

## **Disaster News Update – October 15 to 21, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, North Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas
- **Fire:** Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Kentucky, California
- **HazMat:** Washington (Fuel Tank Fire), South Carolina (Chlorine Gas Leak)
- **Heavy rain / Flooding:** Iowa
- **Sandstorm:** California
- **Strong winds:** Oklahoma, Missouri, Washington,
- **Tornado:** Florida, Missouri, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky
- **Transportation:** Indiana (Bus Accident)

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

- [Texas](#): Tropical Storm Erin (10/2)
- [Illinois](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (9/25)
- [Missouri](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (9/21)
- Fire Declarations: [Washington \(9/21\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Residents of KS town lend their green thumbs** (Associated Press, 10/21)

A tornado leveled Jerrold Hoffman's town of Udall more than 50 years ago, killing 77 people and leaving little behind for the survivors. So after a twister swept through Greensburg this year, wreaking similar destruction, he decided he would at least try to help the town get its scenery back. Next Saturday, he and a group of volunteers plan to begin overseeing tree planting to help return a sense of normalcy to residents after the May 4 tornado, which killed 10 people, destroyed some 2,000 trees and nearly wiped the town of 1,400 off the map. About 40 homeowners have signed up to have a tree planted in their yards. The money raised for the project has come from donors nationwide, including many with ties to Greensburg or Udall, 120 miles apart, Hoffman said. One donor wrote that her mother lost her home in the Udall tornado of May 25, 1955, he said.

#### **Red Cross sets up shelter, disaster assessments** (KY Messenger Inquirer, 10/20)

Pearl Nester was able to get a couple of hours' rest between Thursday night and Friday morning. Nester, the emergency services director for the Big Rivers Chapter of the American Red Cross, had helped get a shelter set up at First Baptist Church's Family Life Center within two hours of the storms that rocked Owensboro on Thursday night. There were also sporadic phone calls to answer throughout the evening. Several volunteers had already started Thursday, and Nester estimated they had about 50 working Friday. "I think our volunteers did a yeoman's job," she said. The Red Cross will help storm victims try to replace some possessions, such as clothes, and in some cases, the organization can

help with issues such as a deposit or a month's rent, Nester said. "The biggest thing we need is money to support this effort," she said. People can donate money at U.S. Bank locations or call the Red Cross and donate using a Visa or MasterCard. Nester trained AmeriCorps workers in the spring to work in **disaster** assessment, and disaster assessment teams traveled to locations where they knew the storm had hit.

**Volunteers Sought for Beaver Disaster Response** (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 10/18)

A Beaver County citizens group will be recruiting and training volunteers to help individuals who have suffered from disasters such as severe storms and flash floods. The group, Aliquippa Recovery Initiative Serving Everyone, has scheduled these classes tomorrow and Saturday to provide volunteers skills to helping victims of disaster:

- Volunteer Coordination
- Estimating and Assessment
- Case Management

To enroll, call 724-375-9813, fax to 724-375-6145 or send an e-mail to [arise15001@gmail.com](mailto:arise15001@gmail.com) with your name, address and phone number, and the class you plan to attend.

**Report: Help of nonprofits running dry** (The Advocate, 10/15)

The nonprofit sector's response to the 2005 hurricanes has been unprecedented, but, with money for volunteer services running low and "Katrina fatigue" running high across the nation, it is time for the government to take the ball and drive the recovery, a report released Monday stressed. "The scale of the devastation is so vast in Louisiana and across the Mississippi Gulf Coast that only the government has the capacity to handle significant rebuilding," the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government said in a joint report. "The nonprofit sector was not meant to replace government as the primary agent of recovery. Rather, it was to buttress the governmental response, to fill in the gaps left by government," the PAR/Rockefeller report said. It has been more than two years since Katrina and Rita hit in August and September of 2005, respectively, and predictions are the recovery will continue for another five to seven years, PAR and the Rockefeller Institute said in their latest "GulfGov Reports." "For the recovery to proceed in a timely and substantial way, government must take the lead while the nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations play a strong supporting role with their focus on the human element of the disaster," the groups said. PAR President Jim Brandt, co-principal investigator for the GulfGov Reports project, said the scope of the nonprofit sector's work in helping the Gulf Coast region rebuild has included national foundations investing millions of dollars in the recovery, out-of-town groups making frequent rebuilding trips, and local groups lobbying for policy changes.

**'Mission to Mississippi' Hammers First Nails On Homes in MS** (PR-Inside, 10/15)

Work began today in Waveland, MS to build eight new homes for families wiped out by Hurricane Katrina in this small city where the historic storm made landfall. This unprecedented project, called *Mission to Mississippi*, is a 16-week building effort by more than 400 skilled craftsmen and volunteers from all over the U.S. The \$1.6 million project cost is being raised by monetary contributions and donations of materials and supplies.

Approximately \$750,000 has been raised so far. Tax-deductible contributions can be made online at [www.missiontomississippi.org](http://www.missiontomississippi.org) or mailed to Wayland to Waveland Hurricane Relief Fund, c/o Town of Wayland, 41 Cochituate Road, Wayland, MA 01778. Also starting today is the sale of apparel with the Mission to Mississippi logo that will aid in fundraising -fleece pullovers (\$45), T-shirts (\$15) and wristbands (\$5). Jackets will be going on sale later. The project is sponsored by a volunteer organization called *Wayland to Waveland* that has partnered with eight builders from the Boston area, led by Kenneth Vona Construction and includes Custom Designs, Inc, Mitchell Construction, Thoughtforms, Whitla Brothers, Twin Peaks Construction, CMG, and Gallagher Home Builders. In addition, dozens of New England-based subcontractors from more than 45 communities are donating their time, tools, materials, and skills to make this project possible. To support their effort, more than 150 volunteers from across the U.S. will travel to Waveland to help with logistics, light construction work, and landscaping. Volunteer should register on the Web site [www.missiontomississippi.org](http://www.missiontomississippi.org). The progress of the 16-week project can be viewed live on the Web site via video cameras that are on each work site.

**Small LA Church Switches Roles** (Disaster News Network, 10/16)

Members of the small First Christian Church of Slidell, more accustomed to playing host to hundreds of volunteers coming to the Gulf Coast to help rebuild after Hurricane Katrina, reversed roles recently when they took to the road to assist tornado-ravaged Greensburg, Kan. It wasn't an easy transition. "It was hard for us because Katrina's still so fresh in our minds and many of the people on the trip had personal damage to their homes," said the Rev. Susan Lassalle, pastor of First Christian. "As we approached Greensburg, we anticipated it would be difficult to see what we saw - the piles of debris, the heavy equipment moving things around - and it was," she said. "It just brought us right back to two years ago." In the last year, the Disciples of Christ church has hosted nearly 400 people from throughout the United States, serving as a "mission station" for Week of Compassion and the Office of Disciples Volunteers. The volunteers come through Northshore Disaster Recovery, an organization representing more than 85 civic, government and faith-based groups. First Christian has hosted volunteers from 18 states, 38 different churches and five different denominations.

**Youth Volunteers Needed Along Gulf Coast** (Volunteer News Blog, 10/16)

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is calling for youth volunteers to help with the Gulf Coast Hurricane Recovery in the summer of 2008. PDA is getting the word out now that they have designed a program specifically for youth volunteers (ages 16+) to help out next summer. Volunteers would stay at one of the many PDA Volunteer Villages along the Gulf Coast. For more information visit:

<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/response/usa/gulfcoast/youthweeks2008.htm>

## **COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

**Conn. lawmakers push to protect first responder tax breaks**

Members of Connecticut's congressional delegation are fighting to get federal support for

the local tax breaks many communities give volunteer firefighters and other first responders. The tax abatements were crafted by communities across the state to attract and keep more volunteer firefighters, emergency medical technicians, ambulance drivers and civil preparedness directors. In 2002, the IRS ruled the local tax breaks should be treated as income and are subject to federal income tax. Rep. John Larson, D-Conn., has been pushing to change that- and he's hopeful for a breakthrough. Prospects are "extraordinarily good" that his legislation to safeguard the tax breaks will win House passage, he said. The House Ways and Means Committee is putting together a package of tax incentives, called the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2007, to benefit volunteer first responders, veterans and active duty military. Larson said his measure has been included in the broader bill. The Connecticut General Assembly in 1999 permitted local governments to provide as much as \$1,000 in property tax abatements for volunteer first responders such as firefighters, emergency medical technicians and ambulance drivers.

**First Mega-Shelter Arrangement Created in OR** (US Newswire, 10/15)

The alliance between MERC and the ARC Oregon Trail Chapter follows a national trend among government agencies, public facility managers, and community organizations to develop alliances to increase cooperation and collaboration to more effectively respond to major natural and human-made disasters. There were no precedents prior to Hurricane Katrina for operating large evacuation centers or 'mega shelters' to manage the needs of thousands of people being sent to arenas, stadiums and convention centers during and after the storm. The term mega-shelter was created during the Katrina response to differentiate the capacity of large evacuation facilities -- that can shelter over 2,000 -- from traditional sites like schools and churches. In the months that followed hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, leaders from the International Association of Assembly Managers (IAAM) and the American Red Cross worked to developed new best practice guidelines for operating mega shelters and providing emergency assistance during large scale disasters.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

**Ark. governor declares disaster areas in 2 counties** (Arkansas News, 10/20)

Gov. Mike Beebe declared Crittenden and Lincoln counties disaster areas Friday because of damage caused by thunderstorms and a tornado earlier this week. Beebe released \$100,000 from his disaster fund to be distributed by the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management through the Individual Assistance Program. Affected residents in both counties can apply for assistance at their local Department of Human Services offices starting Monday. The governor's office said preliminary damage assessments are being conducted in both counties to determine the extent and amount of damage. The National Weather Service said a tornado that reached speeds of 86 to 110 miles per hour Wednesday covered five and a half miles just west of Star City. The Department of Emergency Management said five mobile homes were destroyed and one sustained minor damage. Four homes also sustained minor damage. Near Edmondson, 21 dwellings were damaged by strong winds from the storm system Thursday, said Crittenden County

Emergency Management Agency coordinator Ronny Rogers. George and Nancy Christian were injured when their mobile home was destroyed. They were in fair condition late Friday at The Med in Memphis, Tenn. Rogers said people living in the Edmondson area probably would remain on a boil-water order for the next week.

**Three IL counties approved for federal storm assistance** (Associated Press, 10/20)  
Governor Rod Blagojevich says the federal government will provide assistance to three more Illinois counties hit by severe storms and flooding in late August. Blagojevich sent a letter to President Bush requesting the assistance for local governments in Cook, Knox and Warren counties. The governor's office says approved counties are eligible to apply for 75 percent reimbursement of storm-related expenses. That would include emergency work, debris removal and infrastructure replacement. Preliminary damage assessments from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency show more than \$17 million in damages in the three counties.

**Wisconsin Residents Recovering from Floods** (Disaster News Network, 10/19)  
Regional long-term recovery committees are forming across southern Wisconsin in response to summer flooding. The four regional committees cover 14 counties where August flooding destroyed 26 homes and damaged more than 920 others. The committees expect to handle at least 400 cases for those who need help beyond what insurance or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is able to provide, said Rick Tyler of the Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. "We're getting local people (on the committees) so that they can administrate their long-term recovery," said Tyler, disaster response coordinator for the Heartland District of the conference. Tyler was working specifically with the Region 1 committee, which encompasses La Crosse, Vernon and Crawford counties in southwest Wisconsin. Region 2 consists of Grant, Richland, Sauk and Iowa counties. Region 3 is Columbia, Dane, Green, Rock and Jefferson counties. Region 4 is Kenosha and Racine counties.

**All But Two VA Counties Declared Disaster Areas** (Government Technology, 10/18)  
Governor Timothy M. Kaine announced that the Acting U.S. Secretary of Agriculture has designated 78 additional Virginia counties and 34 independent cities as primary natural disaster areas due to reductions in farm production caused by drought and high temperatures that occurred from January 1, 2007, and continuing. Previously, 15 counties had been declared primary natural disaster areas. With these additional designations, all Virginia counties are now covered with the exception of Arlington and York counties. Arlington and York were not approved as primary natural disaster areas because they were not found to have sustained qualifying crop losses due to the natural disaster, but which have received contiguous disaster status. The independent cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Poquoson have also received contiguous disaster status; all other independent cities in Virginia have already been designated or named by the Secretary of Agriculture for this same disaster. These disaster designations make farmers eligible for low-interest loans and any supplemental relief that may be provided by Congress.

**Counties Added To OK Presidential Disaster Declaration** (FEMA, 10/18)

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) and FEMA announced that two additional counties have been approved for public disaster assistance. The Presidential Disaster Declaration is the result of damages from the severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes that occurred August 18 thru September 12. The 22 counties, with damages from the severe weather which occurred August 18 thru September 12, now approved for Public Assistance are: Blaine, Caddo, Canadian, Cleveland, Comanche, Cotton, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Garvin, Grady, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Latimer, Logan, McClain, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Pottawatomie, Seminole, Stephens, and Washita counties.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

### **Fire district reaches out to at-risk groups** (N.O. Times Picayune, 10/21)

As part of its ongoing fire safety and prevention program, St. Tammany Fire District 12 in Covington recently identified several at-risk groups who remain vulnerable to the highest risk of injury and death due to fires. The list includes senior citizens, children who are home-schooled and the mentally challenged. Fire District Chairman Joe Mitternacht announced last week that the department has received a \$75,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help pay for its new at-risk prevention program. "It will allow us to research the needs of our community and to design training materials and programs that are specially tailored for those needs," he said. The new grant provides for several new part-time positions as well as a high-speed copier/booklet maker, video equipment and computer software. "Studies have shown that most folks learn fastest with a multimedia presentation, and for us to be effective, we need to be able to produce multimedia," Fire District Administrator Ray Newton said. St. Tammany Parish has a larger than average population of home-schooled students, Newton said.

### **Study: Stafford disaster act unfit** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 10/19)

Adding an independent voice to efforts by Louisiana lawmakers to rewrite the nation's major-disaster response law, a study by New York University says the Robert T. Stafford disaster act is dangerously out of date and must be reformed to provide rapid help following a catastrophe like Hurricane Katrina. The report by the university's Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response said the 1988 disaster law offers the same level of assistance for a blizzard in a rural community as it does for a major earthquake or hurricane in a major urban area. Among the recommendations in the NYU report:

- Eliminate the \$5 million cap on tax recovery assistance for state/local governments
- Allow FEMA to pay the salaries of public employees in areas struck by a catastrophe
- Expand federal help to private utility companies so they can quickly bring in emergency workers to repair important infrastructure, and provide logistical and emergency food and transportation resources to emergency utility employees
- After a catastrophe, the government should waive proof-of-insurance requirements so that immediate assistance can be provided to those in need
- The government should add small grants to the SBA disaster loans to help small companies get back on their feet after a major disaster

**Nearly Half of Americans Won't Flee Without Fido** (PR Newswire, 10/15)

Flood waters may be approaching. Wild fires could be closing in. Yet 47 percent of Americans surveyed would refuse rescue assistance if it meant leaving without their family pet. The statistic is perhaps the most eye-opening finding in a new study from the American Humane Association that sought to gauge the strength of the human-animal bond and public attitudes toward the rescue of animals during times of crisis. The study also found that nearly three out of four people surveyed (72 percent) agree that there should be formal evacuation plans for pets. Not surprisingly, the support for formal disaster plans for pets and companion animals was strongest in the South (74 percent) and West (76 percent), areas most closely associated with hurricanes and wildfires. After Hurricane Katrina, American Humane and other groups rescued nearly 10,000 animals, said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO of American Humane. We have been first-hand witnesses to the power of the animal-human bond since our founding in 1877, but there's nothing more powerful than seeing a man or woman refuse rescue efforts because there is not a rescue lined up for their family pet. This survey brings to light that rescue coordinators need to have plans in place for animal rescue. If they don't, more people could be left in harm's way. The study surveyed 1,000 adults to gauge their attitudes and level of preparedness surrounding disasters. Areas of research included determining the public interest in formal evacuation plans for pets, policy surrounding ownership of pets that become lost in a disaster, and the steps people have taken to prepare their pet for a disaster.

**FEMA readies Web-based response system** (Federal Computer Weekly, 10/15)

FEMA announced it has a solution for improving its coordination of nationwide disaster response efforts: a real-time information-sharing system based on commercial software. FEMA said it intends to make its new Emergency Management Information Management System (EMIMS) a single repository for disaster information. It will give emergency response leaders a wide-angle view of what is happening during a national crisis. "It's basically going to be used as a mechanism to share situational and operational knowledge during incidents," said Steven McDevitt, chief enterprise architect of FEMA's information technology service division. EMIMS is based on SSI's Knowledge Center software. McDevitt said technicians will install the system next month and follow up with customization. FEMA will deploy EMIMS at the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) first and then in other regions. The system will be able to process geographic information systems and Global Positioning System data in addition to weather reports and patterns. FEMA field officers can manually enter detailed information via EMIMS' Web-based interface. EMIMS will evaluate the information for validity and importance and distribute critical data to multiple FEMA offices, including the NRCC, the Regional Response Coordination Center and appropriate joint field offices.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**Gulf Recovery Chief Discusses Flood Maps, Spending** (N.O. Citybusiness, 10/19)

Federal Gulf Coast recovery chief Donald Powell talked about the importance of the

federal levee system and improvements in his office's Web site information system during a downtown business forum today. Powell spoke at the Tulane Association of Business Alumni Business Forum at the Hilton Riverside hotel. Powell said recently released 100-year flood protection maps will soon be available at [www.dhs.gov/gulfcoastrebuild](http://www.dhs.gov/gulfcoastrebuild), which will allow residents and potential business leaders to pinpoint 100-year flood levels in every area of the city. "For the first time, the citizens of New Orleans will understand the power of a storm like Hurricane Katrina," Powell said. "When a potential business leader can look at exactly what flood potential there is in a particular area, that is a powerful tool." Powell said so far 80 percent of the \$6.3 billion set aside for Gulf Coast recovery has been allocated, and the new Web site will allow citizens to track all federal spending on a dollar-by-dollar basis. Powell also spoke of moving public housing residents into "the mainstream of life" by improving public housing services he said were ineffective even before being devastated by Katrina.

**LA officials upbeat after asking feds for more funding** (N.O. Citybusiness, 10/19)

A group of Louisiana officials led by Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco said they are optimistic after traveling to Washington, D.C., this week to ask for more funding for The Road Home program. The Louisiana team asked White House officials and congressional leaders to act quickly in plugging a Road Home shortfall estimated at more than \$3 billion. In addition to Blanco, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, New Orleans Recovery Director Ed Blakely, Louisiana Recovery Authority Chairman Norman Francis and LRA Executive Director Andy Kopplin attended the trip. An LRA press release called the meetings successful. "We made tremendous progress on Capitol Hill this week, and I am optimistic that the federal government will fully fund The Road Home program," Blanco said. "Congress and the White House heard our message loud and clear: Louisiana needs your help and we need it now." Blanco said congressional leaders "have pledged to fully fund The Road Home program and they demonstrated their commitment to our recovery earlier this year with their swift action on critical measures like waiving our 10 percent match. Now, it's a matter of congressional leaders finding the best legislative avenue to secure full funding for The Road Home program before it runs out of money in January so our recovery continues to move forward with strength."

**Gulf Coast Schools Failing Mental Health Needs** (Disaster News Network, 10/19)

Gulf Coast schools have failed to provide for the long-term mental health needs of students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, according to a study released Thursday by a California-based think tank. "Mental health responses were good during the early part of the crisis, but most schools were not able to sustain their efforts," said Lisa H. Jaycox of the nonprofit research organization RAND, which conducted the study. "Schools need to respond not only in the weeks following a disaster, but for the months and years afterward when lingering mental health problems start showing up," said Jaycox, who headed the study for RAND Health. The study of schools in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas reported that while comprehensive efforts were made to assist students immediately after the disasters, those efforts only lasted for about six months at many schools.. Some of the schools determined there was no longer a need to provide the additional services, researchers said, while other schools ended the programs

due to lack of funding or trained staff. It noted that some schools were able to extend additional services to displaced students

**FEMA Partners With State to Provide Funding to Elevate Structures** (FEMA, 10/17)

Road Home applicants who initially requested funds to elevate their homes may soon receive funding. While the initial application contained over 55,000 flood prone properties, the first four properties with the federal share of \$120,000 have been approved. The entire project could potentially fund eligible mitigation actions for these 55,000 flood prone properties and individual mitigation measures with the total federal share contribution of over \$1 billion. The project will be funded in batches once properties are identified and determined eligible by FEMA. FEMA and the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) have coordinated efforts in the development of the State Office of Community Development's (OCD) Hazard Mitigation Grants Program (HMGP) project to elevate or reconstruct eligible structures in order to comply with local floodplain ordinances.

**FEMA Funds Relocation of Displaced Katrina/Rita Households** (FEMA, 10/15)

FEMA announced a reimbursement program that will provide relocation assistance to disaster victims displaced by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The damage and destruction caused by the hurricanes resulted in many Gulf Coast residents temporarily relocating to various locations around the country. Currently there are Katrina/Rita households in all but one of the states, including 800 in Arkansas, 875 in Tennessee, 880 in Georgia, 225 in Colorado and 160 in California. The program will reimburse eligible applicants for relocation expenses up to \$4,000 that have been or will be incurred between Aug. 29, 2005, and Feb. 29, 2008, for Katrina, or Sept. 24, 2005, to Feb. 29, 2008, for Rita. Funding for relocation expenses must be available to applicants within the FEMA Individuals and Households Program cap and they must not have received funds from any other state, federal or voluntary agency subsidized travel-home program. Those applicants returning to their pre-disaster states must relocate to housing that is not provided by FEMA and is not a hotel or motel. For those families that are already living in their pre-disaster state in FEMA travel trailers or mobile homes, FEMA will pay moving expenses to a FEMA-funded rental resource anywhere in the continental United States. However, FEMA will pay for an in-state move only if the new location is greater than 50 miles from applicants' current location in the state.