

Disaster News Update –August 13 to 19, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Maryland, Virginia, Washington, DC, North Carolina, South Carolina, Indiana, Ohio, Florida, Hawaii, Arkansas, Kentucky
- **Extreme Heat:** Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Missouri, Tennessee, West Virginia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Arizona
- **Fire:** Montana, Idaho, Hawaii, Virginia, California, Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, North Dakota, Virginia, North Carolina, Michigan, Hawaii, Utah, Florida
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia
- **Hurricane:** Texas, Oklahoma
- **Technological Disaster:** New York (Structural Fire)

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Texas](#): Hurricane Dean (8/18 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Maine](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (8/8)
- [Vermont](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (8/3)
- [Micronesia](#): Drought (7/31 – Emergency Declaration)
- [Nebraska](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/24)
- [North Dakota](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/17)
- Fire Declarations: [Hawaii \(8/17\)](#), [Montana \(8/16\)](#), [Hawaii \(8/14\)](#), [Wyoming \(8/12\)](#), [Montana \(8/4\)](#), [South Dakota \(7/21\)](#), [Utah \(7/21\)](#), [Washington, \(7/16\)](#), [Nevada \(7/16\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Volunteers needed to help communities weather disaster (Simi Valley Acorn, 8/17)
Experts at the National Weather Service are projecting a 75 percent chance that the Atlantic hurricane season will be above normal this year. When such devastating natural disasters strike, volunteers are often able to help communities weather the storm. Jonathan Gibbs, director of 1-800-Volunteer.org, a service of the Points of Light Foundation said that untrained volunteers often show up at disaster areas unprepared, potentially creating a "disaster within a disaster." Lacking direction and practical knowledge of the situation, these good-intentioned individuals may actually hinder the recovery effort and put an additional strain on the limited resources available to aid the victims. The Points of Light Foundation created a website to serve as a national initiative to pre-register, affiliate and inform volunteers who would like to assist in times of disaster, enabling organizations within the disaster area to locate and match skilled volunteers with local needs. HelpinDisaster.org is part of an online, community-based volunteer network, 1800Volunteer.org, which the foundation built for volunteer centers

to manage. The system is used in 38 states by more than 175 volunteer centers and nearly 30,000 organizations, and provides access to nearly 200,000 registered volunteers.

Volunteer Agencies Respond to NY Tornadoes (Disaster News Network, 8/15)

Disaster relief organizations are continuing to respond to a tornado that affected 200 families in the Bay Ridge area of Brooklyn. New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) and the New York City Office of Emergency Management (NYCOEM) partnered to get information out about debris removal, home repairs and other services. "We are deploying our volunteers to provide outreach to homeowners so that they are correctly informed on what they are entitled to, and to give them information on how to register for free debris and tree removal or home repair," said Peter Gudaitis, NYDIS Executive Director. The National Weather Service classified the early morning Aug. 8 tornado as an EF-2 with winds of 110 to 135 mph. The tornado tore off roofs, shattered windows and knocked trees down onto homes and cars. Parts of Staten Island and Maspeth, Queens, also experienced damage and flooding. Forecasters said a tornado was a rarity in the area. A team from Mennonite Disaster Service was in Bay Ridge to provide cleanup and debris removal assistance.

TX Disaster Response Group Helps After Flood (DisasterVolunteers.Org, 8/15)

A disaster response team from Blanco County, Texas, organized in the spring was one of the first responders to the catastrophic flooding in the Marble Falls area in mid-July. Team members opened the doors to the First United Methodist Church in Johnson City as a possible shelter on two different occasions, first at the request of the Blanco County Sheriff's Department and then by the American Red Cross. As waters quickly receded, however, the shelter was not needed. Within days of the flood, the team was on the phone checking with people in flooded areas to assess needs. A plan was developed to send aid and assessment teams as soon as the Marble Falls area was ready. The group was soon "on the ground" in Burnet County, where it examined the damage first-hand in Marble Falls and in nearby Granite Shoals, about seven miles away, and lined up resources and volunteers. The area is about 50 miles northwest of Austin. The first weekend after the flooding, more than three dozen volunteers hit the streets of Granite Shoals to canvass the flooded area for the city and report back on where they found flood damage and what assistance residents needed. In addition to local volunteers from Granite Shoals and Marble Falls, canvassers came from Blanco, Wimberley, Round Rock and San Antonio.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

N/A

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Erin Remnants Drench TX, OK (Disaster News Network, 8/19)

The remnants of Tropical Storm Erin caused flash flooding across Oklahoma Saturday and Sunday.

The National Weather Service reported that some areas received 10 inches of rain. Flood and flash flood warnings are posted for central and eastern parts of the state.

Some 20,000 people were without power in the state. Officials in Kingfisher, Okla., and surrounding areas reported numerous swift water rescues of people stranded in their vehicles. Television images also showed farms and homes underwater. Watonga and Lawton reported some damages.

High winds and a few isolated tornadoes also damaged structures in the state.

Texas on Saturday was still dealing with Tropical Depression Erin, which drenched the state with nearly a foot of rain in some areas.

Some flood warnings are still posted for Texas, stretching from the southeast to the northern counties.

Erin dumped more than 11 inches of rain on Houston and 9 inches on San Antonio, where as many as 90 homes were reported damaged.

At least five people were reported killed in storm-related incidents in Texas

Southern Heat Wave Finally Eases (Washington Post, 8/19)

Heat-stricken residents in some areas finally got a small break Sunday from the oppressive triple-digit temperatures that have killed at least 49 people in the Southeast and Midwest. Temperatures reached 94 in Memphis, well short of the predicted 102 and the first time in 10 days it didn't break 100. It was forecast to reach 96 on Monday before hovering near the century mark the rest of the week. The local health department said the city's heat index _ a measure that factors in humidity to describe how hot it feels _ has broken 100 every day since June 27. Temperatures also finally dropped into the mid-90s and upper 80s Sunday in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and Missouri after more than a week of triple-digits. Americus, in southwest Georgia, was still expected to reach 99 degrees Monday. Experts warned that the heat and extended drought conditions could mean an early start to the fire season, which usually doesn't begin until October. Leaves of some species of trees have already begun to brown and drop to the ground as trees suffer continued stress from the recent extreme weather that has blanketed the South coupled with April's late freeze. That will create wildfire conditions during the closing weeks of summer.

Drought Hitting Farmers Across US Hard (Disaster News Network, 8/18)

Drought conditions are seriously impacting farming and public water supplies across more than 25 states, causing economic impacts in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to officials across the nation. "Traveling around the state I hear other farmers complain that it's a little dry," said Buddy Hance, deputy secretary of agriculture for Maryland. "But I tell them, 'You haven't seen dry.' For my career in agriculture, this drought is certainly going to rank up there as one of the worst. Time will tell which one is the worst." Hance lives in Calvert County in southern Maryland, where the dry conditions have impacted the state the hardest. A fourth-generation farmer, he grows corn and soybeans and said his crops are past the point of no return. "The corn crop is pretty much to the point where rain won't help it much," he said. "It's getting near the end of its maturity stage. The soybeans are near the end of pod development and it's a critical stage for rainfall. They've got a little potential if we get some rain, but the long-range forecast is not very optimistic." He said as much as two-thirds of Maryland is in a "significant

drought." The state just received a disaster declaration from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which allows farmers to apply for low-interest loans.

President Declares State Of Emergency For The State Of Texas (FEMA, 8/18)

The President today declared an emergency exists in the State of Texas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local response efforts due to the emergency conditions resulting from Hurricane Dean beginning on August 17, 2007, and continuing. The President's action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts that have the purpose of alleviating the hardship and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population. The declaration provides appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in the counties of Aransas, Bee, Bexar, Brazoria, Brooks, Calhoun, Cameron, Chambers, Dallas, Fort Bend, Galveston, Goliad, Harris, Hidalgo, Jackson, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Live Oak, Kleberg, Matagorda, McLennan, Nacogdoches, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio, Smith, Tarrant, Travis, Victoria, Walker, Wharton, and Willacy. Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize, and provide at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance, will be provided at 75 percent Federal funding. R. David Paulison, FEMA Administrator, named Kenneth Clark as the Federal Coordinating Officer for Federal recovery operations in the affected area.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Stricter building codes pay off (Lakeland Ledger (FL), 8/18)

Newer homes suffered less damage than older homes, and their owners filed fewer insurance claims, when Hurricane Charley blasted through Charlotte County three years ago, a study released this week shows. Homes built before 1996 suffered an average loss of \$24 per square foot. Those built between 1996 and 2004 suffered an average loss of \$14 per square foot, a decrease of 42 percent. The Institute for Business and Home Safety, based in Tampa, worked with researchers at the University of Florida and the FEMA Mitigation Assessment Team to study damage caused by Hurricane Charley based on closed insurance claims. Numbers shared by one insurance company, Poe, showed that claims dropped by 60 percent for homes constructed under the newer building codes. Newer homes needed only partial replacement of roofs; window damage was primarily limited to screens; and garage door repairs were minor, such as track adjustment or dent repairs. The better performance of newer homes was attributed to tougher statewide building codes. After Hurricane Andrew devastated South Florida in 1992, coastal areas, such as Charlotte County, strengthened their codes starting in 1995. A stronger statewide building code went into effect in 2002.

DHS IG urges better post-disaster data sharing (GovExec.Com, 8/16)

The DHS inspector general is urging FEMA to streamline information sharing to help law enforcement agencies locate missing children, registered sex offenders and fugitive felons during disasters. A report released by the IG this week showed that after

Hurricane Katrina, law enforcement agencies struggled to get information from FEMA that would have helped them track down missing children and criminals. Among those missing after the storm were 5,000 children, more than 2,000 sex offenders and a number of fugitive felons. The FBI, New Orleans district attorney's office and state and local law enforcement agencies had to go through a time-consuming process to gain access to FEMA's disaster recovery assistance files. The agencies were not granted direct access due to FEMA's concerns about improperly disclosing information protected by the 1974 Privacy Act.

Bio-threat preparedness called lacking (LA Times, 8/15)

The ability to detect a biological attack quickly or even a naturally occurring outbreak of influenza is years behind schedule because of a lack of leadership by DHS, according to a new audit. Although President Bush ordered the national surveillance program in 2004 to detect biological threats and ensure a rapid response, the program "is falling short of its objectives," wrote DHS Inspector General Richard L. Skinner. Final plans for the system -- designed to gather information from food, animal, air and water monitoring, as well as public health data -- are still incomplete because the system was shifted repeatedly within the department and was chronically short on staffing, the report found. A DHS spokesman said the problems were being addressed and the system would be running by September 2008.

LI Survey finds less than 15% of households prepared (Newsday NY, 8/15)

The lights go out. A hurricane pounds the Island. There's an outbreak of highly contagious flu. Terrorists have attacked New York City. Are we ready? Experts grappled with that question yesterday at a Catastrophe Readiness program in Centereach, saying readiness for a major storm or other disaster is more important than ever in the post-Katrina and post-9/11 era. "We are in theory overdue [for a hurricane]," said Matthew Crosson, president of the Long Island Association, the Island's largest business group. "Somewhere along the line ... it's going to happen." Yet a recent survey of 200 registered voters conducted by the Middle Country Library showed that they believed that less than 15 percent of average Long Island households are prepared to deal with a potential catastrophe. The survey of Centereach and Selden residents also found more than three-quarters of respondents think a catastrophe is imminent. "Everybody says they're prepared, but they're not," said Albert DeStefano, a salesman for Generation Power Systems, residential standby generators, who was at the event.

Norfolk to stop publishing bus stops, citing safety issues (Pilot Online, 8/8)

Norfolk Public Schools will no longer list school bus stops in newspapers or on its Web site. "As the world is changing, we just felt like it was the prudent thing to do," said John W. Hazelette, Norfolk's senior director of transportation services. "There's just a lot of information that's out there that we don't think should be out there." Reasons for the change include custody disputes between parents, terrorism concerns and possible abduction from a bus stop, Hazelette said. Bus routes, stop locations and times have been published in newspapers and on the Internet in the past. The division is in the process of removing the old information from the Norfolk city schools Web site. Norfolk is one of four school divisions in the region, along with Newport News, York and

Williamsburg/James City County, that have stopped publishing its school bus routes. Suffolk Public Schools is reconsidering its policy on publishing bus routes. Lonnie Reavis, Suffolk's school transportation coordinator, said his department has discussed not posting bus route information because pedophiles might use the information. "It's always a concern," said Reavis, whose division will transport about 14,000 students this year.

DHS Develops Public Preparedness Videos (Ready.Gov Press Release, N/D)

In order to encourage Americans to prepare themselves, their families and their communities, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in partnership with The Advertising Council, has created instructional videos to help educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to all kinds of emergencies. The first set of instructional videos, released in English and Spanish, are designed to detail how American families get an emergency supply kit, make a family emergency plan, and be informed about the different types of emergencies in their community. Homeland Security and the Ad Council have also created additional instructional videos with specific information for pet owners, older Americans and individuals with disabilities and other special needs.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Brookings Releases Katrina Recovery Report (Homeland Security Institute, 8/17)

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, "the New Orleans region has recovered most of its population and economic base," according to the Brookings Institution, which has published a second-anniversary report on recovery from the hurricane. "Yet, in the past year, progress has slowed, especially in the city, as critical public infrastructure--schools, law enforcement, and health care--remains weak. As recovery continues, a strong federal, state, and local partnership is necessary to ensure a safe and economically robust region for all."

Trauma shapes Katrina's kids (USA Today, 8/16)

New Orleans pediatrician Corey Hebert dreads the rainy weeks when he knows he'll face about 20 sobbing, screaming children in full-blown panic attacks. "They can't be calmed because they're terrified another hurricane is coming," he says. Parents bring them in because there are no therapists around. Hebert says about 5% of children in his medical practice had mental-health problems before Hurricane Katrina; now it's 50%. Psychologist Leslie Higgins, whose suburban practice is full, sees storm-related trouble daily. "If they were prone to anxiety, they've become more anxious. If they were prone to acting out, they've become much more defiant and irritable. Many are depressed, and this is how depression shows up in kids." Nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina struck, the toll the storm and slow recovery are taking on Gulf Coast children will be among the topics covered at the American Psychological Association meeting. The conference begins Friday in San Francisco. There are no overall numbers on the scope of children's problems. In a study last fall, two out of five New Orleans students in fourth through 12th grades had symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. About as many have the same symptoms in 2007 studies still being analyzed, says Howard Osofsky,

chairman of the psychiatry department at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center. Children are doing fairly well in Jefferson Parish near New Orleans, an area with less property destruction but one taking in many students displaced by Katrina, psychologist Denise Newman will report at the psychology meeting. About 21% of middle and high school kids had mental health or behavior problems, according to surveys last fall and this spring; 9% were serious. The figures are not significantly different from average rates in public schools, she says.

FEMA Launches Unique Communications Tool (FEMA, 8/16)

FEMA announce a unique, new Web site devoted solely to matters of recovery from hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The FEMA Gulf Coast Recovery Web site will be an essential resource for anyone interested in FEMA's involvement and the progress being made following the devastation of the 2005 hurricanes. The site, www.fema.gov/gulfcoastrecovery, contains news and statistics; the latest reports and graphic descriptions of federal aid; interactive maps showing locations and descriptions of rebuilding projects; important phone numbers, links and other contact info; as well as background information and essential guidelines on preparedness and mitigation. "The purpose of this site is to inform families, trying to recover and rebuild their homes and lives, about what FEMA has accomplished during the last two years," said Gil Jamieson, FEMA's Deputy Administrator for Gulf Coast Recovery.

Katrina victims struggle mentally (USA Today, 8/16)

Many Gulf Coast residents still feel the wallop of Hurricane Katrina nearly two years later. Mental illness is double the pre-storm levels, rising numbers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and there is a surge in adults who say they're thinking of suicide. A government survey released Wednesday to USA TODAY shows no improvement in mental health from a year ago. About 14% have symptoms of severe mental illness. An additional 20% have mild to moderate mental illness, says Ronald Kessler of Harvard Medical School, who led the study. The big surprise: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which typically goes away in a year for most disaster survivors, has increased: 21% have the symptoms vs. 16% in 2006. Common symptoms include the inability to stop thinking about the hurricane, nightmares and emotional numbness.

66% of Residents return to New Orleans (USA Today, 8/13)

The New Orleans region has recovered a significant portion of its pre-Katrina population, helped along by an increase in Hispanic families, but basic services such as schools, hospitals and public transportation still are slow to rebound, according to a report released today. The New Orleans Index, a look at several indicators that show how the city and region are rebounding from the 2005 disaster, shows the city has regained 66% of its pre-Katrina population as of June 2007. "It's pretty much in line with what the mayor forecast a while ago," said Ceeon Quiett, a spokeswoman for Mayor Ray Nagin, referring to the population growth. The population numbers are based on U.S. Postal Service data of households actively getting mail service in the region. "Crime remains unacceptably high in the city, eliciting real and legitimate concerns from residents and business owners," the report states. Essential criminal justice buildings, including police

Prepared by Project TADS for the Corporation for National and Community Service

stations, still are in need of repair. Two police stations and police headquarters continue to operate from trailers supplied by FEMA.