

## **Disaster News Update –November 19 to 25, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Tennessee, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida
- **Fire:** California, Montana, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, North Carolina
- **HazMat:** Arkansas (Gas Leak)
- **Heavy rain / Flooding:** New York, Texas, Georgia, Hawaii,
- **Strong winds:** California
- **Transportation:** South Carolina (Bus Accident)

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

- [California:](#) Wildfires (10/24)
- [California:](#) Wildfires (10/23 – Emergency Declaration)
- Fire Declarations: [New Mexico \(11/21\)](#), [Hawaii \(10/28\)](#), [California 1 \(10/22\)](#), [California 2 \(10/22\)](#), [California 3 \(10/22\)](#), [California 4 \(10/22\)](#), [California 5 \(10/21\)](#), [California 6 \(10/21\)](#), [California 7 \(10/21\)](#), [California 8 \(10/21\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Volunteers are needed to help at FEMA centers** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 11/22)

Several entities that worked together to open two community centers at FEMA sites in east St. Tammany Parish now need volunteers to use the additions to bring services to the residents in those transitional neighborhoods. Northshore Disaster Recovery, Save the Children and Volunteers of America/Louisiana Spirit recently celebrated the grand opening of the Interstate 59 Community Center in the I-59 Mobile Home Park in Pearl River. They had held a similar event about two months ago, commemorating the official opening of the Tammany Community Center in the Tammany Mobile Home Park off U.S. 190 East near Slidell. They now are ready to schedule programs at the community centers, especially in Pearl River. Last week at the I-59 Community Center, Louisiana Spirit hosted a health day at which the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, offered free adult flu immunizations to park residents, said Rebecca Thees, Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans/Louisiana Spirit's St. Tammany team leader. "It's a wonderful thing for the community. The residents were thrilled to see it," she said, referring to the center inside a trailer. "It gives them an important place to create community." The center provides a gathering place for residents and others from the departments, agencies and assistance groups that otherwise would have to hold meetings, programs and events outside under tents or in mobile units. The groups have not yet set center operating hours, but Louisiana Spirit offers crisis counseling, referrals and other outreach services at least once a week at the I-59 site.

#### **Charities' coffers swell to \$23 million** (San Diego Union Tribune, 11/21)

Major nonprofits have collected more than \$23 million for wildfire relief in what some are predicting will become the largest local charity drive ever. The American Red Cross has collected \$17.3 million in contributions for Southern California wildfires, most of which it said will go to San Diego County. And millions more has been donated and pledged to The San Diego Foundation, the Salvation Army, the Jewish Community Foundation and others. Many nonprofits are still collecting money while they forge a long-range plan on how to best spend the contributions. Next month, The San Diego Foundation is scheduled to release an assessment on wildfire-relief needs. The foundation, the United Way and other organizations said they will base their spending on the report. In addition, a local association of nonprofits affiliated with the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster is coordinating fire-relief charity work among themselves to prevent double-dipping and duplication of services. Money has been disbursed and will continue to be directed toward some obvious areas, such as housing and meals. But the contributions could also help the agricultural industry, the environment and wildlife. Federal statistics show that more than 93 percent of people whose homes were destroyed in the wildfires are insured. But that doesn't mean they won't have emotional and financial needs, said Sara Wilensky Napoli of The San Diego Foundation.

**President Appoints American Red Cross Cabinet Council Members** (ARC, 11/21)

Today, the White House announced that President Bush has appointed seven members to the newly formed American Red Cross Cabinet Council. The Council will provide advice and counsel on relevant issues that affect the Red Cross mission and serve in an advisory role to the American Red Cross Board of Governors. The members of the Cabinet Council include: Carlos Gutierrez, Secretary of Commerce; Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense; Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education; Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Health and Human Services; Michael Chertoff, DHS Secretary; Condoleezza Rice; and Admiral Michael Mullins, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The American Red Cross greatly values its partnerships which include community, humanitarian and governmental partners at the local, state and federal levels. The Cabinet Council will serve as a critical resource to the Red Cross Board in support of the organization's life-After an extensive self-examination and comprehensive review of its governance practices in early 2006, the Board of Governors unanimously approved several recommended changes to modernize its 60-year-old governance structure and to enhance its ability to support the critical mission of the Red Cross in the 21st Century. One of these changes was to transition seven of the presidentially appointed Red Cross Governors to a newly created Cabinet Council.

**FEMA Helping Hands Workshop Nov. 27 in Gulfport** (FEMA, 11/20)

Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VAL) from FEMA will conduct a Helping Hands Workshop from 6 to 9 p.m., Nov. 27 at the Isaiah Fredericks Community Center in Gulfport. VAL has hosted ten Helping Hands Workshops across the lower six counties, targeting families in FEMA temporary housing. Organizers estimate nearly 600 applicants have attended the events. "We bring a panel together to obtain every resource imaginable to help temporary housing occupants," said Laura Mason, FEMA VAL and workshop organizer. "We're trying to expedite the process of getting out of a unit and into

an apartment for applicants and hopefully help them not to feel discouraged. Some organizations like the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and American Red Cross have participated in nearly every workshop. Several new organizations are scheduled to participate in the upcoming event including Operation Hope and the Harrison County Long Term Recovery Committee. "The panel participants bring so much to every event. Not every agency can offer something for every person, but the agencies try to help. They see the results; even if it's just one family out of temporary housing, it's progress," said Mason. VAL and FEMA Individual Assistance teams will distribute fliers to approximately 500 occupants of commercial and FEMA group parks throughout Harrison County with more details about the workshop.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

### **Volunteers needed in Jo Daviess County, Iowa** (Telegraph Herald, 11/23)

The Jo Daviess County Health Department Emergency Management Team is looking for volunteers to assist in emergencies requiring many first responders, such as a major flu outbreak to distribute antibiotics or vaccines. Persons interested in volunteering should be 18 years or older, understand English, but may also speak other languages. For information or to sign up as a volunteer call Peg Murphy at the Health Department at 815/777-0263.

### **CA Fire Recovery Group Sets First Meeting** (Disaster News Network, 11/21)

A long-term recovery committee designed to help survivors of the deadly wildfires which devastated swaths of San Diego County will hold its first official meeting Dec. 6, officials announced Tuesday. In the meantime, efforts continued by faith-based and community organizations, as well as local, state and federal government agencies, to assist people impacted by the fires. Efforts also continued by recovery groups to gather information about which communities will need ongoing assistance and exactly what needs will need to be addressed. "Overall, we're moving so effectively, compared to the 2003 (Cedar) fire, that we're ahead of the data," said Don Read, emergency disaster services director with The Salvation Army. "It's like pushing Jell-O. "We just can't get enough data to cut through the Jell-O to get at the heart of what the problems really are," he said. For example, Read noted that while 93 percent of homeowners affected by the fires had insurance, it was unknown how many of them might be underinsured or unable to rebuild their homes. Also unknown was how many renters – which he said made up nearly half the population affected by the fires – had insurance.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Malibu Wildfire Destroys 49 Homes** (Disaster News Network, 11/25)

A wildfire pushed by strong Santa Ana winds raced through hills above Malibu on Saturday, destroying at least 49 homes, damaging 27 others and forcing thousands of people to flee their homes. By Sunday morning, the so-called Corral fire had consumed more than 4,700 acres and was 40 percent contained, according to the Los Angeles

County Fire Department. Some evacuation orders were lifted Saturday night and residents were allowed to return home as the winds subsided and firefighters made progress on the blaze. Full containment was expected Tuesday. "All residents are urged to be prepared to evacuate and to immediately follow instructions given by fire department and sheriff's department personnel," Malibu officials advised residents. Evacuation centers were set up at Agoura High School and at Channel Islands High School in Oxnard. Facilities were also set up where people could bring large and small animals. A red flag warning remained in effect for Los Angeles and Ventura counties until noon Sunday. Some 1,700 firefighters from California and other states were battling the blaze. Nineteen aircraft, including helicopters, air tankers and a retardant-dropping DC-10 jet, were used to fight the fire from the air.

**Red Cross Ready, But No One Shows** (Albuquerque Journal, 11/23)

The most interesting part of the Red Cross volunteers' day at Mountainair High School was football practice and a football game. The half dozen or so volunteers set up a shelter Tuesday night at the gym, and 45 people spent the night. By Wednesday night, no one was staying there. Those manning tables and registration were left with little to do on Thanksgiving except watch the Mountainair High School football team practice in preparation for the team's game Saturday in Animas for the 8-man football state championship. Once the high schoolers were finished with practice about 10 a.m., the volunteers had to wait an hour for professional football on TV. "Fortunately, we have nothing to do," said Robert Friedrich, shelter manager. "This is a small community, and they take care of each other." The U.S. Forest Service forced the evacuation of about 100 residences near the small villages of Manzano and Punta de Agua early Wednesday. By Thursday, those people were depending on the kindness of friends instead of strangers. The Red Cross and the Southern Baptist Convention's New Mexico Disaster Relief Team prepared Thanksgiving meals for displaced families, volunteers and firefighters. By noon, the only people to serve were each other and a few television and newspaper reporters.

**Manzano wildfire forces evacuations, state requests federal aid** (AP, 11/22)

An air tanker and helicopters were busy Wednesday trying to knock down a wind-whipped blaze that charred an estimated 7,500 acres, burned several structures and forced the evacuation of residents from a rural area in the Manzano Mountains. The Ojo Peak Fire had burned at least three homes, four outbuildings and several vehicles by Wednesday evening, said Arlene Perea, a spokeswoman for the Cibola National Forest's Mountainair ranger district. Perea said people in 75 to 100 homes in the villages of Punta del Agua and Manzano, along with other residents in ranches scattered around the area southeast of Albuquerque, were asked to leave. "The fire is not a running crown fire like it was this morning. The biggest thing is just the weather. The winds died down and we got the air tankers up and we were able to knock down the head of the fire," she said Wednesday evening. The fire was 5 percent contained late Wednesday and crews were hoping that forecasters' predictions for snow overnight would come true, fire officials said. A shelter was been set up for evacuees at Mountainair High School, and people were taking their livestock to the Mountainair rodeo grounds. Gov. Bill Richardson has directed the state's Emergency operation Center to monitor the situation and provide assistance to the communities affected by the fire.

**FEMA turns down disaster declaration for town hit by tornado** (AP, 11/22)

FEMA is turning down Nappanee's request for disaster assistance after a tornado destroyed more than 50 homes there last month. FEMA says damage to the private sector wasn't severe enough to warrant a major disaster declaration and assistance. Local and state officials say they'll appeal the decision. The Oct. 18 storm destroyed 51 homes in the city of fewer than 7,000 people. Another 137 had major damage and 201 had minor damage. A total of 107 businesses sustained damage, including three recreational vehicle plants that are among Nappanee's largest employers.

**First responders' border-crossing delays raise concerns** (GovExec.Com, 11/21)

U.S. and Canadian officials are raising questions about whether Customs and Border Protection personnel along the northern border have improperly delayed first responders crossing in response to local emergencies. Last week, an ambulance transporting a critically ill patient from Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit for emergency heart surgery at Detroit's Henry Ford Hospital was delayed for several minutes while Customs and Border Protection agents conducted a "secondary inspection," during which they required the driver to get out of the vehicle and have his identification papers examined by personnel inside the customs office, while other agents asked the patient to confirm his identity, despite his critical condition. Canadian officials told the *Windsor Star* that the ambulance had been given a police escort to the tunnel linking the two countries and that there should have been no delay at the border.

**Deadline to Apply for Disaster Assistance Extended** (FEMA, 11/21)

Residents who suffered damages from the Southern California wildfires in the affected counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, San Diego and Ventura now have until January 9, 2008 to apply for federal and state disaster assistance. "During the holidays we know that many have issues to deal with, and it is our hope that extending the deadline until after the New Year will allow a little extra time for those who haven't registered for assistance," said Federal Coordinating Officer Mike Hall. There are two easy ways to begin the application process. Those with Internet access can register at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or they can call FEMA's (FEMA's) toll-free number at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY 1-800-462-7585. Phone lines are open from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week until further notice. Multilingual operators also are available to answer calls. "We are pleased with the quick response and approval of our request for an extension," OES Director Henry Renteria. "Extending the deadline will put less of a burden on fire victims as well as the agencies striving to assist them in the recovery process." Disaster assistance can include: funding for temporary disaster housing assistance; grants to help with housing repairs and personal property damages and losses; U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) low-interest disaster loans for individuals and business owners; and assistance for other disaster-related expenses not covered by insurance.

**Year after explosion, life almost back to normal for displaced** (Boston Herald, 11/21)

Tile on the kitchen floor is still missing and cans of paint sit on the living room console, but they're the only signs in Ann Marie Ruotolo's Danvers home of the blast that rocked

her house off its foundation and blasted out the windows and doors. A year after vapors from a chemical mixture at a paint and ink manufacturing plant caused a blast that devastated nearly 300 homes and businesses, Ruotolo, like other residents in this town of 26,000 people, are still rebuilding their homes - and their lives. "I consider myself lucky," said Ruotolo, who'll have Thanksgiving dinner out with friends tomorrow, rather than at the Beverly church that served dinner last year to those left homeless. "I didn't have to rebuild." Across Bates Street, Laura and Tim Barry did. The blast destroyed everything but the frame of their house, the cellar and the foundation, forcing them to spend the next nine months living out of hotels and with relatives until their house was rebuilt. "We were just glad to be alive," said Laura Barry, 40, who was feeding her infant son when the blast blew in their windows, showering them in shards of glass. "Having everybody safe and back together - we have a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving." Neither CAI nor Arnel, the two companies the manufacturing plant housed, could be reached yesterday for comment. But both companies have relinquished their license to store flammable materials, Town Manager Wayne Marquis said.

**More Than \$822,400 Approved for Crisis Counseling** (FEMA, 11/21)

FEMA has approved an \$822,438 grant to the California Department of Mental Health for crisis-counseling services for victims of the recent Southern California wildfires in the disaster-affected counties. "Losing a home, business, or personal property to the wildfires takes not only a financial toll on victims, but also levies an emotional impact," said Mike Hall, head of the federal effort for the disaster. "This grant demonstrates the commitment of FEMA and the state to those suffering the emotional toll of this disaster." Crisis counseling can help wildfire victims deal with the normal stress brought on by an abnormal situation. Common reactions to a disaster may include nightmares, difficulty sleeping, feelings of being overwhelmed, hopelessness, increased anger or aggression, domestic violence, frustration, and feelings of powerlessness. These feelings can be exhibited by people of all ages. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to post-disaster stress. Crisis counseling is available for those who live or work in disaster-affected counties. Those who need help may call one of the hotline numbers below. Lines are open 24/7. Los Angeles (800) 854-7771 Orange (866) 830-6011 Riverside (800) 706-7500 San Bernardino (888) 743-1478 San Diego (800) 479-3339 Santa Barbara (888) 868-1649 Ventura (800) 671-0887

**PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

**Mobile home owners affected by flood face expensive changes** (AP, 11/22)

Some residents of a north Norman mobile home park that saw extensive flooding in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Erin will have to make expensive changes in order to stay in their homes, city officials said. Ten mobile homes at Ranch Estates had damage that amounted to more than 50 percent of their value when waist-deep water overwhelmed the area where Interstate 35 meets Indian Hills Road. FEMA deemed them "substantially damaged." The owners heard details of their options at a public meeting Tuesday evening. "We want to help you through this," said Shawn O'Leary, Norman public works director and floodplain manager. "We understand this is complicated. We understand this

is not very good news." To stay, owners of the 10 substantially damaged mobile homes will have to elevate their homes to two feet above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) in the floodplain, which runs throughout most of the mobile home park. The elevation must be on an engineered structure like concrete piers, and the homes also must be anchored. Those with full flood insurance could receive up to \$30,000 to help them elevate, relocate or demolish the homes. The owners received certified letters earlier this month detailing the damage based on county assessment records. "These are minimum requirements," O'Leary said of Norman's new floodplain ordinance requirements. "These are not negotiable." Many of the 41 homes in Ranch Estate already are elevated to the 36-inch industry standard. Another two feet above BFE could put the mobile homes up by more than five feet.

**Reports warn of mudslides in burn areas** (LA Times, 11/22)

Newly released federal and state wildfire reports offer a grim assessment on threats to life, homes and drinking water supplies if hard rains hit steep slopes charred in last month's wildfires. Those most at risk appear to be residents of rural eastern Orange County, portions of Bouquet Canyon and Val Verde in Los Angeles County, and vacation homes in the Angeles and San Bernardino national forests, according to the reports and government officials. More than \$6 million in federal emergency funds have been approved in the last week to stabilize denuded forest lands, many of which sit above threatened communities. In many cases though, residents will have to rely on their own judgment to determine if they should evacuate, as applications of sandbags or straw bales may do little to help. The warnings come amid predictions of a dry, La Nina winter throughout most of drought-stricken Southern California. However, officials said that even a single day of pounding rains could trigger a disaster because there are no plants to hold soil, rocks and debris in place. "La Nina? You can't speak in those terms," said Randy Westmoreland, a U.S. Forest Service soils scientist who led a multi-agency team that evaluated risks in the wake of the Santiago fire. "You could get all your storm in one event, and it could be 80% above normal . . . in five minutes," Westmoreland said. "If you get one big storm with the right intensity, it could trigger flooding and mudslides." Modjeska Canyon in Orange County, which sees runoff from the Cleveland National Forest, could be hardest hit. Soil and storm experts said that because of last month's wildfires, mudslides in the canyon could measure "19 times greater" than mudslides occurring before the fires. Also, flash floods and other runoff threaten hundreds of homes that exist between two canyon creeks, experts said. The flooding could be four to eight times greater than in pre-fire conditions, experts said.

**Nonprofit Group Puts Web to Work For Emergencies** (Washington Post, 11/22)

In a quiet brick building 17 miles west of the White House, Arthur Bushkin has prepared for disaster. Now the former telecom executive and Carter administration official is asking: Will you join him? Bushkin has tapped technology, much of it developed by his nonprofit Stargazer Foundation over the past eight years in Fairfax County, to help families and organizations plan for catastrophe, and communicate when one hits. His Web site, <http://stargazer.org>, aspires to be part personal command center, part meeting place. It uses Web- and cellphone-based tools to connect users of handheld devices with colleagues and relatives. It also seeks to give people an efficient way to tell loved ones or

co-workers how they are, or what they need, even when cellphone networks fail under an onslaught of calls or people are away from their desktop computers. "Everybody's plan is: When something happens, I'm going to call everybody," Bushkin said. "The whole point of Katrina, 9/11, of snowstorms, of fires, is that things don't work the way you planned them. . . . The technology exists to make people safer today. How many more people have to die or be dislocated for this to spread?" One service lets people with Web-enabled cellphones that are equipped with a keyboard, such as a Treo or iPhone, create or respond to surveys. The results can be sent to a Stargazer Web page or to the cellphones of the people in a network you set up. "One form would be an 'I have' form, one would be an 'I need' form," Bushkin said, as in: have blankets, need food. In another service, provided through a partnership with the British company 2sms.com, users in the United States can text a message to 80911 describing their status, such as whether they are safe. Anyone with a computer can then type in the cellphone number to see the message. That is useful because cellular data networks sometimes stay up even after cellphone voice networks fail.

**W.Va. town orders residents to conserve water** (Associated Press, 11/20)

The water woes continue for the Marshall County town of Cameron. Two weeks after voting to issue a voluntary water conservation order, Cameron City Council voted Monday to make the order mandatory. That means residents must refrain from using water for unnecessary tasks, such as washing cars, watering lawns and running partial loads of laundry and dishes. Mayor Betty Scott said residents and businesses have already done a lot to conserve water. The town's nursing home, for example, has started using plastic foam cups and bottled water for drinking. The City Council and the Marshall County Commission have each declared a state of emergency, according to Marshall County Office of Emergency Management Director Tom Hart. That designation could help the city obtain state assistance, but Paul Howard, director of operations for the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, said Tuesday that the type of assistance hasn't yet been determined. The city has suffered a number of water line breaks recently, including one on Monday that forced the town's elementary school and high school to close Tuesday.

**Project aimed at making communities 'resilient' in disasters** (AP, 11/20)

A researcher working to help communities recover faster from destructive hurricanes and other catastrophic events told a homeland security conference that owners of destroyed homes typically are not back to normal for eight years. M. John Plodinec, Savannah River National Laboratory's science adviser, said a "resilient home initiative" he is heading aims to reduce the time that homeowners are displaced by half, to four years, and help communities survive. Speaking at a meeting of the Tennessee Valley Corridor, an economic initiative started 12 years ago, Plodinec said homeowners in some Mississippi Gulf Coast communities wiped out by Hurricane Katrina appear to be "slightly ahead" of that timetable. He said the pace in New Orleans is slower. Plodinec was among speakers at a conference on homeland security "regional resiliency." He said he is working to develop an overall recovery process for displaced homeowners. Robin K. White, a Meridian Institute senior fellow with a background in national security, said three cities Charleston, S.C.; Memphis, Tenn.; and Gulfport, Miss. are developing resilience

assessments as part of an initiative that will eventually be expanded to other communities.

**First responders begin carrying oxygen masks for animals** (Associated Press, 11/19)

Some first responders in Tennessee are now equipped with oxygen masks for animals. Thanks to a donation from Country K-9 Rescue and animal lover Marion Moeller, Wilson County paramedics will have equipment more suitable for furry and feathered family members. In an emergency situation, oxygen-deprived pets were once revived using masks designed for humans. Each Wilson County Emergency Management Agency station and the Watertown Volunteer Fire Department received a set of specially designed oxygen masks for animals Thursday. "They're very affordable, \$55 a set with small, medium and large masks," Annelise Henning with Country K-9 Rescue said. The masks allow emergency personnel to treat animals of all different sizes, Moeller said, including some fit for cattle and horses. The donation comes after the recent start of WEMA's 36-member Disaster Animal Response Team. "We have the county covered," WEMA spokeswoman Melissa Riley said.

**Wildfires Might Take Toll on Businesses** (Disaster News Network, 11/19)

For many people, going to Farmer Brown's Christmas Tree Farm has always been a highly anticipated adventure. Not only did it involve a drive through the rugged back country in San Diego County, but the trip often was capped with a picnic – or a weekend spent camping – in Potrero County Park next to the tree farm. This holiday season, Mike and Kathy Brown are wondering if many people will show up at the tree farm they have owned for the last 15 years. Other businesses throughout fire-ravaged Southern California are wondering the same thing. For the thousands of people directly affected by the wildfires, however, holiday gift buying and other nonessential purchases may have to be put on hold. "People are probably not going to be as worried about all the little things as compared to the essential things," said Jim Phalan of the College Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego. Even so, numerous businesses, as well as entire communities, are trying to get the word out that they are open for business after the recent wildfires that swept through the region. The fires destroyed more than 2,000 homes, burned more than 800 square miles from Santa Barbara County to the Mexican border and left 10 people dead. "Julian is still here and open for business," touts the town east of San Diego best known for its Apple Festival Days, apple picking and apple pies. "All roads leading to Julian are open."

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**Houston using federal grant to step up security in evacuee areas** (AP, 11/23)

The city is using \$20 million in federal funding to enhance security at more than 50 apartment developments with heavy concentrations of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. The Houston Police Department is assigning liaison officers to work with tenants and managers to fight crime in the areas, officials said. The money will also pay for overtime and increased patrols. The money is part of a \$60 million allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds intended to help Houston and Harris County pay for

Hurricane Katrina recovery. As many as 200,000 evacuees went to Houston in fall 2005. The city and county plan to spend an additional \$20 million on improving deteriorating units in developments where evacuees have been housed. The remaining \$20 million will reimburse the county hospital district for evacuee medical expenses and expand facilities that treat offenders' mental health and substance abuse problems. The Texas Low-Income Housing Information Service, an advocacy group for the poor, said the money should be redirected to address long-term housing assistance for evacuees. John Henneberger, the organization's co-director, said the funds shouldn't be used for public safety when some evacuees are about to be forced out of their apartments. As of Dec. 1, some evacuees will no longer be eligible for housing assistance at their current homes because their landlords have decided not to participate in a new federal program. Nearly 50 landlords are opting out of the assistance program when the Department of Housing and Urban Development takes over the program from the FEMA on Dec. 1. Another 1,622 landlords will continue to participate. The FEMA program provided free rent for evacuees, but HUD will require payments starting at \$50 a month and increasing by that amount each month, up to full market rent, until the program ends in March 2009.

**FEMA to fund N.O. demolitions** (The Advocate, 11/20)

FEMA said Monday it will pay to tear down the remaining 1,800 hurricane-damaged homes in Orleans Parish. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stopped handling the demolitions at the end of August, which coincided with the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA had paid the corps to perform the demolitions prior to Aug. 29. FEMA will pay a contractor to work with the city of New Orleans' legal housing unit to supervise and document the demolition and debris disposal of the remaining eligible structures. FEMA expects a contract to be awarded sometime this month and all of the demolitions completed by the end of February. "This recent funding shows FEMA's commitment to New Orleans and the region since these damaged homes remain a threat to public safety and have to be removed for this city to recover fully," Jim Stark, director of the Louisiana Transitional Recovery Office, said. James Ross, a spokesman for Mayor Ray Nagin, said the city must cover the costs upfront and then process paperwork through FEMA for reimbursement.

**Crackdown on corruption seen as key to N.O. recovery** (Associated Press, 11/19)

When political corruption in New Orleans comes up in Tim Williamson's pitch to entrepreneurs and it frequently does he tries to turn scandalous headlines into selling points. "The conversations I'm having is that corruption may have existed in the past but there are really aggressive actions being taken to address that and create a level playing field," said Williamson, who heads The Idea Village, a nonprofit business incubator. Williamson is part of a network of post-Hurricane Katrina business leaders, government watchdogs and law enforcement officials who say a wave of recent corruption prosecutions proves New Orleans is cleaning up its act and image. With the city struggling to recover from Katrina and attract new investment, it couldn't come at a more crucial time. "You can build an economy if you can show this is not a haven for corruption," said U.S. Attorney Jim Letten. "We have to let people, and the world, know we're not a haven for it." More than 26 months after Katrina, New Orleans is still coping with the storm's destruction as well as pre-existing thorns including violent crime, poor

public schools and lack of economic diversity. Letten believes public corruption is a root cause for all those problems. He dismisses suggestions New Orleans is more corrupt than other big cities but says years of corruption have "gutted" the city. Curbing graft, he says, is a key to its survival. That's why, when someone Letten identified only as "loosely involved in a governmental entity" suggested he shift his attention from corruption to fighting crime, Letten said he fired off a sharply worded rebuttal.

**Agonizingly slow FEMA pace stunts recovery in LA** (NO Citybusiness, 11/19)

The daily experiences of college students in New Orleans vary greatly depending on the level of recovery at each school. Repairs are complete at Loyola University, which sustained \$5 million in damages. Tulane University is back up to speed after \$600 million in repairs to its Uptown campus and downtown medical school. It's a different story at Southern University New Orleans, where a diminished student body still strains the capacity of a temporary campus built by FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Enrollment hasn't returned to the pre-storm total of 3,647, but the 2,645 students at the temporary campus are more than anyone expected to return, said Harold Clark, SUNO executive assistant to the chancellor. SUNO's original campus across from the Joseph Bartholomew Municipal Golf Course near the Lakefront received between 4 feet and 20 feet of water after Katrina, swamping many of the buildings for nearly three weeks, Clark said. The school gymnasium at the north end of the campus received 4 feet. Water lines on the education building show as much as 20 feet of water at the other end of the sloping campus, although water sat at 11 feet for a long time, Clark said. SUNO enrollment jumped 14 percent in the past year from about 2,300 in fall 2006 to 2,645 this fall, making it one of the fastest-growing academic institutions in the country, Chancellor Victor Ukpolo said. "We are doing well under the circumstances," Ukpolo said. "Our people are resilient and they persevere. Of course we continue to experience some challenges and some frustration but that's understandable. " Most of Ukpolo's frustration stems from the snail's pace of recovery, which is keeping students in temporary classrooms. More than two years after Katrina, none of SUNO's original buildings are fit for use, Clark said.