drill at 9:45 a.m. Tuesday. Statewide, more than 283,000 people have registered to participate in the drill, according to the emergency management department. The drill -- which has been done annually for years -- usually lasts about 30 minutes, Robertson said. He said officials try to change it a little bit each year in order to discover any kinks in emergency plans or problems they may not have considered.

New NHC Director emphasizes hurricane preparedness (Houston Chronicle, 3/11)
Longtime Houston meteorologist Bill Read's move to Miami to become the new director of the National Hurricane Center hasn't changed his views on hurricane safety one bit. But becoming the nation's most visible forecaster has given him a bigger stage. From that platform, Read plans to continue delivering a simple message: Local and state planners - not just in Texas, but in all areas vulnerable to hurricanes - need to do more to prepare their communities for storms. Texas has taken some steps since Hurricane Rita to facilitate evacuations, Read said, but officials haven't done enough to encourage smart development along the coast. That didn't happen in Houston even after Rita, Read said. "I defy you to find one community that changed their land-use and building codes based upon hurricanes Katrina or Rita," he said. "I'm not a builder, maybe our codes are satisfactory. But that's not what people in that business are telling me. So, we're setting the table for the next big one." After 16 years of leading the Houston area's National Weather Service forecasting office and seeing his share of floods and strong winds, Read is passionate about protecting coastal communities and speaks his mind. But don't mistake him for his outspoken predecessor, Bill Proenza, who sharply and publicly criticized his bosses and divided his employees. It was after Proenza's expulsion as director last summer that officials at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration called Read to Miami to be the hurricane center's temporary deputy director. Being far from his League City home, Read worked extra hours, coming into the office whenever an active storm threatened, to learn more about the craft of the hurricane center's senior forecasters.

Kansas prepares for looming tornado season (Journal World (KS), 3/11)
Public agencies across the state this week are sounding the alarm on the impending tornado season. Kansas University and some Lawrence schools will participate in a statewide tornado drill early this afternoon. The drill is part of a statewide campaign to spread the message about how to prepare and be safe during severe weather. "Everybody needs to know what their potential dangers are -- such as flooding, tornadoes, heat waves and thunderstorms, and how they can be prepared," said Teri Smith, director of Douglas County Emergency Management. Lawrence public schools will have school tornado drills either today or at other times during the week, said Rick Gammill, the district's director of special operations, safety and transportation. Gammill said students are taking statewide tests at some schools and the tornado drills will be scheduled around them. Smith reminds area residents about the 30/30 lightning rule. The rule says to get to shelter if the time between a lightning flash and thunder is 30 seconds or less. Once inside, people should not head out again until 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder. The

state division of emergency management has tips available on the Web at www.ksready.gov. The agency suggests to watch oncoming storms for large hail, the telltale dark-greenish tint of the storm or the loud, roaring noise of rushing wind. All are signs of a tornado.

NOAA Completes US Tsunami Warning System (NOAA, 3/10)
NOAA deployed the final two tsunami detection buoys in the South Pacific this week, completing the buoy network and bolstering the U.S. tsunami warning system. This vast network of 39 stations provides coastal communities in the Pacific, Atlantic, Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico with faster and more accurate tsunami warnings. These final two deep-ocean assessment and reporting of tsunami (DART) stations, deployed off the Solomon Islands, will give NOAA forecasters real-time data about tsunamis that could potentially impact the U.S. Pacific coast, Hawaii and U.S. Pacific territories. Tsunami sensors are now positioned between Hawaii and every seismic zone that could generate a tsunami that would impact the state and beyond, including the U.S. West Coast. Buoys already in the western Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean have been keeping watch over the U.S East and Gulf coasts. DART stations consist of a bottom pressure sensor anchored to the seafloor and a companion moored surface buoy. An acoustic link transmits data from the bottom pressure sensor to the surface buoy, and then satellite links relay the data to NOAA tsunami warning centers. The DART network serves as the cornerstone to the U.S. tsunami warning system.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Nagin: Katrina anniversary goal for getting rid of FEMA trailers (AP, 3/15)
Mayor Ray Nagin said he'd like to see people out of remaining FEMA trailers in his city by August, the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Recent concerns raised about formaldehyde fumes in federally issued trailers and mobile homes are forcing the city to act, he said Saturday. "We have to push," Nagin told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "At this point in time, we really don't have a choice." Formaldehyde, a preservative commonly used in construction materials, can lead to breathing problems and is also believed to cause cancer. Last month, the CDC said formaldehyde fumes in 519 trailers and mobile homes tested in Louisiana and Mississippi averaged five times the amount in most modern homes. FEMA said about 22,680 trailers and mobile homes remained in the state as of Thursday. About 7,420 are in New Orleans, most of those in front of houses damaged or destroyed by the storm. FEMA has set June 1 its one-time target for closing trailer group sites in Louisiana as its goal for getting as many people as possible out of trailers. Nagin said he shares that goal.

Katrina Victims Complain About Red Tape (Associated Press, 3/13)
Two and a half years after Hurricane Katrina, tens of thousands of miserable homeowners are still waiting for their government rebuilding checks, and many complain they can't even get their calls returned. But the company that holds the big contract to distribute the aid is doing quite well for itself. ICF International of Fairfax, Va., has posted strong profits, gone public, landed additional multimillion-dollar government contracts, and, it

was learned this week, secured a potentially big raise recently from the state of Louisiana. In the waning days of Gov. Kathleen Blanco's administration, state officials increased the management contract ceiling from $756 million to $914 million this, after the Legislature wanted to fire ICF over its handling of the homeowner recovery program, called Road Home. "I'm flabbergasted that this company could be so inefficient and could mess up so consistently and for so long," said Bill Yurt, 57, who has been living in a FEMA trailer for 2 1/2 years. He said ICF hasn't sent an appraiser to determine the grant amount that will resurrect his gutted house in Gentilly. And his calls to an ICF caseworker have gone unreturned for a month. Road Home was created in June 2006 as a state-run, federally funded plan to compensate homeowners for the breach of New Orleans' government-run levees. Homeowners can apply for grants to repair their homes, or obtain buyouts if they don't want to fix things up. Yet, 56,000 applicants nearly 40 percent of the qualified total had yet to receive a cent as of last month. Plagued by cost overruns and delays, Road Home is expected to cost the taxpayers $10 billion in federal money and has become another glaring symbol of frustration and red tape in post-Katrina New Orleans.

FEMA OKs repairing 6,000 blocks of N.O. streets (New Orleans City Business, 3/11) Mayor C. Ray Nagin on Monday commemorated the completion of street repairs paid for by FEMA and announced the start of a citywide street-repair project also approved by FEMA. The new project will repair more than 6,000 blocks of streets, the city said. "We've identified more than 6,000 blocks, or 17,000 individual sites, that will undergo repairs," said Robert Mendoza, director of city's Department of Public Works. "Repairs range in size from less than 2 square yards to over 1,400 square yards. However, the average size repair is between 20 and 30 square yards per site. " Last year, Public Works repaired 347 sites for a total of about $937,000. The repair work was focused primarily in Algiers, the Lower Ninth Ward, Lakeview and Gentilly. Last month, the city released an invitation for bids for the remaining sites that qualify for reimbursement through FEMA's Public Assistance program. Bids are due today. "We continue to reach milestones in our recovery, and this event represents one step toward completing the task of rehabilitating our streets that were heavily damaged due to the devastation and flooding," Nagin said. Public Works will assign construction managers to each project with one or more inspectors. The city's Project Management Team, MWH, will assist Public Works with the overall administration of each project. "Repairing New Orleans' roads is an important project that will bring much relief to everyone who drives here in the city," said Jim Stark, acting associate deputy administrator for FEMA's Gulf Coast Recovery Office. "By assessing damages as a FEMA, state and city team, we were able to walk nearly 13,000 blocks of New Orleans and develop a common approach to assess damages that worked for all three entities. I'm happy to say that as of today, FEMA has obligated more than $26 million for road projects in New Orleans. "