

Disaster News Update –November 26 to December 2, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama
- **Explosion:** Georgia (Chemical Plant)
- **Fire:** California, Arizona, New Mexico, Virginia, Texas
- **HazMat:** Kansas (Tanker Truck Spill)
- **Heavy rain / Flooding:** Arizona, Colorado, California, Alaska, Washington
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Wisconsin, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Maine, Idaho, New York, Colorado
- **Strong winds:** Oregon, Alaska
- **Transportation:** Ohio (Coal Train Derailment), Illinois (Train Collision)

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Indiana](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (11/30)
- Fire Declarations: [New Mexico \(11/21\)](#), [Hawaii \(10/28\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Rescue Riders recruit motorcyclists for emergency work (Associated Press, 11/30)

Most people don't think of motorcycles as emergency response vehicles, probably because they never had been used in that capacity until some folks in Kane County came up with a winning idea. "It hadn't been done before to my knowledge," said Dean Akey of Rescue Riders, a group of volunteer bikers who are trained in basic emergency response. "We looked all over." The group has been able to accumulate about 125 members since its inception three years ago and hopes to recruit more, said Akey, of St. Charles. Rescue Riders came about after county officials approached Akey, he explained. He already had started a group called "Bikers for Bikers," which does fundraisers for fallen riders. Originally, Rescue Riders was more of a "taxi service" for emergency workers and supplies. But then everyone started to realize that it makes more sense to train the bikers themselves in basic response measures so they can keep things under control until the professionals come onto the scene, Akey said. Now all his troops who also are Kane County Medical Reserve Corps volunteers are trained in CPR, first aid, triage and accident-scene management. What they lack in expertise, they somewhat make up for in speediness. "It just takes longer for a traditional emergency vehicle," he said. "You can ride (a motorcycle) between lanes of traffic and on sidewalks."

Emergency Volunteer Groups in the Washington DC Area (Washington Post, 11/29)

The following Montgomery County, MD-based emergency groups are currently looking for volunteers:

- Mid-Atlantic DOGS, Canine Search Unit: Members train with air-scenting and tracking dogs that can find missing people in the wild, in collapsed buildings or in criminal investigations.

- Trail Riders of Today Search and Rescue: The mounted search unit, whose members provide their own horses, helps locate missing people in wilderness areas or large parks.
- Civil Air Patrol: The Bethesda-Chevy Chase squadron conducts air and ground search-and-rescue operations, flight training and aerospace education for adults and teenagers. Montgomery Senior Squadron members are primarily instructors and search pilots.
- American Red Cross, Montgomery County Chapter: Red Cross members provide county residents with humanitarian services and provide them with help to prevent, prepare for and respond to an emergency.
- Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service: Federal Communications Commission-licensed amateur radio operators supplement communications during emergencies.
- Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams: Volunteers support radio communications for the community and other volunteer organizations.
- Community Emergency Response Teams: Residents are trained to prepare for and respond to emergencies when authorities need their help. They also serve as first responders until professional help arrives.
- Skywarn: Volunteers report wind gusts, hail size, rainfall and other weather-related information that could presage a tornado. They also disseminate information.
- Medical Reserve Corps: Volunteers are medical and public health professionals who prepare for and respond to emergencies, as well as promote healthy lifestyles.
- Emergency Action Teams: Members help in emergencies by staffing hotlines, helping with transportation and distributing information.

To volunteer or get more information, call Michael Goldfarb at the Montgomery County Volunteer Center at 240-777-2621 or e-mail Michael.Goldfarb@montgomerycountymd.gov

[Charities worry giving is over](#) (Fresno Bee, 11/26)

After a flood of donations poured into Southern California to aid wildfire victims, some of the Valley's nonprofit agencies are seeing local donations coming in at a trickle. But others find that recent natural disasters have brought awareness to the local need. Local chapters of the American Red Cross and Salvation Army are scrambling for donations to help families displaced by local fires, but have found that donors who gave to the Southern California Wildfire Relief Fund are not giving to local needs. The Fresno Madera Counties chapter of the American Red Cross raised more than \$60,000 locally for the Southern California fire victims last month, said Ellen Schneider, the organization's chief executive officer. "All of that money does not stay here locally, and chances are those people who donated are not going to donate for the rest of the year," she said. Many people donate during the fourth quarter of the year to meet the deadline for tax benefits, Schneider said. And because the Southern California fires came during that final quarter, chances are slim that people will donate again before the end of the year, she said. "We are gracious and thankful to them for their donations because it was a very big need," she said. "But we still need help locally -- none of that money stayed here." The chapter has

stopped actively collecting for Southern California and is focusing on the local Save a Family Relief Fund. But donations don't seem to be coming in fast enough to help families displaced after home fires, Schneider said. The organization usually raises \$160,000 a year for that cause, but this year it is falling behind by about \$60,000, she said. Since July 1, 115 fires left many families in need, Schneider said. "That's a 30% increase compared to this time last year," she said. "But donations are nowhere near a 30% increase."

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

For Rescue Teams, A Volunteer Hunt (Washington Post, 11/29)

Last year, when flooding threatened the Lake Needwood area in Rockville, retired U.S. Capitol Police Sgt. Tom Finkle helped spread the word to residents that they should evacuate. As commander of a volunteer search-and-rescue team, Finkle went door to door alerting residents. Three years earlier, the team had searched Sugarloaf Mountain for a mother and three children who had gotten lost. The team is part of Montgomery County's contingent of emergency volunteers, which includes dog search groups, a volunteer medical corps and a CERT Team of residents who help professionals. Officials say they need a large group of trained emergency volunteers, but recruiting has become a challenge six years after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, said Capt. Ty DeMent, community outreach coordinator for the county's Homeland Security Department. "We haven't had a terrorist attack in six years now, so people aren't really threatened at this point, so it's hard to get people to think about disasters," DeMent said. Also, requirements for people who want to volunteer have been tightened, a response to the country's heightened security after the terrorist attacks. Still, when recruiting DeMent says he doesn't "sugarcoat" the job of a volunteer, which can require long hours of demanding work. The county looks for people who can channel their passions into their volunteer jobs, such as the people who love horses and join the mounted search team, and the ham radio enthusiasts of the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service and the Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams, two groups that can convey emergency messages over the airwaves. Participation in such groups requires volunteers to own radios or horses. Finkle's group, TROT Search and Rescue, has picked up 14 members since 2002, when it had only four. Although training and qualifications vary for each volunteer group, those who want to join the search-and-rescue team, which also serves neighboring areas, must go through criminal background checks and are issued photo IDs that show their level of training. It takes about one year to become an operational member, and the commitment is enough to scare off many potential recruits, said Finkle, 52, who lives in Charles County.

Greensburg Hopes to Chase Holiday Blues (Disaster News Network, 11/29)

The holidays are coming on the heels of the six-month anniversary of the Greensburg tornado, and for some of the town's residents, it's almost more than they can bear. That's why organizers with the South Central Kansas Tornado Recovery Organization (SCKTRO) decided to hold a Christmas get-together this weekend for the community. "We're concerned about them," said chairman Kathleen Blair. "They're getting very

discouraged and frustrated. Some are very angry that things are not progressing as quickly as they'd like. "This is really a hard time for everyone," she added. "We're hoping to give them a little happiness and take their minds off things, at least for a little while." On May 4, an EF-5 tornado swept through the farm town, killing 10 people and destroying about 90 percent of all residential and commercial buildings. Two other people outside Greensburg were also killed by the storm. Blair, who also serves as vice president of Greensburg's Ministerial Alliance, said the future appears bleak for many. A high percentage of residents had dropped homeowner's insurance because their homes were paid for. Many more were severely under-insured. A few others, who had mortgages on their homes but weren't required by their lenders to obtain insurance, didn't have any coverage.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Mudslide Fears Prompt Evacuation (Disaster News Network, 11/30)

Mandatory evacuations were ordered Friday for two canyon areas in Orange County after heavy rains raised concerns about mudslides in areas burned by last month's Santiago wildfire. A flash flood warning was issued by the National Weather Service until 4 a.m. PST Saturday for areas in Southern California burned by the fires. Orange County officials ordered the immediate evacuations of Modjeska and Williams canyons and advised residents in the Silverado order to voluntarily evacuate. An emergency shelter was set up by the American Red Cross at El Modena High School in the city of Orange. "We are closely monitoring the situation for all other canyon areas," the Orange County Fire Authority said. The evacuation orders were lifted Friday night. In San Diego County, rock slides and mudslides were reported in several areas. There were no reports of injuries or damages. More than 2 inches of rain was recorded in some portions of the county. In San Bernardino County, officials closed Highway 18 after rock and mud blocked the roadway.

President Declares Major Disaster for Indiana (FEMA, 11/30)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Indiana to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms and flooding during the period of August 15-27, 2007. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Lake County. The assistance, to be coordinated by FEMA, can include grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. Low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration also will be available to cover residential and business losses not fully compensated by insurance. Federal funding is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Donald Keldsen as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Keldsen said that damage surveys are continuing in other areas, and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are complete.

A Disaster Pet Plan That Worked (FEMA, 11/29)

Whether it's puppies, parakeets or pythons, Californians love their pets and leaving them behind when disaster strikes is not an option. San Diego had a disaster pet plan for the California wildfires, and it worked. To qualify for grants from FEMA, under the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act signed by President Bush in October 2006, state and local emergency preparedness officials must include an emergency plan for pets and service animals. San Diego County had a comprehensive disaster plan in place and was prepared. They saw to it that pets and people stayed together during the wildfire crisis. The County of San Diego Department of Animal Services was at the helm and worked in unison with the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA, and the American Red Cross (ARC). Adjacent to the Mira Mesa High School and Qualcomm Stadium ARC shelters, common areas and green space served as kennel space. San Diego Humane Society volunteers were on hand to help at Mira Mesa High School, and volunteers from Noah's Wish were at Qualcomm Stadium to help those coming to the shelters with their small pets. They busily tagged the pets and documented information on the owners. They also supplied larger pet crates, food and water. "Many pet owners camped out and took personal care of their animals, and owners were able to go into the ARC shelters for rest and nourishment themselves," said Lt. Daniel DeSousa of the San Diego County Department of Animal Services. "It was a 'win-win' situation for both the pets and their owners." The Humane Society also supplied the "MUTT mobile," (Mobile Universal Transport and Treatment), an RV stocked with medical supplies and an onboard veterinarian. "This was a great source of comfort to those who came to the shelters with older pets," said Simran Noon, spokesperson for the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA. San Diego proved that keeping pets and people together in the face of disaster can be done, and because of this caring and coordinated effort, many fire victims were spared the added trauma of being separated from their pets.

Kimball (TN) still cleaning up after twister (Chattanooga Times Free Press, 11/28)

Workers in Town Hall still are dodging buckets scattered on the floor to catch water dripping from the tornado-damaged roof. But officials say this Marion County town is recovering quickly from a Nov. 14 twister. "Life is returning to normal as much as it can down there," Marion County Emergency Management Agency Director Steve Lamb said. Kimball Town Recorder Tonia May said all but one family displaced by the storm have moved from motels into permanent housing. She said one family remains in Bridgeport, Ala. Debris still was being cleaned up this week by municipal maintenance crews, but Ms. May said there was noticeable improvement at many homes in the town of 1,300. She said Kimball is seeking bids to rebuild a maintenance building demolished after the storm and is negotiating with Grandview Medical Center to return an ambulance station to Kimball. The former police and fire hall on Main Street that housed ambulances was damaged so badly in the storm it had to be razed. Ms. May said Kimball serves as the ambulance service's midpoint between Jasper and South Pittsburg. Damage from the tornado first was estimated at \$2.5 million, but Ms. May said a reassessment likely will be conducted this week. Officials said 42 buildings initially were reported damaged by the tornado, which packed 130 mph winds.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

USGS Launches Post-Wildfires Hazard Site (Government Technology, 11/30)

The U.S. Geological Survey launched a Web site where the public can access science information to help them in the aftermath of the Southern California wildfires. The public can find out how to prepare for and protect themselves from flash floods and debris flows, commonly known as mudflows; see satellite imagery of the burned areas; learn about real-time stream-flow/flood information; listen to interviews with scientists; and view a video and photo gallery. The USGS Multi-Hazards Demonstration Project team is coordinating a post-Southern California wildfire response around four public safety goals - assess and identify debris-flow danger, size and potential flows; estimate flood risk; assess biodiversity and ecological impacts; and assess surface water quality impact on human health. The website can be found at:

<http://www.usgs.gov/hazards/wildfires/ca/>

Area counties work to get StormReady (Chattanooga Times Free Press, 11/30)

Kimball, TN, wasn't technically storm ready when a tornado tore through town Nov. 14. It is one of several cities in Southeast Tennessee and North Georgia that haven't earned the National Weather Service's StormReady certification, which is based on an area's ability to detect severe weather and warn the public. Marion County Emergency Management Agency Director Steve Lamb said the county is working toward the severe-weather readiness certification by adding more weather warning systems in public buildings. But he said the fact that few serious injuries were reported as a result of the twister shows severe-weather warnings are working in Marion County. "A lot of people did pay attention to it," said Mr. Lamb, noting that members attending services at Kimball Baptist Church got advance warning from a cell phone call. "I don't know what else you can do other than to not be in the location where the tornado is," he said. Howard Waldron, a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Morristown, Tenn., said Marion County is well prepared for severe weather even though it hasn't been designated StormReady. There are 28 StormReady counties in Tennessee. Bradley County was the first in East Tennessee, followed closely by Hamilton County, Mr. Waldron said. No counties in Northwest Georgia -- including Dade, Walker, Catoosa, Whitfield or Murray -- are among the 61 certified StormReady sites in the state. National Weather Service officials said the program saved lives in a Van Wert County, Ohio, movie theater in 2002. The cinema's weather warning system installed through the StormReady program gave management enough time to evacuate moviegoers before a tornado ripped off the roof and tossed cars into the screen, officials said. More than 1,200 U.S. sites -- including counties, universities and military installations -- are certified StormReady, according to the National Weather Service.

Officials Urge Californians To Prepare For Winter Storms (FEMA, 11/30)

As wet weather arrives, state and federal officials urge Californians affected by the 2007 fires to take precaution against flooding and landslides that may occur as a result of fire-scorched landscapes. "The rain is just beginning; now is the time to prepare for the possibility of wintertime flooding and erosion," said Henry Renteria, director of the

Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and state coordinating officer for the fire recovery effort. "Local, state and federal officials have been doing everything possible to stabilize the burn areas, but the risk from post-fire hazards can never be completely eliminated." "I urge Californians living in and below the burn areas to take steps to reduce their risk of death, injury and property loss from flooding, mudflow and debris flow," said FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer Mike Hall. Severe storm events can cause flash floods, contaminate the drinking water supply, disrupt electrical service, damage homes and contents, and threaten lives. Natural disasters such as fires elevate these risks by creating sudden damage to the watershed which increases potential for soil erosion and runoff. If the storm is intense or lasts a long time, the risk of flooding, debris torrents and debris flow increases. The coalition of local, state and federal agencies has begun using a report from the Burned Area Emergency Response teams to implement emergency stabilization activities. The efforts focus on short-term actions to reduce the potential for flooding and mudslides within burned areas. However, state and federal officials encourage residents to take additional steps to reduce the risk of death, injury and property losses from flooding, mudflows and landslides. Officials urge the public to prepare by taking the following actions before the rain begins:

- Teach children not to play in or near streams, ponds or other flood-prone areas.
- Assemble emergency supply kits for your home and place of work including the following items:
 - Flashlights with extra batteries
 - Sandbags
 - Plastic sheeting
 - Plywood, lumber
- Store emergency building materials away from potential flooding areas.
- Store a seven day supply of water (at least one gallon per person per day) in clean, closed containers.
- Maintain fuel in your cars; electrical outages might make gas pumps inoperable.
- Identify safe routes to high ground from your home and work, but be prepared to follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Check with your local public works, building or planning departments to determine whether you live in an area subject to flooding, or visit www.floodsmart.gov.
- Clear debris and overgrowth from onsite drainage facilities.
- Work with neighbors to solve potential drainage problems and to avoid diverting debris onto their properties. Consult a licensed civil engineer if you are in doubt.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

[Local leaders tout progress rebuilding New Orleans](#) (GovExec.Com, 11/30)

A panel of New Orleans business leaders speaking at the National Press Club in Washington Thursday said there has been significant progress in rebuilding local infrastructure and rectifying some of the social ills that plagued the city before hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast in the late summer and fall of 2005.

"Recovery has been painful and sometimes halting," said Bob Brown, managing director

of the New Orleans Business Council and the former vice chancellor at the University of New Orleans. "But the strides being made now are tangible." Katrina devastated New Orleans, flooding an area seven times the size of Manhattan and displacing virtually all the city's 454,000 residents. More than 105,000 homes were classified with major or severe damage, and the health care and criminal justice systems were rendered inoperable.

FEMA Sets Date to Close Trailer Camps (New York Times, 11/29)

Almost 3,000 families here and across Louisiana will have to leave their government-supplied trailers over the next few months under a new schedule prepared by FEMA. FEMA officials said Wednesday that the agency planned to close all the trailer camps it runs for victims of the 2005 hurricanes by the end of May, including its biggest camp for evacuees, outside of Baton Rouge. Here in New Orleans, 926 families are living in smaller FEMA camps, some of which are supposed to close within days. The agency says its action is intended to hasten the move of residents from trailers to permanent housing, and officials said FEMA is committed to helping them find new housing before the parks close. Counselors will work with residents to track down available apartments. "We're with them every step of the way," said Diane L. W. Perry, a spokeswoman for the agency here, who added that no one will be forced out of a trailer without a home in which to live. The Department of Housing and Urban Development will assume responsibility for paying to house poor families, as it is also doing for evacuees who are already in rental units around the country. Volunteer groups have been assisting with down payments and furniture in some cases, she said. But advocates who work with trailer park residents are skeptical of the plan, noting anyone still living in a cramped, flimsy and possibly formaldehyde-tainted trailer probably has nowhere else to go. Most of those still living in the FEMA parks — which occupy playgrounds, churchyards, parking lots and fields around southern Louisiana — had previously been renters, and little low-cost rental housing has been repaired or built since the storm. Many people in the trailer sites are elderly or disabled, and large numbers are living alone.

FEMA to Close its Trailer Parks (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 11/30)

Dozens of Hurricane Katrina victims still living in FEMA trailer parks will have to find new housing by tomorrow, as the agency works to shutter the temporary facilities it set up after the 2005 storm. The move is intended to help the hurricane victims move into more stable, permanent housing, FEMA said. But advocates worry that a housing shortage in the still-recovering area could leave some struggling to find a place to live. It wasn't clear how many residents remained in the parks -- as many as 13 -- slated for closure tomorrow, though Ronnie Simpson, a FEMA spokesman, estimated there were dozens. Residents were given at least 60 days' notice, and FEMA is offering rental assistance to those living in the trailers, he said. FEMA plans to close all its trailer sites set up specifically for residents affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita within the next six months.

N.O. airs plans for Road Home lots (New Orleans Times Picayune, 11/28)

New Orleans' redevelopment agency has a plan to turn thousands of Road Home buyout properties into new homes and green space, a process that could take 10 years and cost

more than \$15 million a year. But that cost depends on major state and federal subsidies the agency hasn't yet secured. The New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, or NORA, has completed the plan as required by the Louisiana Recovery Authority. If the LRA approves it, the state will start sending NORA what should be about 7,000 storm-damaged lots it bought or will soon buy through the Road Home program. The total number of Road Home buyouts won't be known until about 60,000 applicants move through the pipeline and decide whether to rebuild or sell their damaged homes to the state. Before the LRA rules on NORA's plan, the local agency will hold a hearing tonight at 6:30 p.m. at the City Council chambers to get public input. "It's critical that we hear what the people have to say about this process," said Joe Williams, NORA's executive director. "There is a presumption in New Orleans that the demand for property is unlimited. The unfortunate reality is that soaring construction costs and homeowners' insurance premiums have driven the price of housing so high that it has limited demand and hindered affordability." NORA faces an unprecedented challenge. The process must proceed slowly, the NORA plan says, because the agency must not only manage the incoming Road Home properties, but must strategically avoid crippling the real estate market. And NORA must manage the bought-out properties in concert with the 10,000 blighted or adjudicated lots it already has on the books. Further complicating matters, the agency soon may take on up to 15,000 other properties in substandard condition.

FEMA Funds First Hazard Mitigation Project In Orleans Parish (FEMA, 11/26)

FEMA recently approved funding to reconstruct six severe repetitive loss properties in Orleans Parish. The approved project is significant because it is the first project in Orleans Parish being funded through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grants Program (HMGP). The funding provides mitigation alternatives to reduce or eliminate long-term risks for properties affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Under FEMA's Pilot Reconstruction Program, eligible applicants may receive HMGP funds to demolish an existing structure and construct an improved, elevated structure on the same site. This may include pre-existing structures that were substantially damaged or destroyed because of the declared event. The grant is only available to property owners who owned the property at the time of the event for which funding is authorized. Mitigation reconstruction projects are not eligible if located in floodways as identified on the effective Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS). Alternative mitigation actions were considered, but elevation was determined to be the most cost effective and beneficial action. "We have committed to rebuilding stronger than before, and the approval of these projects speaks directly to that goal," said Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) Board Member Tim Coulon. "Spending the time and money to elevate and reconstruct these homes not only makes our citizens safer, but also saves taxpayers money in the long-term by preventing future loss." Funding from the \$885,036 Pilot Reconstruction Grant is earmarked to rebuild the residential properties in compliance with the latest building codes and to elevate one foot above Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE). The project is designed to reduce future flood damages, health and safety risks, clean-up costs and displacement time for the homeowners. These measures will also bring cost savings to the National Flood Insurance Program.