

Disaster News Update – March 3 to 9, 2008

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Building Collapse:** New York
- **Drought:** Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Maryland
- **Explosion:** New York (Bomb), Pennsylvania (Residential Gas Leak)
- **Fire:** New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Kentucky, Maryland, Hawaii
- **Flood/Flash Flood:** Nebraska, Alabama, Illinois
- **HAZMAT:** Michigan (Chemical Truck Leak)
- **Heavy Rain:** Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Maine, Illinois
- **Ice Storm:** Ohio
- **Landslide:** New York, California
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Arkansas, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Texas
- **Sinkhole:** Pennsylvania
- **Strong Wind:** Kansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama
- **Thunderstorms:** Pennsylvania, New Jersey
- **Tornado:** Florida, Texas, Virginia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Georgia

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Illinois](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (3/7)
- [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)
- Fire Declarations: [Texas \(3/4\)](#), [Texas \(2/28\)](#), [Texas \(2/25\)](#), [Oklahoma \(2/25\)](#), [Texas \(2/25b\)](#), [Texas \(2/23\)](#), [Texas \(2/13\)](#), [Texas \(2/8\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Community pitches in to prepare for disaster (Contra Costa (CA) Times, 3/6)

About 60 North Richmond volunteers erected shelters for people and pets Wednesday morning in the unincorporated community's first large-scale disaster drill. Led by the local faith community, Contra Costa County agencies and the American Red Cross, the exercise focused on helping displaced people who need aid following an earthquake or similar incident. "It's not acceptable for us not to prepare for what we know is going to happen," said the Rev. Cedric Alexander, pastor of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church on Filbert Avenue. "In the event of disaster, people look to the churches" in North Richmond. Organizers registered and briefed volunteers at the church in the morning. They then erected cots and kennels down the street at North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church. The mock disaster was nonspecific; community members

simply came to the shelter asking for shelter and other aid. "The volunteers assess their medical condition and decide which have the most urgent needs," said Kate Fowlie, spokeswoman for Contra Costa Health Services. "What was great about this was it was the community, community members getting a chance to practice with the pros." Other participating groups included Easter Hill Methodist, St. Peters CME, Resurrection Health Services, Contra Costa Employment and Human Services, and county Animal Services. The local faith community spent about two years cultivating disaster volunteers in North Richmond and Richmond in preparation for the drill. Alexander said similar events will follow.

Meteorologists praise volunteer spotters for help during storms (AP, 3/5)

When storm watches and warnings are issued for northeast Arkansas, most people turn on their radios, televisions and a few their weather radios. Others are beginning more and more to go online to the National Weather Service Web sites for their information. No matter what you choose for your up-to-the-minute information, there's an important group of people throughout the Mid-South who many times place their lives in danger for the good of others. They are volunteer storm watchers, members of "Skywarn." These are people who have undergone hours of specialized training so that they can recognize the signs in the sky that provide the information to those who will eventually issue the warnings or turn on the warning systems to make those decisions, said David Moore, coordinator of the Craighead County Office of Emergency Management. Moore said a severe weather seminar held recently was to focus on the Skywarn weather spotter class. "This is not only to bring more knowledge for the Skywarn spotters, but for anyone who wanted to show up and learn more about storms and how to take care of themselves and their families in a storm." "They are our eyes and ears," Krissy Scotten of Memphis, National Weather Service meteorologist, said of the storm spotters. "We're here working together to save lives."

San Diego Red Cross volunteers tell of frustration (Copley News Service, 3/4)

Concerns over how the American Red Cross directed resources during the Southern California wildfires run deeper than the tens of thousands of dollars the disaster-relief organization admitted to spending on unused hotel rooms. San Diego residents who volunteered for the Red Cross during October's firestorms said they observed needless spending - citing car rentals as an example - and uncoordinated leadership among volunteers sent here from around the country by the national organization. "It was very frustrating," said Cameron Peter, a Point Loma woman who volunteered in the initial days of the disaster. "Obviously I volunteered because I wanted to help, but I was just wasting my time. We weren't helping anyone at all." The American Red Cross defended its relief efforts in Southern California, although a December report from the agency's ombudsman found several examples of miscommunication and a lack of proper training among its leaders. The agency's response to the wildfires has received new attention after news reports last week that the national charity reserved and paid for hotel rooms that were never used. Charity officials admit overbooking an unknown number of rooms for out-of-town volunteers dispatched to San Diego, but they said they erred on the side of caution. "These are very large incidents, and it's tough to coordinate," spokeswoman Laura Howe said. "When disaster is uncertain, sometimes it's a moving target." The

American Red Cross declined to say how much it spent on unused rooms, although it acknowledged the total is tens of thousands of dollars. The agency is negotiating with San Diego hotel operators to try to recoup a portion of the expense or secure vouchers for free rooms during a future emergency.

Organizations help animals get through emergencies (Telegram & Gazette, 3/3)

As JoAnn Griffin tended to the emotional needs of Southbridge residents who had been evacuated to an emergency shelter after severe flooding, she noticed something odd: an abundance of pets. It was October 2005, a month after Hurricane Katrina. People on the Gulf Coast had been forced to either abandon their animals or risk their lives to save them. Desperate pet owners had been stranded on the rooftops of their submerged houses, their dogs at their sides. Ms. Griffin was aware that the presence of dogs and cats posed a problem in Southbridge, as it did in Louisiana. For health and safety reasons, she explained, the Red Cross does not permit pets in shelters for people. As it happened, Ms. Griffin, a lifelong dog lover and president of the Central Massachusetts Disaster Animal Response Team, was particularly well poised to take action. Her team quickly came to Southbridge to help displaced families with their pets. Working with the Red Cross of Central Massachusetts, members set up an animal shelter. They also helped the town's animal control officer interview victims to find out how many pets had been left behind. "Right after the flooding occurred, people were agitated," Ms. Griffin, who lives in Douglas, recalled the other day. "That's when I made the recommendation: 'If we can help these people with their pets' needs, it might calm them.' That's what happened." Ms. Griffin, along with people from other towns in southern Worcester County, formed the Central Massachusetts Disaster Animal Response Team in 2003. But after Katrina, helping animals in times of disaster took on a greater sense of urgency. Many well-meaning people had rushed to the region to save pets without the proper training, creating what Ms. Griffin referred to as "chaos within chaos."

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

State Posts Clips About Preparedness On YouTube (Washington Post, 3/9)

Hoping to grab an audience it might otherwise miss, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management has begun offering clips on YouTube. "Just about everybody looks at YouTube nowadays," said Bob Spieldenner, VDEM's public affairs director. "But our big thing is to try to reach the young generation with our messages. We want the kids who are going out there on the Internet to see what we're doing." YouTube.com is the three-year-old Web phenomenon that allows people to watch and share videos -- some serious, some sassy, some downright silly. VDEM's YouTube channel leans toward the serious side, focusing on the agency's bread-and-butter issue: emergency preparedness. "I'm Governor Tim Kaine," one clip begins. "Unexpected disasters can happen at any time with little or no warning. So act now to get ready, Virginia." Kaine (D) is seated in what appears to be an elegant room, with blue walls and an ornately framed painting. "Three simple low-cost steps will go a long way toward making sure your family is prepared for any emergency," he continues. "Get an emergency kit, make a plan and stay informed. Three ways to make a difference in your family's life."

Totes to help seniors prepare for disasters (Bangor Daily News, 3/6)

Tote bags are not Tom Iverson Jr.'s specialty but he's distributing them in the name of preparedness. Iverson, Piscataquis County's Emergency Management Agency director, is hoping to ensure that every senior citizen, especially those who are shut in, know what to do in the event of a disaster. Having acquired tote "go" bags from the state Emergency Management Agency, Iverson has filled them with informational pamphlets that advise whom to call, how to get help in the event of an emergency, and what seniors should take for themselves and pets if they have to be relocated. He's also enclosed a healthy calendar and a file of life to hold the senior citizen's medical information and history. "The plan is for these bags to be used for emergencies and not for grocery shopping," Iverson said this week. Seniors should fill the bags with as many supplies listed as possible and leave them in a central location for quick retrieval. The Meals for Me program in the Milo region is distributing the first 50 "go" bags to shut-ins. As more bags are received from the state, the program will be expanded to all areas of the county, he said.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Flood-prone towns keep eyes on the rivers (NJ Star Ledger, 3/9)

We got the wet. We got the wind. Now comes the wait. After a drenching rainstorm pounded New Jersey yesterday - followed by high winds that delivered a sucker punch knocking out power to more than 100,000 homes - residents were told to brace for flooding, with several rivers expected to exceed flood stage today. "We're watching all the rivers from Mercer County all the way up," said Nick Morici, public information officer for the state Office of Emergency Management. As much as 2 inches of rain fell in the northern part of the state yesterday, bringing average totals between 2 and 3 inches since the storm's first wave began Friday, according to the National Weather Service. Some areas in Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties may have received close to 4 inches, meteorologist Lee Robertson said. But it didn't take long for the heavy rain to be upstaged by high winds that brought down trees and power lines. The high winds also forced long delays at the area's airports. At Newark Liberty International Airport, arriving flights were delayed nearly 4 hours, on average. More than 115,000 utility customers were without power last night. Jersey Central Power and Light reported nearly 50,000 customers without power, with the greatest concentration - upward of 20,000 - in towns along the Watchung Mountain ridge, including Summit, New Providence and Berkeley Heights.

TN residents waiting for aid, insurance, construction (Associated Press, 3/9)

Most of the debris is gone, and volunteer and police presence is light. Now, a month after tornadoes ravaged this rural area, residents are playing the waiting game for federal aid to arrive, for insurance checks to come in the mail and for construction to begin. Federal officials are also waiting on mobile homes to be cleared for use in Tennessee and Arkansas, though some residents are wary because of formaldehyde levels in the trailers. The mobile homes are being tested after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported last month that government-issued trailers may have exposed Gulf Coast

hurricane victims to dangerous levels of formaldehyde fumes. Formaldehyde, a preservative commonly used in construction materials, can cause breathing problems and also is believed to cause cancer. FEMA spokesman Jay Eaker said the agency has identified 61 people in Macon County, northeast of Nashville, and eight in other counties who are eligible for mobile homes, but it could take a month before the trailers are ready. Doug Baldwin, who has been living in his home since the storms pushed a tree into it and tore through the roof, said he's concerned about the safety of the FEMA mobile homes even though he isn't eligible for one.

Residents clean up after deadly north Florida storms (Associated Press, 3/9)

Residents cleaned up Saturday after deadly storms raked north Florida a day earlier, spawning tornadoes, fierce thunderstorms and high winds. National Weather Service meteorologists estimated that a tornado that hit Lake City on Friday measured about a quarter mile wide and stayed on the ground for about a half mile. It was designated as an EF-2 tornado on an ascending scale that estimates wind speeds from zero to five. The tornado killed a woman when a tree fell on her mobile home. Another person who lived outside the tornado's path also died while trying to hook up a generator after he lost power Friday. His death has been deemed storm-related, said Gina Busscher, a spokeswoman for Columbia County emergency management. Neither person had been identified Saturday. Busscher said crews worked overnight to try to restore power to about 5,000 residents. At least two other tornadoes were reported in north Florida on Friday. An EF-1 in Capitola near Tallahassee generated about 105 mile-per-hour winds, injured one person and damaged at least six homes, National Weather Service meteorologist Kelly Godsey said. Another twister in Keaton Beach on the Gulf Coast generated 120 mile-per-hour winds and destroyed one home, Godsey said.

FEMA reverses, says Illinois counties qualify for flood aid (Associated Press, 3/8)

Livingston and Iroquois counties in eastern Illinois will receive federal disaster aid to recover from January flooding, FEMA said Friday in a decision that reversed an earlier ruling. FEMA initially ruled last month the counties weren't badly flooded enough to merit disaster status, which allows people and businesses to apply for financial help following floods and other disasters. The agency accepted an appeal of the decision by Gov. Rod Blagojevich, said FEMA spokesman Aric Schmidt. State and local officials had complained that FEMA failed to count several hundred homes damaged by the floods. "I'm so excited that we'll now be able to assist those residents who had their lives turned upside down by this flood," said Pontiac Mayor Scott McCoy. "I can't tell you how happy I am right now." McCoy said he received a phone call Friday afternoon from Illinois Emergency Management Agency director Andrew Velasquez informing him of the aid just as he was to address a ribbon-cutting ceremony at a local museum. McCoy announced the news to the crowd, which cheered and applauded. Hundreds were forced to evacuate after days of heavy rainfall and melting snow caused the flooding. More than 430 homes, including 200 in Livingston County, evacuated when the Vermilion River went over its banks.

President Declares Major Disaster For Illinois (FEMA, 3/7)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Illinois to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding during the period of January 7, 2008 and continuing. FEMA Director David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state of Illinois by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Iroquois and Livingston 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 also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide. Paulison named Lawrence Sommers as the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Sommers said that additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.

Killer tornadoes sweep across FL (Disaster News Network, 3/7)

Severe storms tore across north Florida and southeast Georgia, leaving at least two dead in the Tallahassee area, damaging buildings and cars and leaving thousands without power between Tallahassee and Jacksonville. In Chaires, just east of Tallahassee, the National Weather Service reported two fatalities as a result of the storm, but could not yet confirm it had been a tornado or simply high winds that moved through the area. Mark Prasek, disaster relief coordinator of the Florida Baptist Association, said his group put about a half a dozen volunteers to work within two hours after the storms moved through the area to begin clearing the debris from the affected area just east of Tallahassee. He said, despite continued rain in the area, the workers would be using chainsaws to cut up fallen trees and other hazards before moving on to some repair work on houses. Jessica Geib, of the Capitol Area Chapter of the American Red Cross, said that immediately after the storms moved through, the organization set up a center to distribute food and water in the affected area. By the mid-afternoon, a shelter was set up at Chaires Elementary School. Geib said the number of homes damaged by the storm was small, so she wasn't sure how many people would take advantage of the place to sleep and eat, but they would be offering other services at the shelter as well. Prasek, who was at the staging area for his group at the Wood Run Baptist Church in Tallahassee, about two miles from the storm ravaged site, said he had been told by workers at the scene that about eight houses had been damaged, including one on which a tree had fallen.

IL Residents Return After Ice Jam Flood (Disaster News Network, 3/7)

Residents are heading home this weekend after the Rock River spent a week rising and falling because of an ice jam. The Quad Cities area has been riding a wave of snow, rain, rising and falling temperatures that finally caused the Rock River to rise to a level here of 16.38 feet Thursday. About 100 people were evacuated from their homes because of the rising water, which closed city streets and parks. After the ice jam broke up Thursday, the river dropped three feet, and those evacuees have been allowed back in their homes. "They are starting to let people back in their homes today," said Leslie Anthony, director of communications of the American Red Cross of the Quad Cities, Friday. Anthony said two people stayed in a shelter activated by the Red Cross. A shelter has been put on

stand-by by the Red Cross as the river remains above flood stage. In Moline, the flood stage is 12 feet. Throughout this weekend, the Red River is expected to stay around 13.8 feet. North in Joslin, the Red River rose to 17.8 feet and is expected to rise slightly to 17.9 feet Saturday. The flood stage in Joslin is also 12 feet. It's unknown what services those evacuees may require right now, but Marci Zogg, community relations manager for the United Way of the Quad Cities Area, said her organization is ready to help.

FEMA reviewing possibility of aid for tornado cleanup (KY Messenger Inquirer, 3/7)
Muhlenberg County city and county officials expect a federal agency to make up its mind next week about public assistance for their cleanup costs from the Feb. 5 tornado. FEMA said Friday that the county would not get aid because the public damages and costs did not meet a \$5 million threshold in the storm-affected areas. But FEMA representatives on Wednesday and Thursday toured damaged areas in the county and reviewed costs incurred by Central City, Powderly, Greenville and Muhlenberg County agencies. "I'm glad they're in here taking another look, and hopefully they'll change their mind," Judge-Executive Rick Newman said Thursday afternoon. The collective estimated cost is about \$3.25 million, but FEMA needs a more precise list, said Keith Putnam, director of Muhlenberg County Emergency Management Agency. "It takes a whole lot to get to \$5 million," Putnam said. "It depends on how much of it's public property." About 90 percent of the damage in Muhlenberg County was to private property, Putnam said. Utilities in the county are privately owned, not publicly owned, he said.

Families hit by tornado need more help (Columbus Ledger Enquirer, 3/6)
The good news for the families left homeless by the Feb. 17 tornado in southern Russell County is that, day-by-day, things are steadily improving. The families are in safe quarters thanks to the community effort spearheaded by the Russell County Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, the Russell County chapter of the American Red Cross, and churches and other faith-based organizations throughout the county. Several of the families have been accepted by the Phenix City Housing Authority. Russell County Homeland Security Director William Alexander said Wednesday that another man left homeless by the storm has found quarters in a public housing apartment, joining three families that had been accepted last week. But the not-so-good news, Alexander said, is that more help is needed. He said the community has responded well with donations in money, clothing and furnishings. But there are a few more necessary services and needs to be met. "The fund has been set up and people are contributing to it," Alexander said. "They are getting furnishings. People are beginning to donate those. We've gotten a few calls from people last week who were interested in donating some items and I put them in contact."

Virginians cleaning up after storms (Richmond (VA) Times, 3/6)
After a trip, Bob Smith returned to his western Goochland County home yesterday morning to find the roof of his barn lying in the woods. A Tuesday night storm also had toppled several of Smith's trees and torn away his carport. "I haven't found that yet," said Smith, a 67-year-old retiree. He wasn't alone. Authorities were removing debris and investigating possible tornadoes yesterday after a line of powerful thunderstorms destroyed houses and left thousands without power. Gov. Timothy M. Kaine declared a

state of emergency in Virginia yesterday, which allowed state workers and cleanup equipment to respond quickly to problem areas. Federal officials confirmed that a tornado touched down in Wise County -- the first there since April 5, 1957. It destroyed eight homes in Big Stone Gap, left 13 more with major damage and 25 with minor damage. "It was a biggie," Jane Bennett, the county's emergency coordinator, said of the tornado. A line of storms, running roughly south-to-north, rolled east across Virginia from Tuesday afternoon to early yesterday. There were no reports of deaths or serious injuries, authorities said.

More Counties Approved For Recovery Aid Due to February Storms (FEMA, 3/5)
Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear announced that federal disaster assistance is now available for six additional Kentucky counties to help homeowners, renters and business owners recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding Feb. 5-6. This brings to 15 the number of counties where residents with storm-related damage may apply for such aid. The Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM) and FEMA announced that Bath, Harrison, Hopkins, Nicholas, Shelby and Spencer counties have been added to the Feb. 21 major disaster declaration. The original declaration covered Allen, Christian, Fayette, Hardin, Hart, Meade, Mercer, Monroe, and Muhlenberg counties.

National Guard raises estimate for winter storm damage to \$381M (AP, 3/5)
State officials say the winter storm that knocked power out to thousands of customers across Kansas continues to get costlier. The newest damage estimate was released Wednesday, putting the figure at \$381 million. The Kansas adjutant general's department and FEMA said that makes it the most expensive storm ever to hit the state. Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting said the damage was particularly bad for rural electric cooperatives, which lost meters, poles and transmission lines when the ice and snow fell in December. Adding to the cost was that many of the lines were made of materials no longer manufactured, so they had to be rebuilt. The storm caused six deaths and injured 11 others.

Tornado sighted, 2 homes destroyed in MS (Associated Press, 3/4)
A storm system passing through Mississippi on Monday spawned at least one tornado and is being blamed for severely damaging two homes in Amite County. A tornado touched down briefly around 4 p.m. in western Mississippi's Sharkey County near Holly Bluff and Rolling Fork, but there were few sightings of funnel clouds as high, sustained winds buffeted the state. High winds are blamed on the damage in Amite County near Liberty, National Weather Service senior meteorologist Mike Edmonston said, but a storm survey team will check the site Tuesday to determine if the damage was actually caused by a tornado. Five other Amite County homes suffered heavy damage, though no injuries were reported to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The advancing storm system spawned tornado warnings across central and south Mississippi and eastern Louisiana. It packed high winds, lightning, heavy rain and some hail and was expected to cross through the state Monday night. Cold weather behind the front prompted snow warnings for some parts of northern Mississippi

Tornado Recovery Plans In Action (Disaster News Network, 3/4)

Nearly one month after tornadoes ripped through Arkansas and Tennessee, many faith-based organizations are gearing up to provide long-term assistance to those affected by the storms. "The churches have done a lot, but there's a lot more to do. This thing is far from over," said the Rev. Joe Kitchens, pastor of the Atkins, Ark. United Methodist Church. "Right after the tornado hit, churches set up feeding programs, food pantries and shelters. We all had groups out in the field checking on people, helping with clean-up and tree removal. That's all well and good, but now that much of that work is over, and now that the Red Cross and Salvation Army have pulled out, the local churches will be the ones helping to put people's lives back together. And that's as it should be." Jamie Dake, public information officer and volunteer coordinator for FEMA, said the response by faith-based groups in the affected communities has been unlike anything he's ever seen. "The mantra 'all disasters are local' has really been driven home here," he said. "It seems that nearly every community has taken responsibility for its own. Maybe it's because many of the areas hit are small towns, but groups have connected and come together to begin the rebuilding process without our help or direction. They have completely taken ownership of these families and are already working together to see that their needs are met."

FEMA Authorizes Funds To Fight La Perla Fire (FEMA, 3/4)

FEMA authorized the use of federal funds to help fight the La Perla Fire in Zapata County following a request from the State of Texas on Monday. "Fire conditions in Zapata County are extreme. The La Perla Fire covered 1,000 acres and threatened 75 homes and 300 residents when the state requested federal aid," said William Peterson, FEMA regional administrator. "In order to protect lives and property, it's critical for firefighters to receive the support they need." At the time of the request, the fire was threatening 75 homes in San Ygnacio. A shelter was set up at the Zapata Community Center for residents who had to be evacuated. Peterson encourages all Zapata County residents to monitor conditions carefully and heed safety instructions issued by local officials.

Storm system leaves scattered damage in parts of AL (Associated Press, 3/4)

A massive storm system moving through Alabama early Tuesday left scattered storm damage and created flash flooding that forced some rural residents from homes, but there were no reports of any injuries. Lowndes County authorities said search and rescue teams were in the Collirene community at 6 a.m. to help families trapped in their homes because of flooding. Lowndes County Sheriff Chip Williams said floodwaters reached up to the floor of three trailers and washed away a bridge. The water subsided and all residents were able to safely get out of their trailers, he said. County work crews were checking roads where flooding occurred. The National Weather Service said meteorologists surveying storm damage in Eutaw in Greene County found that one home was destroyed, four received major damage and 25 were damaged as a tornado with maximum wind speeds of 105 mph moved through the area.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

NOAA Weather Radios Proved Valuable In Recent Disaster (DHS, 3/5)

Shortly after midnight, Hardin County Commissioner Bill Brandenburg and his family were awakened by their National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio warning them that a storm was only miles, in fact minutes, away from their home. "I am an advocate of the weather radios. I have purchased them for myself and my children and have even told my associates about the radios," said Brandenburg. "We were able to go get our "Ready Kit" and go down in our basement after the NOAA radiowarned us of the recent February storm." Brandenburg purchased a radio for his home as a result of a presentation given to Hardin County Fiscal Court on NOAA weather radios. David Underwood, administrator of Emergency Services for Hardin County, gave the presentation and showed examples of different radios that could be purchased during the lecture. Hardin County has been approved to be a "Storm-Ready Community." In 2006, the county received a hazard mitigation grant to purchase NOAA weather radios because of high winds and tornado risk in the area. A "Storm-Ready Community" means that the county has disaster plans in place and has properly equipped its facilities, e.g. the weather radios. It also means that the residents have been well educated on what to do in the wake of a storm. "I purchased 61 NOAA weather radios after the Emergency Management Service received the mitigation grant, and placed them in government buildings and schools," said Underwood. Underwood said law enforcement, 911 dispatch centers and fire departments were some of the places given radios. Each of these agencies received advance storm warnings because of the NOAA radios during the recent February storms. Other government buildings and schools were not in operation when the storm hit. "The 911 center's system went down on the night of the storm," Underwood said. "Electricity went out and they were having trouble getting information out, but agencies that had the NOAA weather radios were able to get the information because the radios worked automatically on AC/DC batteries when the power failed."

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

College students renew push to help New Orleans rebuild (Newhouse News, 3/4)

For the third year since Hurricane Katrina, thousands of college students are pouring into New Orleans this month, using their spring break to frame walls, install flooring and drywall, scrape and paint and offer other help to older, year-round volunteers working to rebuild the flood-damaged city. The volunteers are filling churches, schools and other facilities long ago converted into rustic dormitories to house workers for the long-term recovery mission. They rise daily, collect their tools and fan out to work sites assigned by relief agencies like Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities' Operation Helping Hands and the Southeast Louisiana Disaster Recovery Ministry, a quasi-secular nonprofit backed by Methodist money. "March was booked solid four months ago," said Paul Cook, senior project manager at Operation Helping Hands. "All the other nonprofits are telling us the same thing. "They're all at capacity." Because the private relief effort is highly decentralized, no one tries to count how many volunteers will be working in more than a dozen nonprofit agencies during spring break, which attracts a revolving cast of students all through March and much of April. Certainly the number is well below the

10,000 volunteers per week who surged into the area in 2006, when Katrina was fresh and agencies could throw hordes of willing bodies into the relatively brutish, unskilled work of gutting scores of thousands of ruined homes. But because the need long ago shifted from simple gutting to more complex rebuilding work, relief agencies find they cannot effectively manage so many workers as before. "Construction is all about planning," Cook said. These days, the daily work assignments Cook and his counterparts hand out on any given house are the results of a behind-the-scenes process that evaluates a homeowner's needs, coordinates any finishing work on the last stage of repair, arranges for a new batch of building materials and assesses the skills of the next set of incoming volunteers, he and others said. Moreover, the agencies keep some kinds of work off-limits to volunteers; much of the electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning work requires licensed professionals. And some agencies keep volunteers off roofs.