

Disaster News Update – October 22 to 28, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Tennessee, Mississippi, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama
- **Fire:** California, Arizona
- **HazMat:** Kentucky (Railcar Leak), Ohio (Railcar Leak)
- **Heavy rain / Flooding:** New York, Louisiana, South Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, Indiana
- **Strong winds:** California, Arizona

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [California](#): Wildfires (10/24)
- [California](#): Wildfires (10/23 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Texas](#): Tropical Storm Erin (10/2)
- [Illinois](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (9/25)
- Fire Declarations: [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

Specialized disaster team undertakes first mission (Inside Bay Area, 10/28)

A unique team of Bay Area disaster specialists led by a San Carlos man was dispatched on its inaugural mission last week to San Diego County, where they provided medical support to people displaced from their homes by the firestorms that ravaged the region. The 43-member California Medical Assistance Team raced to Southern California on Tuesday with a police escort to assist local agencies in meeting the medical needs of thousands of residents forced into temporary shelters. It was the first deployment for Cal-MAT, which was established this year at the direction of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when residents of New Orleans waited several days for help to arrive from the federal government. Beginning Wednesday, Cal-MAT doctors treated patients, sent out "strike teams" to perform assessments of medical needs at local shelters and helped the American Red Cross set up a medical clinic at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, the horseracing venue that served as one of San Diego County's major evacuation centers. In each instance, Cal-MAT's role was to augment local services.

United Animal Nations Offers Financial Assistance Grants (PR Newswire, 10/26)

United Animal Nations (UAN), the organization that pioneered disaster relief for animals 20 years ago and provided emergency animal sheltering and disaster relief services during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Southern California wildfires in 2003, is offering financial assistance grants of up to \$500 to help victims of the devastating fires in Southern California care for their pets. "When people lose their homes and everything they own in a fire, they often do not have the resources to pay for vet care for

injured pets, or to board their pets temporarily until they find a new place to live," said UAN President & CEO Nicole Forsyth. "Through our LifeLine Crisis Relief Grant program, we can relieve families of the stress of caring for their pets so they can focus on rebuilding their lives. UAN's LifeLine Crisis Relief Grants can help fire victims with expenses for the following:

- Veterinary care to treat injury or illness caused by the fire
- Temporary boarding
- Transporting the animal to a temporary living situation

UAN will offer qualified individual applicants up to \$500 as long as funds are available. Since UAN's LifeLine Crisis Relief Grant Program is supported solely by private donations, individuals can help keep services flowing to evacuees and their pets in need with donations to the Disaster Relief Fund by visiting www.uan.org.

Volunteers can help Kansas families rebuild (Omaha World Herald, 10/25)

It took only minutes for a May tornado to wipe out the Main Street of Greensburg, Kan., and all the businesses along the way. The tornado also took its toll on homes of Greensburg and took the lives of 10 of its residents. The tornado did not, however, take away the will, the resilience and the determination of the people of Greensburg, Kan. Greensburg residents are rebuilding. And North Platte volunteers will be able to help them for a week in December. The First United Methodist Church of North Platte is looking for 31 volunteers to go to Greensburg from Dec. 2 to Dec. 8 to help with the rebuilding. The Methodist Church in Havoline, Kan., about 10 miles from Greensburg, can sleep 31 volunteers, who will be allowed to use the church kitchen for cooking. The North Platte volunteers will do a variety of work on the houses of Greensburg residents who can't afford to hire workers. "The work will be varied so persons with all kinds of building talents and the talent to provide support work are needed," said Chuck Scriptor of North Platte. Scriptor worked as a Red Cross disaster team volunteer in Greensburg for 10 days after the May 5 tornado. "In the days following the tornado, they didn't talk about the loss of their homes," Scriptor said. "They talked about being lucky enough to have had a basement or crawl space. They talked about having time to bring other people to shelter before the tornado struck. "I have great respect for them." Anyone who wants to participate in the Neighbors Helping Neighbors effort can call the First United Methodist Church at 308-532-1478 or Chuck Scriptor at 308-534-1158 to volunteer or offer other help.

Hands On Disaster Response Sends Team to SoCal (PR Newswire, 10/26)

Hands On Disaster Response (HODR), a volunteer-driven, 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization, has dispatched a team to assess the areas affected by wildfires in California. The on-going fires have already destroyed 2,205 structures and approximately 427,217 acres have burned. There are currently 33,985 structures reportedly threatened. At the height of the fires, 900,000 people were evacuated, but that number continues to fall as evacuations are lifted. At least 12 people have died. Upon arrival, the HODR assessment team will tour the affected areas, meet with local officials and survivors and work in conjunction with other NGOs in an effort to identify and evaluate the needs facing the region. Once the assessment team gathers information from the affected areas they will post updates on what they learn and find. Updates will be posted on HODR's website

<http://www.hodr.org/> . Should HODR decide to deploy and coordinate a volunteer relief project, they will immediately begin accepting donations and volunteers. HODR relies on the support of donors to run successful relief projects and all funds donated to HODR go directly towards these efforts. Please give generously to support the volunteers and the people they assist. Anyone interested in making a tax-deductible donation can do so securely on their website <http://www.hodr.org/> . For additional information on HODR's California Wildfire assessment please visit <http://www.hodr.org/> or contact Paula Ogletree at 706-476-0310 or paula@hodr.org

ARC Responds to CA Wildfires (10/25)

The American Red Cross announced that the Hewlett-Packard Company Foundation has generously donated \$2 million to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. This Fund allows the Red Cross to provide immediate emergency assistance to the victims of thousands of disasters each year, disasters like the wildfires in Southern California. Additionally, the Hewlett-Packard Company Foundation will match employee contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for up to \$1.5 million in support of Red Cross California wildfire relief efforts. The Hewlett-Packard Company Foundation's contribution will assist the Red Cross in continuing relief efforts in the devastated areas. As wildfires continue to burn across Southern California, the Red Cross is providing residents, firefighters and first responders with shelter, food, water, clean up and comfort kits, and medical and mental health services. The Red Cross has nearly 3,000 workers on site in Southern California, including volunteers from all 50 states. To date, the Red Cross has provided the following services:

- Opened 24 shelters providing displaced residents with a safe place to stay
- Mobilized tens of thousands of cots, blankets, comfort kits, and clean-up supplies
- Volunteers are staffing 75 Emergency Response Vehicles, providing hot meals and snacks to residents, firefighters and first responders
- Red Cross mental health counselors are available to help residents and emergency workers in the affected areas manage the stress and fear that accompanies all disasters

Volunteers set to aid fire victims (The Republican, 10/25)

American Red Cross volunteer Roberta S. Steingart, who helped flood victims cope with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, yesterday flew to San Diego to help those displaced by the fires raging there. "I feel there is great need right now," the Longmeadow resident said yesterday morning as she prepared to leave for two weeks. "It's a huge disaster, and we all need to band together to help." Steingart is one of at least five area residents who have left for the fire-blasted region or are preparing to go. She is a volunteer with the Pioneer Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross. The Greater Westfield Chapter of the American Red Cross sent three volunteers to San Diego Tuesday and two more are poised to go today, said Jennifer D. Perfect, director of emergency response for the Greater Westfield Chapter. As the fires have raged out of control across parts of California, thousands of Red Cross volunteers flocked throughout California to help where needed. Through yesterday, Red Cross personnel have opened several emergency shelters, while tens of thousands of cots, blankets and comfort kits have been sent to the

affected areas. Volunteers are also staffing 75 emergency response vehicles to deliver meals and snacks to residents, fire fighters and first responders.

President Declares Major Disaster for California Wildfires (FEMA, 10/24)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of California to help people and communities recover from the effects of wildfires beginning on October 21, 2007, and continuing. 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 Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The assistance was added to the emergency declaration issued yesterday by the President for the state of California. 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 also is available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties for debris removal and emergency protective measures. Federal funding also is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Michael J. Hall as the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Hall 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.

Kentuckians extend help to fire victims (Kentucky.Com, 10/24)

Kentuckians are gearing up to help fire-ravaged Southern California. The Bluegrass Area Chapter of the American Red Cross sent one volunteer Tuesday and three more yesterday to California. More volunteers are being prepared for possible deployment, said chapter spokesman Dwayne Edwards. Orie Lebus of Lexington left Tuesday to supervise a shelter in the San Diego area, Edwards said. Lebus will be responsible for the manning, security and logistics of the shelter for a minimum of 21 days. "He can handle a shelter of about 250 folks," Edwards said. The shelter is typically set up in a school or church. Volunteers Roxie Covington of Casey County, Donnie Wade of Whitley County and Cami Watts of Breathitt County left yesterday to support other Red Cross operations in the San Diego area. The volunteers have received training and their names are kept in a database. When a need is communicated from regional or national Red Cross offices, for such things as shelter managers or other volunteers, the local chapter makes calls to those who are available. Meanwhile, Blue Grass Community Foundation, a non-profit organization that gave \$1.8 million last year to various Kentucky causes, is soliciting donations to help with disaster relief in the San Diego and Los Angeles areas. "The mission is to connect people to causes," said Anne Nash, executive director of the foundation.

GA volunteers join efforts to assist California fire victims (Macon Telegraph, 10/24)

Five midstate American Red Cross volunteers flew to Southern California on Wednesday

to join other volunteers and emergency service workers called in from around the country to provide relief to persons displaced by the raging wildfires. The volunteers, who are residents of Macon, Sparta and Eatonton, are trained members of the Middle Georgia chapter's disaster action team, which usually handles single-family fires in the area. In California, the volunteers are performing mass care work including driving emergency response vehicles, delivering food, operating shelters and assessing fire damage. "It's kind of a hardship assignment. They will be bunking in shelters with the clients and working in areas that are smoky and may not have all of their utilities," Red Cross chapter spokeswoman Sandy Baxter said. "But they're trained and they're willing. They want to help." The five volunteers, who are all retirees, will spend three weeks in California as part of a national call-up for volunteers by the Red Cross. Baxter said volunteers from the southeast and southwest service areas -- about 2,000 people -- received the first assignments. By Tuesday, the Red Cross had opened more than 24 shelters in the region and stocked 40 supply trucks with cots, blankets, toiletry kits and other needed items.

Salvation Army Continues California Wildfire Response (Salvation Army, 10/24)

As the California wildfire crisis enters its fifth day, The Salvation Army continues to provide relief and support to those in need in San Diego County and other impacted regions. Among other efforts, today the Army opened a firestorm assistance center in El Centro to help meet the needs of evacuees from San Diego County. It also continued to mobilize nine canteens, and has six others on call. The canteens have fed more than 31,000 meals and snacks as well 35,000 drinks to individuals impacted by the disaster, including thousands at Qualcomm stadium. The Army has also provided personal care kits, cots, cups and other materials, as well as emotional and spiritual care. Specific Salvation Army activities include:

- Firestorm Assistance Center (El Centro, CA): The Army has opened a center to meet the needs of evacuees at 1301 S. Fourth St. The center providing food, shelter and other materials.
- Qualcomm Stadium (San Diego, CA): Two Salvation Army mobile kitchen units have provided thousands of meals and drinks at the stadium evacuation site.
- Additional Canteen Unit Locations:
 - Campo Santana High School
 - Escondido High School
 - Lakeside, CA
 - Chula Vista, CA
 - Fallbrook, CA
 - San Bernardino, CA (x2)
- Los Angeles, CA: Four canteen units have been dispatched in Los Angeles providing food, drinks, 300 cots and 3,000 personal care kits to fire survivors. The care kits include items such as a toothbrush, wash cloth, comb, shampoo and other items.
- Elsewhere: In Los Angeles County, where fires continue to burn in Malibu Canyon, Santa Clarita, and other areas, Salvation Army Emergency Disaster personnel remain on standby, ready to respond when requested by County authorities.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Businesses donate to CA relief efforts](#) (San Diego Union Tribune, 10/26)

Several businesses have donated money to help fire victims:

- San Diego-based wireless giant Qualcomm said it has committed \$1.5 million to support fire relief and recovery efforts. The company will immediately donate \$100,000 to the San Diego/Imperial Counties American Red Cross Chapter and \$100,000 to Volunteer San Diego. Over the next several weeks, Qualcomm also will provide \$1.3 million through its corporate giving program, employee matching grant program and donations.
- Bank of America's charitable foundation is donating \$1 million to aid and evacuees.
- The Anheuser-Busch Foundation will donate \$500,000 to the American Red Cross to aid wildfire victims. The foundation is also providing more than 500,000 cans of drinking water and nearly 15,000 cans of 180 energydrinks.
- The Helen K. and James S. Copley Foundation is contributing \$100,000 to the San Diego/Imperial Counties American Red Cross chapter, which will use the money to provide shelter, food, counseling and other assistance to those affected.
- David C. Copley, chief executive officer of Copley Press and publisher of The San Diego Union-Tribune, also announced that the Copley Foundation is donating \$50,000 to the San Diego Humane Society.
- The Verizon Foundation will donate \$60,000 to the American Red Cross for fire victims, with the grant to be divided among the Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego and Riverside county chapters. The company is also providing 100 cell phones, 20 laptop computers and seven broadband access cards to Qualcomm Stadium, El Toro High School, the Orange Show Fairgrounds and Del Mar Racetrack relief centers to allow evacuees to make calls, check e-mail and charge wireless devices.

[Robinson YMCA offers free child care](#) (San Diego Union Tribune, 10/26)

The Jackie Robinson Family YMCA will provide free child care from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. today for families affected by the wildfires. Child care will be available for children of first responders, evacuation center volunteers, SDG&E employees and 211 operators who live within the following ZIP codes: 91950, 92102, 92105, 92113, 92114, 92136 and 92139. It will also be available for families within the agency's service area, which includes those ZIP codes. Child care will be provided to those 5 to 17 years old. Children must bring their own lunch and snacks. An adult must sign each child in and out. Registration forms must be completed at check-in.

[Safeway and Vons Announce \\$750,000 in Wildfire Assistance](#) (Yahoo, 10/25)

With the devastation from the Southern California fires, Safeway Inc. and its Southern California-based Vons division today announced \$750,000 in support for relief efforts in the region. The Safeway Foundation announced a \$500,000 cash donation to support local emergency organizations spearheading relief efforts for communities impacted most

by the fires. Already, Safeway and Vons have provided 16 truckloads filled with \$250,000 worth of food, water, diapers, infant formula and other supplies to emergency and evacuation centers. Additionally, the company announced that all 300 Vons and Pavilions stores will serve as collection points for customers who want to make a donation in support of local relief efforts. The company began deliveries of food, water, diapers, infant formula, pet food and other supplies within hours of the call for assistance. Store managers and employees, while helping families prepare for evacuations, were also aiding local firefighters and emergency crews who needed immediate supplies as first responders to the emergencies throughout Southern California. Safeway and Vons are continuing to work with local relief organizations and emergency officials, including the American Red Cross and the Office of Emergency Services, to coordinate and distribute additional critical items to the most affected areas. Beginning today, customers will also be able to support the local relief and emergency efforts by making a donation at any of the 300 California-based Vons or Pavilions stores. The Safeway and Vons Foundations will donate 100% of all customer donations to local organizations coordinating emergency relief efforts and providing support for families and communities impacted by the fires.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Browns Valley (MN) residents still picking up pieces from spring flood (AP, 10/28)

More than six months after fleeing rising floodwaters in the middle of the night, Bill Spotts gave in and turned to salvaging what he could from his condemned house. Spotts, 80, said he emptied his savings account and borrowed money to move across town. He called it "kind of a bad deal" but otherwise didn't want to talk about losing the house on Jefferson Street where he and his wife, Donna, lived for more than 50 years. "I ain't that kind of a guy," he said, loading household items into the back of his pickup truck. "I don't dwell on stuff like that." Other residents of this southwestern town of about 690 people do. They are frustrated that their government's response didn't include help from the FEMA, which said there wasn't enough damage to trigger its funding. The problem is repeated dozens of times a year when small towns are hit by natural disasters. Families are displaced and sometimes lives are lost, but the financial toll on towns with small populations and property values isn't high enough to bring FEMA assistance.

Shelter has the feel of a festival (New Orleans Times Picayune, 10/28)

The hellish heat and choking ash of the California wildfires were miles from Qualcomm Stadium on Wednesday night. The only sign of the blazes was the thick haze shrouding the football stadium lights high above the field and the acrid smell of smoke. In fact, an almost festive atmosphere prevailed among the thousands of evacuees who sought shelter there from the fires this week. While the stadium-turned-shelter was similar to how the city of New Orleans used the Superdome two years ago for Hurricane Katrina, the experience was a striking contrast to the one New Orleanians endured two years ago. Early on Aug. 29, 2005, the hurricane knocked out power and water systems -- putting the Dome on emergency power with no working bathrooms and no air conditioning in the stifling heat. The Superdome wasn't even supposed to be a shelter. It was opened as a

refuge of last resort, nominally staffed because it was intended to protect residents only until the danger passed. But hours after the hurricane hit, floodwaters rose in the streets outside, virtually cutting off the stadium from emergency and supply vehicles. While reports of rampant violence in the Dome would later be proved false, no one has ever disputed the miserable conditions. On Wednesday evening in San Diego, it looked more like residents had left their homes for a few days to attend a giant slumber party in a football stadium.

Recovery efforts continue 2 months after OH floods (Associated Press, 10/28)

Homes and businesses remain empty more than two months after powerful storms and record flooding washed through northwest Ohio, a sign that progress remains slow for officials and residents working to repair flood-damaged cities and towns. Yellow caution tape still closes off buildings on the west side of the village of Ottawa, about 60 miles southwest of Toledo. Weeks of newspapers have piled up on doorsteps. "At night it's like a ghost town. It's dark and quiet," said Kristy Nienberg, an Ottawa resident whose home is surrounded by four or five blocks of abandoned houses. "I was fortunate the insurance money came fast. A lot of people didn't get their money as fast, if they even had flood insurance," she said. Because of the quick insurance money, Nienberg hoped to be back in her home within a few weeks. Progress and repairs continue, but it's difficult to say when things will fully return to normal, said John Williams, Ottawa's municipal director. "I think it's sporadic," Williams said. "People are coming back to most neighborhoods." Several days of heavy rain in late August caused widespread flooding across an 80-mile swath of northwest and north central Ohio. In Ottawa, the Blanchard River swelled beyond its banks, and about half the down-river town took on water. There's an urgency to finishing repairs and installing working heating systems before winter begins in earnest, Williams said. Some residents are living on the second floor of their homes while work is completed on the first floor, he said.

S. Idaho county considers disaster declaration (Twin Falls Times, 10/27)

Jerome County Commissioners in southern Idaho are preparing to declare the county a disaster area in an attempt to get federal money to help farmers and ranchers who lost fences, cattle, range and cropland to a fire nearly four months ago. But federal officials say the declaration would be too late at this point to do any good. "If this declaration has something to do with the fire, it should have been done at the time of the fire," said Gary Davis, a central Idaho coordinator for DHS. The Red Bridge Fire started July 6 and burned about 70 square miles, destroying 43 power poles and knocking out power to some areas. Commission Chairman Charlie Howell said there's a chance money might be available for ranchers and farmers if the county appeals to the governor's office with a disaster declaration. The commission could sign the resolution next week. "If there's a chance there is relief available, we'll pursue it," Howell told The Times-News. Disaster declarations can lead to relief money through the Farm Service Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. But Tom Snow, executive director for Jerome County's Farm Service Agency, said four months is too long ago to get money now. "I'm not going to be able to help these guys out a bit," he said. "The commissioners just weren't aware of what they needed to do."

Faith Based Groups Ramp Up Efforts in CA (Disaster News Network, 10/27)

As firefighters continued to battle wildfires in Southern California on Friday, thousands of residents who had been evacuated began returning to their communities to see what was left of their homes as what promised to be a long recovery process got under way. Several fires, including the 27,000-acre Santiago blaze in Orange County continued to threaten homes as it moved into Silverado Canyon, prompting more mandatory evacuations. Evacuations also remained in effect in several other areas, including for residents affected by the 13,000-acre Slide and 1,100-acre Grass Valley fires near Lake Arrowhead in San Bernardino County and the Harris and Witch fires in San Diego County, which have blackened a total of more than 282,000 acres. An estimated 1,300 homes in Southern California have been destroyed by the fires, the majority of them in San Diego County. To help residents as the recovery phase got under way, one-stop shops have opened throughout the region to provide assistance. The assistance centers will provide sources for disaster relief services, including information on how to replace records lost in the fires, file insurance claims and apply for assistance and housing. Officials also issued public warnings about charity scams that often pop up during major disasters, when individuals seek donations for fictitious charitable organizations then take and keep the money. Faith-based groups began ramping up efforts for the long-term recovery and said that the extent of the needs was expected to be huge. As areas become accessible, the groups planned to begin assessments to determine long-term needs.

CA wildfire evacuees return home to ashes and uncertainty (CBS, 10/26)

As some wildfire evacuees returned to their neighborhoods to find only ashes where their homes once stood, others sought government help for dealing with the uncertainty of their upended lives. Justin Miner was among hundreds of people who gathered Thursday at a disaster center in Rancho San Diego in San Diego County, where an array of federal, state and county agencies had clustered to offer assistance. Miner was evacuated from his home in Deerhorn Valley and had just arrived with his family at Qualcomm Stadium when his wife seven months pregnant went into labor prematurely. "Things could be a lot better," he said. "It's really bad timing. I'm out of my house, I'm out of my job, my wife's in the hospital. ... I got a 3-year-old with a broken arm and an 11-year old stepson. Would you be OK?" Five hours later, Miner walked out of the disaster assistance center with food stamps, financial help from the Red Cross and a little bit of hope, though he still didn't know if his house was still standing. "I walked out with a tremendous amount of help. It's more than I expected," he said. Such facilities create a one-stop shop where disaster victims can more easily navigate the bewildering array of government and non-governmental assistance.

Help can be found in one fell swoop for victims (San Diego Union Tribune, 10/26)

One-stop shopping took on new meaning at the Rancho Bernardo wildfire victim assistance center yesterday. Residents began rebuilding their lives by visiting the Rancho Bernardo Community Recreation Center, which was turned into a fire victim assistance center Wednesday afternoon. Yesterday, 250 people from the city of San Diego and the county got answers to questions such as how to apply for permits to rebuild their houses, how to recover lost wages and how to replace lost deeds and identification. Center director Debra Fischle-Faulk said she expects 500 families over the next few months. The

center offers child care and has 37 booths staffed by city and county offices, FEMA, cable companies, San Diego Gas & Electric, Social Security Administration, U.S. Postal Service, Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Emergency food stamps are available to those who qualify. Residents are asked to bring identification if available. Fire victims who had lost their homes or possessions registered at the entrance yesterday. Inside, they were given food, water and soft drinks. When they left, they were offered ice cream. In the center's rear parking lot, State Farm, Farmers, AAA, Liberty Mutual and Travelers insurance companies had set up booths or tents. "Everyone here was fantastic," said Richard Meadows, whose Rancho Bernardo apartment building burned down. "I know people had to wait a while (for President Bush to finish his visit to the assistance center yesterday morning), but the real benefit is here. We got everything we wanted."

FEMA Sends Personnel, Equipment to Wildfires (FEMA, 10/26)

FEMA has sent personnel and equipment from Denver to assist with wildfire response and recovery efforts in California. The team consisted of five individuals and four pieces of communications equipment from FEMA's Denver-based Mobile Emergency Response System (MERS). The team left Thursday morning and is driving to California. Once they arrive, the group will support FEMA's wildfire response and recovery efforts at the agency's Joint Field Office (JFO) in Pasadena, Calif. Two MERS computer specialists also flew to California on Wednesday to support FEMA's disaster work. The MERS team headed to California includes the following equipment:

- 1 KU-band satellite system. The trailer-mounted antenna provides multiple voice and data capabilities, allowing FEMA disaster workers to set up phone and Internet operations from the field.
- 1 Mobile Emergency Operations Vehicle (MEOV) which provides additional voice and data capabilities, work stations, and video teleconferencing capabilities.
- 1 ACU-1000 which provides interoperability for different radio systems. This can enhance the radio communications between the multiple local, state and federal agencies responding to the wildfires.
- 1 Lead Sport Utility Vehicle with Satellite phone capabilities.

Bush tours 'sad situation' in California (Associated Press, 10/26)

President Bush had a message Thursday for Southern Californians weary and frightened from five days of wildfires. "We're not going to forget you in Washington, D.C.," he declared in an eerie echo of what he once told Hurricane Katrina victims. On a damage-survey trip haunted at every turn by the ongoing Katrina crisis, Bush saw by air and on foot the result of fires that have raced through canyons and neighborhoods since Sunday. The blazes have killed at least three people, sent hundreds of thousands fleeing their homes and burned nearly half a million acres. "We've got a big problem out here," the president said near the end of his quick, four-hour visit. "We want the people to know there's a better day ahead that today your life may look dismal, but tomorrow life's going to be better," Bush said. "And to the extent that the federal government can help you, we want to do so." Said California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bush's tour guide for the day: "The only way to grasp the true magnitude is to see it for yourself and to be out there with the people whose lives have been turned upside down." Before leaving Washington,

Bush said he aimed to bring assurances of federal help, comfort for those who have lost lives, homes and possessions, and thanks to overworked firefighters.

Helpers pour into a fire-stricken San Diego (Yahoo, 10/26)

Rachel Hanley arrived in San Diego Wednesday after a 12-hour drive from her home in Colorado Springs, Colo. She parked her truck at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, home of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, and set to work caring for some of the more than 2,500 horses that have been given shelter there from the region's firestorm. "There are a lot of displaced folks, but they seem to be taken care of," says Ms. Hanley. "But these animals are really scared, and not a lot of people can handle them. People are helping the fire victims of San Diego in all sorts of ways. Mine just happens to be with horses." At least 1,000 volunteers have turned out in recent days, arriving at the fairgrounds and Qualcomm Stadium, evacuation central, to offer their services to the fire-besieged - everything from medical skills to yoga instruction. Likewise, fire crews who've been battling the blazes since Saturday are seeing reinforcements arrive, as fires that had blackened nearly 500,000 acres by Thursday morning continue to burn throughout San Diego County. Eight deaths have been attributed to the southern California fires, and in a bit of bad news that represents the opposite spirit of the volunteer corps, authorities reported that arson is the suspected cause of two wildfires to the north - one in Orange County and one in Riverside County. Among the firefighters who have worked to contain the San Diego fires are crews from Tijuana and Tecate in Mexico. "It is very important for Mexico to cooperate with the United States in situations like these because these fires affect the environment on both sides," said Capt. Marco Antonio Garambullo, Tecate's Fire Department director.

Wildfire Shelter Offers Volunteerism Lessons (CNN, 10/26)

Dust off every disaster plan from Washington to San Diego, scrutinize them to your heart's content, and it's still unlikely you'll find mention of the emergency services provided by Shary Shores. Shores, a volunteer registrar at San Diego's evacuee shelter, has appointed herself the shelter's "hugger." Every person she signs in gets a warm, heartfelt hug. Having lost her own home to foreclosure in March, Shores says she has empathy for the suddenly homeless. Her embraces may not be government-sanctioned, but they are appreciated. "I can't tell you how many people say 'Thank you. ... I needed that,'" Shores said. Welcome to Qualcomm Stadium, home of the San Diego Chargers and, for the time being, thousands of people who have fled the [California wildfires](#) that destroyed nearly 1,600 homes and burned some 679 square miles. Some 76,000 people stayed in 42 San Diego County shelters Wednesday night, county emergency spokeswoman Lynda Pfeiffer said. Those numbers were dropping as residents were allowed to return home. Qualcomm Stadium housed 11,000 evacuees at the peak of the disaster, but that number dropped to 5,000 Wednesday morning.

New Mexico Firefighters Heading to California (Albuquerque Journal, 10/25) Fighting fires can be vastly different in New Mexico than it is in California. "California fires are just California fires. The heat and intensity they burn with is just a whole different game," Jeremy Hansen, an Albuquerque firefighter, said Wednesday. Hansen was with Strike Team One, one of two New Mexico teams headed to fight the massive fires spreading

across Southern California. Firefighters with Albuquerque, San Juan County and Farmington fire departments hustled early Wednesday morning to prepare five engines for the trip. A second team made up of firefighters from Bernalillo County, Rio Rancho, Village of Los Ranchos, Las Vegas and Raton also was on its way Wednesday. They expected to be at work by 6 a.m. today. Strike Team One planned a stop near the Arizona and California border Wednesday night. They hope to get to the command center in Chino, Calif., this afternoon, and expect to be sent to the Witch fire in northern San Diego County. They had plenty to think about on the way.

U.S. secretary of labor announces \$50 for CA wildfires (Dept. of Labor, 10/25)

The U.S. Department of Labor today announced a \$50 million grant, with \$16.7 million released initially, to create as many as 3,125 temporary jobs to aid in efforts underway in response to the wildfires burning across much of southern California. "The southern California fires have caused catastrophic damage, and it is critical that the state receives assistance immediately," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao. "This \$50 million National Emergency Grant will fund over 3,000 temporary jobs for workers to aid in cleanup and recovery as well as provide humanitarian assistance to Californians who have suffered in this ongoing disaster." The grant, awarded to the California Employment Development Department, will provide immediate assistance to the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Ventura. On October 24, FEMA declared these counties as eligible for FEMA's Public Assistance Program. The funds will be used to create temporary employment on projects related to the cleanup, repair, renovation and reconstruction of public structures, facilities and lands within wildfire-afflicted communities. Funds also will be used for projects that provide food, clothing, shelter and other types of humanitarian assistance for disaster victims.

WA firefighter teams sent to Southern California (Seattle Post Intelligencer, 10/24)

Two firefighter strike teams from Washington state have been sent to Southern California, and officials say four to seven more are on their way. According to a news release from the Emergency Management Division of the Washington Military Department, two structural strike teams from King, Pierce San Juan and Thurston counties were sent Tuesday night. More teams were set to head south Wednesday from Benton, Clark, Cowlitz, Grant, Kittitas, Snohomish, Walla Walla and Whatcom counties. Fires driven by fierce Santa Ana winds have destroyed hundreds of houses and caused mass evacuations in San Diego county. Officials in California asked for help through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, a mutual-aid agreement between all 50 states.

Ky. hazmat team checking acid leak, schools in 2 states closed (MSNBC, 10/23)

Residents of communities on both sides of the Ohio River were urged to stay indoors for much of Tuesday morning and schools were closed because acid fumes had leaked from a railroad car. Hazmat teams were sampling the air around a CSX Corp. rail yard in Kentucky's northeast corner to see if the leak had been stopped, said Buddy Rogers, a spokesman for Kentucky Emergency Management in Frankfort. He said a vapor release was reported late Monday and a hazmat team found a small leak from a valve on a rail car loaded with hydrochloric acid. At least four responders at the scene complained of

watery eyes and itchy skin. No other injuries have been reported. No one was evacuated, Rogers said. However, people living within a mile of the rail yard in Greenup County were advised to stay indoors and keep windows closed. That order was lifted late Tuesday morning. "The tank car, if it was leaking, is no longer leaking," Greenup County 911 director Scott Brown said.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Five NH towns look at flood buyouts (Union Leader, 10/26)

Town officials are signing up for a federal program that will allow them to buy homes damaged by the disastrous floods of 2006 and 2007, which have left some homeless and many others deep in debt. "We're really opening it up to any home that's either in the floodplain and was damaged by the flooding or even homes outside of the floodplain that may have been damaged by the flooding," said Jim Bingham, assistant town administrator. Goffstown is asking FEMA for \$3.6 million for the buyouts. Four other New Hampshire towns are participating, according to James Van Dongen, the spokesman for the Department of Safety. They are: Allenstown, at \$5.9 million, Pembroke, at \$1.6 million, Raymond at \$3.4 million, and Salem at \$4 million. People are still interested in such assistance, though some question whether the government will come through after so long, said Franklin Bishop, chairman of Raymond's Board of Selectmen. Officials said it is not too late for other New Hampshire towns to become involved. The applications will be sent in to FEMA at the turn of the year and reviewed by next spring or summer. Money could be available by the end of next summer, according to Van Dongen. The funding will allow the towns to purchase the homes for their fair market value prior to the floods. The towns are expected to contribute 25 percent of the total cost. But local matching funds could come in the form of administrative hours and demolition work, not actual dollars, according to Bingham.

All northern GA reservoirs called at risk (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10/25)

All North Georgia reservoirs are in trouble, not just Lake Lanier, Lake Allatoona and the other large, federal reservoirs in the region, state Environmental Protection Division Director Carol Couch told the Georgia Board of Natural Resources on Wednesday. With streams at or close to their lowest levels ever recorded, reservoirs are not refilling, she said. As for criticism about the state's slow response to the drought, Couch said, "This drought could not be predicted in its extent and its severity." Despite recent rainfall, she said, the 18-month drought is expected to continue through at least May. Parks to tourists: Bring your own The drought has dropped lake levels so low it's difficult to launch boats and canoes at some state parks, including Red Top Mountain State Park and Lodge in Cartersville; Sweetwater Creek State Park in Lithia Springs; and Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge in McRae. Black Rock Mountain State Park in Mountain City --- about two hours northeast of Atlanta --- has had to warn campers at its 48 campsites to bring water for washing and cooking because the campground well has run dry.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Louisiana Eyes Hurricane Museum (Disaster News Network, 10/29)

Audrey snuck into Louisiana in the early hours of June 27, 1957. The casualties: more than 500 lives lost, including 200 children. The damage: more than \$1 billion. That was followed in more modern times by such ill-tempered ladies as Camille. And, of course, who can forget Rita and Katrina? There will be a special place for them if a proposed \$100 million National Hurricane Museum and Science Center (NHMSC) becomes a reality in southwest Louisiana. "These storms are still seared into the collective memory of those who survived. In the case of Katrina and Rita, the entire nation will not soon forget the overwhelming impact of those two storms," said the NHMSC's final master plan. The museum would be the only one of its size and scope anywhere, its supporters said.

Town moves to slow demand for Katrina cottages (Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette, 10/27)

Members of political boards have their disagreements. But if a majority of Bay St. Louis City Council members agree on one thing, it's their intense dislike for Katrina cottages. Since the small, modular homes wheeled their way into the scene, they have been the bane of council members, who must decide who can have one and who can't. So far, the latter dominates. With federal dollars funneled through the state, a program has been giving hundreds of selected coast hurricane victims the chance to escape FEMA trailers and move into the small, more stable houses. State officials say Katrina cottages will give families a healthier, if only slightly roomier, environment. They are apparently formaldehyde free, and meet Bay St. Louis building code requirements. But councilmen wince at the very mention of the cottages, which they say will batter property values. They also express impatience with some FEMA trailer residents, saying they have no intention of rebuilding. And they openly doubt that the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency will have them removed by March 2009 as promised. "We're going to have a hard time getting rid of these cottages," Councilman Doug Seal said this week. "They're going to be there for 30 years."

FEMA agrees to provide additional aid to remove marine debris (AP, 10/27)

FEMA said it would provide additional aid to Louisiana to clean up debris littering state waterways. But the amount of aid, the scope of the cleanup and the timetable for completing the work has yet to be determined. Ronnie Simpson, a FEMA spokesman, said the U.S. Coast Guard and others are set to meet next week to develop a scope of work. Surveys being done by the Coast Guard are to form the basis for which additional eligible debris deemed to pose immediate threats to public health and safety and the environment is removed. Marine debris may include things like boats, trees, clogging vegetation or other types of wreckage. Since hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, FEMA says the federal government has spent more than \$150 million cleaning up marine debris in the state. The Louisiana Recovery Authority has asked FEMA to "completely fund" the debris removal program, including reimbursing state and local agencies that paid to cleanup state waterways on their own. The LRA has complained that Louisiana wasn't treated like Mississippi and Alabama in FEMA's handling of marine debris removal efforts, and this summer said tractor trailers, refrigerators and storm-damaged houses

littered waterways, creating potential hazards. FEMA has denied that Louisiana was treated differently.

Louisiana bonds to generate \$300M for N.O. recovery (N.O. City Business, 10/24)

The Louisiana Bond Commission on Wednesday cleared the way for bonds to be sold to generate \$300 million for New Orleans infrastructure projects, including repairs for the Sewerage and Water Board. The Louisiana Public Facilities Authority is expected to sell the bonds next week, said Bond Commission Chairman Whitman Kling. The \$300 million will go into a pool that will be governed by a trustee that will release funds when payments are due, Kling said. "They (the city) will not be able to touch them until such time as there is a project reimbursement," he said. Also going into the pool will be repair funds for New Orleans from FEMA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, he said. The city has signed cooperative endeavor agreements with the state pledging to put FEMA and HUD funds into the trustee account, he said. The state will pay the bond debt. The Legislature will have to appropriate about \$22 million a year for the next 25 years to cover the debt, he said. "If they do not .. there is no other source of payment," he said.

Report: NO-area rents may be stabilizing after Katrina (N.O. Times Picayune, 10/24)

New federal figures suggest rental prices in the New Orleans area may have stabilized following a steep rise after Hurricane Katrina. But some fear the cost an average \$764 for an efficiency flat and \$1,271 for a three-bedroom still is pricing pre-storm renters out of the market and taking a toll on homeowners forced to rent while, in some cases, they pay a mortgage on a storm-damaged property they can't afford to rebuild without federal aid. "We get desperate calls every day from people wondering what to do," Davida Finger, a staff attorney at Loyola University's College of Law in New Orleans, said Tuesday. "People can't literally pay for their grass to be cut." The U.S. Housing and Urban Development data analyzed by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center shows the average rent in the seven-parish metro area rose by more than 46 percent since before Katrina hit in August 2005. The bulk of that, about 45 percent, came between fiscal years 2005 and 2007 and was due to basic supply and demand, the data center's deputy director, Allison Plyer said. Most of the city was underwater after Katrina, and more than 100,000 of the estimated 188,250 homes occupied before the storm were severely damaged or destroyed. The price stabilization that appears to be happening was expected, given that more property is becoming available, the center and Plyer said. The average cost to rent a two-bedroom will run about \$990 for fiscal year 2008, which began Oct. 1. That compares to \$978 a year ago, and \$676 in the fiscal year that began before Katrina.

FEMA Road Home woes at \$1.5B and counting (N.O. City Business, 10/22)

The Road Home program has paid an average of \$69,390 to 61,474 homeowners, meaning the program faces a \$3.9-billion shortfall for the remaining applicants seeking grant assistance to rebuild or relocate after the 2005 hurricanes. As of Oct. 15, a total of 185,914 applications had been received. The Louisiana Recovery Authority estimates 162,000 eventually will be verified as legitimate after ineligible applications are weeded out. If the estimate is accurate, 38 percent of all legitimate applicants have been paid. Of the \$7.3 billion now available for Road Home payments, \$3.8 billion has been disbursed,

or 52 percent. With \$8.8 billion in benefits already calculated, The Road Home is already \$1.5 billion in the hole compared with allocated funding. FEMA underestimated the number of applicants to The Road Home program at 123,000, or 51 percent of the total to date.