

Disaster News Update –April 7 to 20, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 14 days)

- **Crime:** Virginia (Shooting Rampage)
- **Drought:** California, Nevada, Arizona, Minnesota, Wyoming, Nebraska, North Dakota, Alabama
- **Fire:** Utah, Minnesota, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas
- **Flooding:** Alabama, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts
- **Hail:** Texas
- **Heavy Rain:** Alabama, Florida,
- **Severe Winter Weather:** South Carolina, North Carolina, Maine, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Texas, Kansas, Virginia, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa
- **Tornado:** South Carolina,

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [New Mexico](#): Severe Storms and Tornadoes (4/2)
- [Iowa](#): snow (Emergency Declaration – 3/30)
- [Iowa](#): Severe Winter Storms (3/14)
- [California](#): Severe Freeze (3/13)
- [Indiana](#): Snow (Emergency Declaration - 3/13)
- Fire Declarations: [Georgia \(4/18\)](#), [Florida \(3/26\)](#), [California \(3/11\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

New Red Cross Head Appointed (New York Times, 4/19)

The American Red Cross named Mark W. Everson, the commissioner of the IRS, as its president and chief executive. When he takes over in May, Mr. Everson will join an organization hit by criticism of its response to Hurricane Katrina and other disasters. An I.R.S. spokesman said Mr. Everson was not available for comment. The Red Cross spent more than a year courting candidates but had difficulty securing a commitment until Congress, which oversees it under a federal charter, passed legislation mandating an overhaul of its board and the appointment of an ombudsman to report to Congress. That legislation will pare the board from 50 members to no more than 20 by 2012 and change the way they are nominated to increase their independence and curb the influence of local Red Cross chapters.

Ready for hard work in Big Easy (San Francisco Chronicle, 4/19)

With his wrap-around shades, cocked baseball cap and sly smile, Cameron Enriquez, 17, doesn't look like a kid who'd volunteer to spend long, sweaty days clearing debris and restoring New Orleans neighborhoods ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. "We wanna do everything we can to help," said Enriquez, who is flying to the Big Easy today with 33 other students from two Brentwood high schools to help in the continuing recovery from the 2005 disaster. Their work -- patching roofs, building walls and clearing debris-filled

yards -- will be supervised by Habitat for Humanity volunteers, but the youths raised all the funds for this four-day trip, and organized most of it, on their own.

Volunteers Bring Joy, Laughter to Gulf (Disaster News Network, 4/17)

Squeals of laughter fill the air as children race around a newly built playground in the heart of St. Bernard Parish. Five-year-old Christopher, who lives a short distance from the park, says he is crazy about his new play place. "It's real fun and it's real cool," he says excitedly. "You can run real fast there and climb on stuff. I love it." Nearly 500 students from Georgia Technical Institute constructed the 2,100-square-foot play area complete with swings, slides and climbing apparatus in Chalmette, an area that had been devastated by flood waters unleashed by Hurricane Katrina. The project was the brainchild of college senior Nelson Davis, who is a member of the university's Christian Campus Fellowship.

Report: Volunteer Rates Low in LA, MS (Shreveport Times, 4/16)

Louisiana and Mississippi ranked 49th and 47th, respectively, in volunteer rates based on a three-year average from 2004-06, in the report released by CNCS. Rates are based on volunteer involvement with an organization, the study's lead author, Robert Grimm, said. Louisiana's volunteer rate was 21.2 percent; Mississippi's, 24.2 percent. Utah, Nebraska and Minnesota ranked the highest, with rates above 40 percent, while Nevada ranked lowest, with 17.5 percent, the report found. The volunteer rate is calculated on a percentage of residents age 16 and older. People still rebuilding their own homes and lives after Katrina may not have as much time as others to volunteer for a church, food bank or other organization, he said. Plus, schools and nonprofits — groups that historically help promote volunteerism — also were affected, in some cases, shuttered, by the storm, he said.

Animal rescue group probed by state (Sacramento Bee, 4/14)

Noah's Wish, an animal rescue group based in CA, has closed operations and is being investigated by the CA attorney general's office for how it spent and accounted for millions of dollars that poured in after Hurricane Katrina. The organization rescued animals in disasters and drew widespread publicity for its work in the days following Katrina. Before Katrina, the group brought in between \$100,000 and \$200,000 a year. After the hurricane, a staggering \$8.5 million in cash and other contributions poured in. Crisp was executive director of the group until March 28. At that time, the nonprofit group's board took away her job, she said. She did not elaborate on the reasons. In 2005, several board members resigned over frustration that they asked for but never received from the nonprofit group adequate financial reports tracking income and expenditures. An accounting firm hired in 2006 to audit the financial position of Noah's Wish as of Dec. 31, 2005, indicated a similar gap in financial information.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Problem riverfront area may become county park (Seattle Times, 4/18)

An ongoing problem with transients living along the Skykomish River near Sultan may be nearing a solution. The county is considering spending \$600,000 to purchase the remaining lots off North and South Skyview drives that were abandoned by property owners in the 1990s after destructive flooding. The land borders the Skykomish River just south of Sultan, and the county hopes to add the remaining 60 or so lots to the almost 40 it now owns. Once purchased, the land is expected to be converted into a boat launch and park area along the riverfront. For years, Sultan officials have complained that transients squatting on the properties have caused trouble inside the city limits, forcing police to increase patrols near the area and to deal with a problem they say should be the county's responsibility.

FL Expands Reviews for Storm Preparedness (St. Petersburg Times, 4/11)

After a five-month hiatus, the state plans to resume its free home inspections program within two weeks to test residential dwellings for hurricane preparedness. The program, called My Safe Florida Home, will use 11 firms and expand statewide. The firms have been divided up among four regions - the Panhandle, North Florida, Central Florida and South Florida - to conduct the inspections. Each firm has pledged to conduct a minimum of 1,000 inspections a week after a startup period that ends in late June or early July. "These inspection firms had to meet the strictest criteria in order to be considered for this program," Chief Financial Office Alex Sink said in a statement. The Legislature created My Safe Florida Home almost a year ago as a way to strengthen residential dwellings against hurricanes and help reduce insurance costs. It offers free home inspections and up to a \$5,000 matching grant for qualified homeowners. To qualify, a home must be a homesteaded, single-family, detached dwelling with an insured value of less than \$500,000.

Baseball and Boy Scouts Encourage Preparedness (Government Technology, 4/11)

Minor League Baseball and the Boy Scouts of America are teaming up with DHS's Ready Campaign for the fourth consecutive year to educate and encourage Americans to prepare for emergencies. Forty-nine baseball teams are joining many local Boy Scout councils in stepping up to the plate and encouraging fans to prepare for all types of emergencies, including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks. "We appreciate continued support of Minor League Baseball and the Boy Scouts in helping us to spread the Ready message to American families," said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. "Through the assistance of these organizations, millions of baseball fans will learn how to get an emergency supply kit, make a family emergency plan and be informed about the different types of emergencies that can occur." Boy Scouts and community organizations will distribute emergency preparedness brochures throughout the 2007 season at team-sponsored Ready Nights across the country.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

NY seeks federal storm assistance (Newsday NY, 4/19)

Gov. Eliot Spitzer urged the Bush administration to declare a dozen counties, including

Nassau and Suffolk, and New York City disaster areas after last weekend's nor'easter. The designation would trigger federal recovery assistance to homeowners, renters and small businesses. Preliminary damage assessment started yesterday puts the following counties, in addition to Long Island and New York City's boroughs, on the federal assistance radar: Westchester, Orange, Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Putnam, Rockland, Schoharie and Ulster. In a note to FEMA, the governor requested the speedy implementation of FEMA's Individuals and Households Program and other needs assistance that would provide grants for temporary housing, rental assistance, home repairs and other storm-damaged needs. Touted as the biggest rainstorm in 125 years, the nor'easter dumped 7.57 inches of rain on Central Park during 24 hours, the wettest day since Sept. 23, 1882, when 8.28 inches fell.

NJ Waters Recede, Anguish Remains (Newark Star Ledger, 4/19)

With the Passaic River finally cresting early yesterday morning, attention turned from flood watch to flood recovery, with acting Gov. Richard Codey requesting preliminary disaster relief from the federal government to help thousands of Jerseyans dry out and rebuild. Teams of damage assessors from the State Police and FEMA arrived in Bound Brook yesterday afternoon to begin the tedious, door-to-door surveying that will ultimately pin a dollar figure on the weekend storm's destruction. Still, a FEMA spokesman said it would likely be several days before the preliminary damage assessment is complete, and advised residents coping with property loss to look toward local sources of assistance.

Fires Blaze in Georgia (Disaster News Network, 4/18)

Wildfires continued to burn Thursday night in southeast Georgia, blackening more than 25,000 acres and forcing several thousand people from their homes. At least 22 structures, including 18 homes, were destroyed. A Friday forecast of windy conditions and low humidity could make containing the fires even more difficult as they burn through land made tinder dry by drought. Firefighters had reported making some progress Thursday in battling the blazes. The largest blaze, dubbed the Sweat Farm Road fire, has burned some 25,000 acres in Ware County since it erupted Monday when a tree toppled onto a power line. By late Thursday, it had edged into the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge, one of the nation's oldest and most well-preserved freshwater areas and home to several endangered species.

Governor's declaration sets stage for federal aid (AR Democrat Gazette, 4/18)

Gov. Mike Beebe declared a state of emergency Tuesday in 35 Arkansas counties in response to the crop damage caused Easter weekend by freezing temperatures. Beebe's declaration won't trigger any monetary aid, but it will support Arkansas' efforts to have U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns declare most of the state's 75 counties as disaster areas. If approved, a federal declaration would make Arkansas farmers in designated counties eligible for low-interest emergency loans. The counties included in Beebe's declaration are: Benton, Boone, Bradley, Carroll, Clay, Cleburne, Cleveland, Craighead, Crawford, Crittenden, Cross, Fulton, Franklin, Greene, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Logan, Lonoke, Madison, Marion, Mississippi, Monroe,

Poinsett, Pope, Sebastian, Scott, Sharp, St. Francis, Stone, Washington, Woodruff and Yell.

Record rainfall hits the Merrimack Valley hardest (Boston Herald, 4/18)

Torrential rains, gusty winds and high tides left several Massachusetts cities battling flood waters yesterday, with the Merrimack Valley hit the hardest. The city of Lowell declared a state of emergency as rainfall totals of 5 inches and high winds led to flooding along the Merrimack and Concord rivers. Shelters have been set up, including one at the Lowell Senior Center. The Merrimack River is about 6 feet over flood level, its fifth highest level in history, according to news reports. Several roads were closed due to flooding, including parts of Route 113 in Lowell and Route 114 in Lawrence. Roadways in Winthrop and Marshfield were also turned into waterways. High tides swamped the Cape Cod shore, and several Nantucket homes were swept into the ocean.

FEMA to Take Lead Role in Coordinating Disaster Aid (Washington Post, 4/18)

FEMA will replace the American Red Cross as the agency in charge of coordinating the provision of shelter, food and first aid to victims in disasters under an agreement disclosed by a Senate panel yesterday. The change in the government's emergency plans, formalized in letters between FEMA and Red Cross leaders Feb. 21, follows criticism of the way they cooperated after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and a new law that bolsters FEMA's role in providing emergency housing, human services, case management and financial help. The FEMA takeover will be administrative and will not affect the Red Cross's traditional direct relief operations, which include opening shelters, providing food and raising money, which totaled more than \$2 billion after Katrina, spokeswoman Laura Howe said.

House Outlines Changes in Disaster Loans (Washington Post, 4/18)

The House approved major changes to the SBA disaster loan program, a reaction to the delays and confusion that marked the agency's response to Katrina and other 2005 hurricanes. The bill, passed 267-158, demands that the SBA develop a comprehensive disaster response plan and maintain a trained disaster reserve corps of 1,000 people. It increases loan limits from \$1.5 million to \$3 million and expands the scope of businesses that can qualify for SBA disaster loans. The bill now goes to the Senate. The Bush administration, in a statement, voiced opposition to the legislation, saying the agency has already addressed some of the problems manifested after Katrina and that the bill "would substantially raise the cost to taxpayers of providing disaster assistance."

Thousands Without Power after Storm (CNN, 4/18)

Utility crews cut their way through downed trees Wednesday to restore service to thousands of customers still without power since a huge weekend storm battered the East Coast. Communities from New Jersey to Maine were still coping with stream flooding after the storm dumped more than 8 inches of rain in places, along with coastal flooding brought on by astronomical high tides and heavy surf. Seventeen deaths were blamed on the weather system.

Aid finally granted for July storms (St. Louis Post Dispatch, 4/17)

More than two dozen Southern Illinois communities and governments, some of which were left in the dark for days by two crippling storms last July, will finally receive a total of almost \$1.4 million in state aid. The storms that struck July 19 and 21 left a swath of damage that was among the worst seen in the area in recent memory. Some cities spent more than \$1 million to clear streets of tree limbs. Many city, county and state cleanup crews worked alongside residents even as some cities remained without power in the summer heat. Granite City, perhaps the hardest hit, will receive the most money - more than \$327,000. Mt. Vernon can expect the second largest reimbursement: almost \$230,000. The Madison County Highway Department, which did work around most of the county, will get more than \$176,000, and the city of Wood River will receive just over \$159,000. Bethalto will get almost \$76,000.

American Red Cross Responding to Nor'easter (Government Technology, 4/17)

The American Red Cross is rapidly expanding its disaster response in the wake of a powerful Nor'easter that swept across the Mid-Atlantic and New England states Sunday, leaving heavy snow, extensive flooding and widespread power outages. Since Friday, Red Cross chapters have been in contact with local emergency management agencies, have been alerting volunteers and have been preparing to open shelters. Volunteers in West Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Maine opened dozens of shelters Sunday, providing warm, safe accommodations, food and comfort to hundreds of people. Additional shelters are ready to open if needed in those states as well as in Pennsylvania.

Evansville Tornado Victims to Get New Homes (Disaster News Network, 4/17)

Sherry Southgate and her family have two important dates in their heads: Nov. 6, 2005 and Sept. 8, 2007.

The dates are worlds apart in emotions. Nov. 6, 2005, marks the date when a deadly tornado tore through Evansville, Ind., destroying numerous homes - including the Southgate home.

Sept. 8, 2007, marks the day volunteers will gather to build the new Southgate home as part of Habitat for Humanity of Evansville's "Operation Home Again" - a housing program for survivors of the tornadoes.

Habitat of Evansville announced in early April that construction of the first 27 of 55 homes for Operation Home Again will be completed in 2007. The building blitz will start in June.

HUD Approves \$429M for Texas Recovery (Presszoom, 4/16)

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson today approved a nearly \$429 million disaster recovery plan to help homeowners and local communities in Texas to recover from the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Texas plan approved today will offer grants of up to \$40,000 to qualified homeowners, restore affordable rental housing, and repair critical infrastructure in the state. The emergency funding is provided through HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and is part of President Bush's commitment to support Gulf Coast states in their rebuilding efforts. In addition to the funding approved today, HUD last year provided

\$74.5 million in CDBG disaster funding to support long-term recovery in Texas.

FL Steers \$100 Million to Storm Aid (St. Petersburg Times, 4/13)

Responding to outrage from local governments, state officials moved to redirect a \$100-million federal grant from the My Safe Florida Home mitigation program to victims of Hurricane Wilma. The decision relieved authorities in affected communities but also suggested that their long-held suspicions were true: Despite pronouncements that the \$100-million was available for Wilma victims, that was not what the original plan stated. But the complaints, a change in administrations and publicity about the controversy led to a new focus for the money. The amended grant proposal still must be approved by HUD. The \$100-million federal grant was part of a congressional aid package for communities hit hard by the 2005 hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Nonprofits' readiness for disaster studied (San Francisco Chronicle, 4/18)

San Francisco's nonprofit and faith-based organizations will probably be the first emergency responders for some neighborhoods if an earthquake strikes, according to city officials who announced on Tuesday the launch of a new study on how well prepared those organizations are for a large-scale disaster. The Fritz Institute, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that works on disaster-relief issues, will lead the two-year study, which is intended to identify gaps in preparedness of local groups that often serve the city's most at-risk populations. The research will lead to recommendations to city leaders and the philanthropic community about how they can best support the organizations so that all city residents receive the care they need in the event of a disaster. The study, unveiled at San Francisco's Glide Memorial Church, which played a major role in bringing services to residents after the 1989 Loma Prieta quake, is believed to be the first of its kind.

Drought Raises Alarm Among FL Officials (Tampa Tribune, 4/17)

Lack of rainfall has exacerbated drought and wildfire conditions in the state, particularly in South Florida, Gov. Charlie Crist was told Monday. Engineers may have to resort to unusual water movement strategies in the Everglades to stabilize drinking water supplies. It's not just a South Florida problem, though, Crist insisted. "It's a statewide drought," he said. "It's important that we're all watchful of that, that we don't use more water than necessary." Florida typically receives about 10 of its 54 inches of annual rainfall during the first three months of the year. This year, the state has received only 5.88 inches of rain. State meteorologist Ben Nelson said seasonal forecasts predict that conditions likely will not improve in the months ahead.

FDA Approves First U.S. Vaccine Against Avian Flu (Government Technology, 4/17)

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today announced the first approval in the United States of a vaccine for humans against the H5N1 influenza virus, commonly known as avian or bird flu. The vaccine could be used in the event the current H5N1 avian virus were to develop the capability to efficiently spread from human to human, resulting in the rapid spread of the disease across the globe. Should such an influenza

pandemic emerge, the vaccine may provide early limited protection in the months before a vaccine tailored to the pandemic strain of the virus could be developed and produced.

White House Opposes Catastrophic Insurance (Clarion Ledger, 4/12)

Lawmakers seeking an overhaul of the insurance industry got the disappointing news Wednesday that the White House opposes setting up a federal catastrophic insurance program. Edward Lazear, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, told members of the Senate banking committee that such a program would spread costs unfairly among taxpayers nationwide. "The insurance industry is healthy, and the private sector is well-equipped to provide insurance for hurricanes and other natural catastrophes, but state regulators and the federal government must allow the private market to function," Lazear testified at a committee hearing.

Bill would reward sturdier housing (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/12)

Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Insurance Commissioner Jim Donelon are pushing a legislative package that requires insurance companies to reward clients who take measures to protect their homes from hurricane damage. But Blanco said Wednesday she will not push legislation to grant state tax credits to families who renovate their homes to make them more hurricane-resistant. Blanco, a Democrat, and Donelon, a Republican, unveiled a five-point package of bills for the legislative session that opens April 30. They said the package is designed to balance consumer interests and rate relief with the needs of the insurance industry and ways to lure more companies to the state.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Water board laments ailing infrastructure (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/19)

New Orleans Sewerage & Water Board members is wrestling with a monumental infrastructure disaster left by the storm that the cash-poor agency cannot even begin to repair. During an emotional debate, board members took turns bemoaning what they described as a never-ending review that FEMA is conducting on their requests for more than \$300 million in flood damage reimbursements. And though they were able to vent, board members again took no action on the issue. For more than a year, water board officials have sparred with FEMA over the extent of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Even before the hurricane, the water system needed hundreds of millions of dollars in repairs to maintain efficient service. The cost to replace the pipe network alone is about \$3.2 billion, according to a December 2006 report by board consultants.

Schools Offer Bonuses to Out-of-State Teachers (N.O. Times Picayune, 4/19)

Bracing for a surge of up to 12,000 new students next year, Recovery District-operated schools and their charters will begin offering \$17,300 worth of incentives to out-of-state teachers who commit to work in New Orleans for two years beginning this fall. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously today for the plan, which will be entirely funded by federal money. The bonuses do not apply to current Recovery District teachers or those working outside the district. The plan offers \$5,000 per year for two years along with a \$400 monthly housing subsidy for the first year and a

onetime payment of \$2,500 to cover relocation expenses. Realizing that many existing Recovery District teachers could be roundly miffed to learn that they're not getting any bonuses, Louisiana Department of Education spokeswoman Meg Casper said they are "looking into the feasibility of doing it for anyone who's working in the Recovery District."

Blitz on to insure area children (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/17)

To reduce the ranks of uninsured children in the New Orleans region, the state is sending dozens of workers to pharmacies, health clinics and churches around the city this week to sign them up for free public health insurance plans. The "outreach blitz" is an effort to find thousands of children who qualify for public health insurance but have managed to elude the social workers, physicians and school nurses who endeavor every year to sign them up. Before Katrina, an estimated 16,000 children in the metro area were eligible for insurance but not enrolled. State policymakers have always scratched their heads at why so many families do not avail themselves of government benefits, but they agree the problem has gotten worse since the storm. Ruth Kennedy, director of the Louisiana Children's Health Insurance Program, said almost 68,000 children in greater New Orleans lost their health coverage after the storm when their parents changed jobs or let a government-sponsored policy lapse as they moved around during the evacuation. State workers and volunteers fanned across the city on Tuesday evening to recapture some of the kids who dropped off the public insurance rolls after the storm, and to sign others up for the first time.

Post-Katrina New Orleans Embraces Charter Schools (CNN, 4/17)

Before Katrina, city schools were plagued by mismanagement, a shortage of qualified teachers, crumbling buildings, poor student attendance and frequent spates of violence. Education officials said Katrina, which flooded 80 percent of New Orleans, created an opportunity for the flagging public school system to right itself, with charter schools as a centerpiece. Advocates preach patience. It will take time, they say, for the experiment to bear fruit. "Starting a charter school in the best of circumstances is difficult. Starting one in post-Katrina New Orleans is even harder," said Andy Smarick of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in Washington, D.C.

\$2.8 Million Verdict Against Allstate (Washington Post, 4/17)

Attorneys say a federal jury that awarded more than \$2.8 million to a man who lost his home to Hurricane Katrina sends a strong message to insurers who refused to pay thousands of other homeowners for damage from the storm. "Insurers should worry about taking any case to a jury," said David Rossmiller, a Portland, Ore.-based attorney who writes a Web journal on Katrina insurance cases and other industry issues. The U.S. District Court jury decided Monday that Allstate Insurance Co. did not pay Robert Weiss, of Slidell, enough money to cover wind damage to his home. Allstate had claimed that most of the damage was due to storm surge, an event not covered in its policy. But the jury concluded that the Northbrook, Ill.-based insurer owes Weiss \$561,600 for wind damage to his home and its contents, plus another \$2.25 million in damages and penalties for not paying the claim quickly enough following the Aug. 29, 2005, storm.

Katrina reconstruction effort lacks long-term strategy (GovExec.Com, 4/16)

The ongoing Gulf Coast recovery effort drew passing grades from the GAO Thursday but the Bush administration got a strong warning from Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., about stinting on money for levee reconstruction around New Orleans. At a hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Disaster Recovery Subcommittee, chaired by Landrieu, the GAO's Stanley Czerwinski said the administration's lead agencies – FEMA and HUD -- were doing a commendable job in meeting short-term needs of Hurricane Katrina victims but cautioned the panel that an effective long-term strategy for restoring the ravaged economies of Louisiana and Mississippi had yet to be settled. Former FDIC Chairman Donald Powell, President Bush's federal coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding, also testified and agreed that a "path must be drawn" for future recovery of the area.

Entergy: \$220 million in aid to steady rates (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/13)

Entergy New Orleans has signed contracts with both the state and an insurer to receive more than \$220 million to help offset its costs for repairing storm damage from Hurricane Katrina. The company has said that it must receive those funds before coming out of bankruptcy. A bankruptcy court judge must approve the contracts at a scheduled April 25 hearing before the utility can receive the money. Late Wednesday, Entergy signed a contract with the state Office of Community Development to receive \$171 million in federal Community Development Block Grant money. Entergy Corp. has also reached a settlement with Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance, a subsidiary of AIG Inc., that will yield \$53 million for Entergy New Orleans. The Louisiana Recovery Authority allocated up to \$200 million in CDBG money to the New Orleans utility for storm-related costs. The money is to directly offset rate increases Entergy had proposed to pay for its storm recovery costs. A consultant hired by the LRA said the \$200 million offsets a 13 percent rate increase on electric bills and a 36 percent rate increase on gas bills that, by law, Entergy could request.

Federal delays stall recovery, states say (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/13)

Officials working on recovery efforts in Louisiana and Mississippi told senators Thursday that federal regulations, along with continued turnover of key FEMA staffers, are slowing projects and frustrating their constituents, who hoped to see more progress 19 months after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. The complaints came in rapid-fire fashion during the first hearing by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, chaired by Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La. Landrieu said one of her top goals is to get Americans to refocus on the substantial challenges ahead, "to get their arms, their heads and hearts around the scope of the disaster."

Hurricane protection, coastal restoration plan (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/12)

A broad-based master plan for providing hurricane protection to southern Louisiana and restoring the state's fragile coastal wetlands won unanimous approval of the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. The authority, which oversees all state levee and restoration projects, will send the master plan and a recommendation for spending \$199 million on levee and wetland projects in fiscal year 2008 to the Legislature for approval

during its session that begins April 30. The Army Corps of Engineers is embarked on a parallel effort to develop a Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Plan to provide alternatives to Congress for how to protect the coast from a "Category 5" hurricane. The corps will include the state plan in its document, which will be forwarded to Congress in December, and corps Task Force Hope director Karen Durham-Aguilera said the agency will use the state plan as its "jumping off point" for its own plan.

Pontiff Fun Fest raises \$15,000 (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/12)

Pontiff Playground was swarming with people of all ages who were eager to assist in the facility's rebuilding process by attending Pontiff Fun Fest, the playground's first fundraiser since it was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The playground's Booster Club president is Dave Maginnis. He said he first had the idea for the fun fest in February and put fellow club member Wayne Winkler in charge of planning and organizing the event. "The entire event was planned in a couple of months," Winkler said. "We wanted to have it before it got too hot to keep attendance up." Along with food and live music, the fun fest, held on April 1, featured both a one-mile and 5K run with about 175 runners participating in those events. Overall, Winkler said, the event raised approximately \$15,000.

State to reap \$275M-plus for Katrina cottage plan (Clarion Ledger, 4/10)

Hurricane Katrina victims are cautiously embracing state and federal efforts to make their lives more comfortable by providing cottages. Mississippi will receive \$275,427,730 to roll out "Katrina cottages," Sen. Trent Lott announced in a news release Monday. The structures will replace the standard white travel trailers issued by the federal government after the August 2005 storm. The cottages will be distributed through a lottery system at the end of this month and are being touted as more permanent, safer and "prettier" than the trailers in which an estimated 80,000 people still are living. A quarter of the trailers now in use will be replaced with cottages this year. In December, FEMA officials awarded Mississippi a majority of the \$400 million funding for the alternative pilot housing program. The rest will go to Louisiana, Alabama, Florida and Texas. The program is intended to determine whether the cottages are a better form of disaster housing assistance than the trailers, which have been criticized as unsteady and in some cases hazardous to residents' health.

Study finds factors in N.O. evacuation (MS Sun Herald, 4/10)

Perceptions of racism and other factors influenced many black residents not to leave New Orleans as Hurricane Katrina approached, according to a limited examination by University of South Carolina researchers. Most of those who died when Katrina slammed into New Orleans two years ago were black residents, and the federal government's slow response led many to the conclusion their health and welfare were low priorities. USC's study, which the university said is the first examination of black evacuation response in a disaster, was based on the views of 53 black residents who were evacuated to Columbia after the storm.

Lump sum grants OK'd (New Orleans Times Picayune, 4/10)

Louisiana received final federal approval Monday to pay all Road Home grant recipients, even those with mortgages, in lump sums transferred directly to their bank accounts. Every Road Home applicant who closes on or after Wednesday can collect the full amount of the award in an electronic transfer, said officials from the Louisiana Recovery Authority, the appointed agency that created the Road Home program, and the state Office of Community Development, which oversees the distribution of the \$7.5 billion in federal aid for homeowners. The change will not speed the pace of awards, because homeowners still must complete the application process, but it will give homeowners all of their money at closing.

New Orleans awash in drugs, addicts more alone than ever (LA Times, 4/8)

Medical specialists and drug abuse counselors say the stresses of life since Katrina have caused substance abuse to skyrocket. Meanwhile, the city's medical and psychological services are greatly impaired, and access to free medical detox facilities is zero. Yet all kinds of illicit drugs are more plentiful since Katrina, according to law enforcement officials. Authorities think an increase in the drug trade has helped increase overall crime. They point not only to dealers but users desperate for their next fix. Since Katrina, most addicts seeking admission to a long-term inpatient recovery program have had to pay for initial medical detox at a private facility or else try to get clean on their own. Others are referred to Louisiana's only existing medical detox facility, which has 12 beds and is in Lafayette, more than 100 miles from New Orleans.

Trial set in suit over Katrina claims (Akron Beacon Journal, 4/8)

Allstate Insurance Co. policyholders Robert and Meryll Weiss blame Katrina's winds and possibly a storm-spawned tornado for demolishing their Slidell home. But the Northbrook, Ill.-based company concluded that the hurricane's storm surge was responsible for most of the damage. Allstate and other insurers say their policies cover a hurricane's wind but not its rising water. Hundreds of homeowners in Louisiana and Mississippi have sued their insurers for refusing to cover billions of dollars in damage from Katrina's storm surge. Jury selection starts Monday in the trial of the Weisses' lawsuit, only the second Katrina insurance case to be tried so far in a Louisiana federal court. They had a federal flood insurance policy and a separate Allstate homeowner's policy with limits of \$343,000 for the dwelling and \$240,100 for personal property. Allstate paid the Weisses \$350,000 for coverage under their flood policy but only \$29,483 for structural damage to their home and \$14,787 for additional living expenses under their homeowner policy.