

## **Disaster News Update –August 4 to 12, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Nebraska, South Dakota, Arizona, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, Ohio, West Virginia, Arkansas, Hawaii
- **Extreme Heat:** North Carolina, Alabama
- **Fire:** Montana, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota, Michigan, Florida
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** Pennsylvania
- **Mining Disaster:** Utah
- **Tornado:** New York

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

- [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)
- [Oklahoma:](#) Severe Storms, Flooding, and Tornadoes (7/7)
- Fire Declarations: [Montana \(8/4\)](#), [South Dakota \(7/21\)](#), [Utah \(7/21\)](#), [Washington \(7/16\)](#), [Nevada \(7/16\)](#), [Oregon \(7/12\)](#), [Washington \(7/8\)](#), [South Dakota \(7/8\)](#), [Nevada \(7/8\)](#), [California \(7/8\)](#), [Utah \(7/7\)](#), [California \(7/7\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Red Cross gets used to going distance** (N.O. Times Picayune, 8/12)

Well-seasoned in immediate disaster relief, the American Red Cross swept into the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina to provide shelter, water, food and other supplies. But as the storm's two-year anniversary nears, Red Cross officials find themselves outside their comfort zone -- and traditional role -- as they seek to support long-term recovery.

Visiting New Orleans as part of a Gulf Coast sweep, the Red Cross's new president, former Internal Revenue Service commissioner Mark Everson, said, "It is not our intent to get into the recovery business." Actually, the Red Cross, a 126-year-old organization known for providing quick aid in times of fire, war, earthquake or destructive weather, already has engaged in long-term recovery work since the flood here. And that move came largely because the agency could not immediately spend the entire \$2.1 billion in donations after the major 2005 hurricanes, finding itself with \$175 million left over after its early mission tapered off, officials said. Not wanting to break faith with donors who designated their money for hurricane relief, the Red Cross has since spent \$45 million, most of it in Louisiana and Mississippi, on longer-term recovery needs such as case management, substance abuse counseling, data collection, summer camp programs for

children and grants for job retraining or home repairs, said spokeswoman Jeanne Ellinport. That leaves \$130 million to be applied to similar purposes, although a slice of the money might be reserved for unidentified "emerging needs."

**Red Cross Faces Criticism Over Katrina Aid Program** (NY Times, 8/10)

A little-known American Red Cross aid program for victims of Hurricane Katrina has unleashed a wave of criticism from evacuees, who say that the program, which pays up to \$20,000 for building materials, used cars, job training and other unmet needs, has been too secretive and strict, and its money too limited. Red Cross officials say the \$39 million program, Means to Recovery, has only enough money to serve about 4,000 families who have undertaken an extensive planning process with caseworkers from the Red Cross and other charities. Families that have not yet started that process or made an appointment to do so can no longer be accommodated, they said last week. More than 80,000 phone calls have poured in to the Red Cross and protesters have picketed its offices since evacuees began drawing attention to the program three weeks ago. The flare-up illustrates the tricky nature of deploying limited finances in the face of unlimited need, and the frustration of evacuees who have seen slow progress in the rebuilding of their own lives and of the ravaged Gulf Coast. Evacuees and charities whose caseworkers have applied for money for their clients accuse the Red Cross of obstruction, pointing out that initially the application form was more than 20 pages long and that some families have waited months for a response. Because the program was not advertised, many families had no opportunity to apply.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

**Preparation can be crucial for seniors, disabled** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 8/12)

For seniors and persons with chronic illnesses or disabilities, hurricane preparations are more complex, but with some advance planning, much of the stress can be alleviated or even prevented. LeslieAnn Ciotti, program manager for the Jefferson Council on Aging's Aging and Disability Resource Center, is working with the Jefferson Parish Office of Emergency Management, Senior Citizens Services and Mobility Impaired Transportation Service to assess the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities who may need hurricane evacuation assistance and then provide appropriate arrangements. The JCOA's Aging and Disability Resource Center is accepting applications for those citizens who are elderly and/or handicapped and do not have the means to evacuate by themselves. The center has an application packet that interested persons can complete and return to the JCOA so that they are included in a list to be used by emergency personnel in the event of a mandatory evacuation. Applicants who are medically fragile or technology-dependent should have their primary care physician complete the medical form included in the packet in order to expedite triage at the time of evacuation.

**Better shelter access sought for disabled** (San Francisco Chronicle, 8/10)

Disability rights advocates sued Oakland on Thursday, claiming the city has failed to adequately plan to shelter the disabled in the event of a disaster. The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers and Californians for Disability Rights Inc.

said they hope the lawsuit, filed in Alameda County Superior Court, forces the city to update its disaster plan so shelters and resources are accessible in the event of an earthquake, fire or other disaster. "They know they need to do this, and they've been dragging their feet for years," said Jennifer Weiser Bezoza, attorney for Disability Rights Advocates. Alex Katz, spokesman for the Oakland city attorney's office, said city officials will meet next week with the groups bringing the suit in an effort to resolve the matter outside of court.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Displaced Tornado Residents Find New Community** (Washington Post, 8/12)

Joan Hayse is trying hard to make her new house here feel like a home. Joan and her husband, Carl, are two of the 383 people who have moved into a new mobile home park, assembled by FEMA for Greensburg residents who lost their homes in a tornado on May 4. The park is one of the most stark changes to the landscape of this western Kansas town, which was almost whipped off the map by a tornado more than two miles wide. Now that debris from homes and businesses has been trucked away to landfills, the park is giving some residents a feeling of community they have lacked. According to FEMA spokesman Greg Hughes, 250 of the 60-foot-long white trailers line a few dirt and gravel roads just southeast of the city limits. There is room for more homes, but Hughes said he thinks the 250 may meet the demand. Though they are all new, dirt from the streets has left a thin film of dust on the homes. Straw is spread around each one to serve as a yard, helping to keep down the dust. Many families living in the park are like the Hayses, trying to make their new surroundings feel like home. Potted plants and satellite dishes adorn some of the wooden porches. Barbecue grills sit outside. Most of the cars parked out front are new, replacements for vehicles that were destroyed in the tornado. Even pink yard flamingos have made an appearance.

### **Storms in Pittsburgh Cause Damages, Power Outages** (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 8/11)

The intensity of Thursday's storms continued to be felt yesterday in Pittsburgh's Uptown section as many residents and businesses remained without electricity for most of the day and three buildings with substantial damage were condemned. Mayor Luke Ravenstahl toured several hard-hit neighborhoods with public safety officials to assess storm damage. He started in Uptown and moved on to Squirrel Hill, Hays and the West End, where some streets were still closed yesterday morning. "Overall, we've been fortunate in the city, especially when compared to the county," Mr. Ravenstahl said while standing outside Harry's Barbershop at Fifth Avenue and Moultrie Street. The brick building was sliced apart by fierce winds. Mr. Ravenstahl told reporters Uptown that he would take quick action to have storm-damaged buildings condemned and demolished. Three buildings and two garages were condemned as a result of the storm, said Paul Loy, demolition manager for the city. Electricity was slowly restored to Uptown residents throughout the day. Fallen trees were removed and shattered windows were being either boarded or repaired. Several residents, anxious about not having electricity and upset about varying degrees of damage to their homes, visited with their neighbors and shared horror stories about their storm experience.

**Colorado Recovery Continues** (Disaster News Network, 8/11)

Mary Rushton knows that everyone who has come to Holly to help with the tornado recovery has a good heart, and that's needed as the recovery may last longer than originally thought. "They're willing to take a weekend or a week to come in and help people they don't even know," said Rushton, case manager for the Holly Recovery Task Force. "It's been great to meet them all. It's probably my favorite part of this job." People remain in need following the March 28 tornado that destroyed 48 homes and damaged 114 others. The twister also killed two people in the southeast Colorado town of just over 1,000 residents. Rushton and the Holly Recovery Task Force were working on 160 cases, ranging from assisting with rent and mortgage payments to securing volunteer teams for home repairs. Hundreds of volunteers have cleaned up debris and repaired and rebuilt homes.

**A Massive FEMA Effort To Rebuild MS's Schools** (FEMA Press Release, 8/10)

The rebuilding of schools on the Mississippi Gulf Coast is a top priority for FEMA, which has committed more than \$185 million in rebuilding funds to all 11 of the public school districts on the coast, plus \$49.5 million for private schools, \$30 million for public higher education and \$4.9 million to schools in other parts of the state. More than 100 schools in the three coastal counties will receive FEMA rebuilding funds. Meanwhile, in other parts of Mississippi affected by Hurricane Katrina, 71 more public school districts are also slated for FEMA assistance. "They've done a great job for us," said Henry Arledge, superintendent of the 13,000-student Harrison County School District, referring to both FEMA and its local partner in state government, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). "Their contributions have really helped the local area. They helped the school district to get organized to get back on its feet." The sheer number of school rebuilding projects, with many separate FEMA worksheets assigned to the schools hardest hit by storm damage, makes the task of isolating specific numbers of projects a matter of interpretation. The worksheets themselves name at least 93 individual public schools on the coast as receiving FEMA attention, with grant funds administered by MEMA. And this is aside from district-wide aid that will benefit all schools in a given district, and large projects at the university level and at private schools. In the 93 public schools in the worksheets, more than 560 rebuilding projects are being funded by FEMA. In the other 71 public school districts in Mississippi that are getting FEMA assistance, more than 400 projects are underway. With the three coastal counties this makes 82 public school districts and nearly 1,000 projects.

**NY Struggles After Tornado** (Daily News, 8/10)

A day after the ferocious twister - spawned by one of the most powerful storms in city history - tore through Brooklyn, millions of commuters returned to the subways and got back to work. But dozens of New Yorkers were wondering where they would spend the night and how they would repair their homes. Across southern Brooklyn, there was a cacophony of hammering and sawing as toppled trees were removed, damaged cars were towed and homeowners began making repairs. Sen. Chuck Schumer called on FEMA to fast-track federal aid to the hardest-hit neighborhoods in Bay Ridge and Sunset Park. "Local businesses and residents are dealing with something that hasn't happened in more

than a century," said Schumer (D-N.Y.). "This storm hit Bay Ridge and Sunset Park like a ton of bricks." The city Office of Emergency Management released a staggering accounting of the raging storm: 60 buildings were severely damaged, and more than half of those were evacuated; 30 people were left homeless; more than 500 trees were toppled.

**President Declares Major Disaster For Maine** (FEMA, 8/8)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Maine to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding during the period of July 11-12, 2007. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe storms and inland and coastal flooding in Oxford County. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures in all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Albert L. Lewis as the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Lewis 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.

**PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

**Hurricane forecasters cast dark cloud over rest of season** (Newark Star Ledger, 8/10)

Though it's been a relatively quiet hurricane season so far, the worst is most likely still to come, climate experts warned yesterday. "The conditions we predicted earlier this year have arrived in time for the peak hurricane months of August, September and October," said Gerry Bell, chief hurricane forecaster for the NOAA. "Things are ripe for an above-normal season." NOAA actually pulled back slightly on its initial forecast in May, but with "high confidence" predicted there will be 13 to 16 named storms, with seven to 9 becoming hurricanes - three to five of them major - before the 2007 season ends Nov. 30. With the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina approaching, Bell said climate factors that produced that powerful storm are in place again this year. They include warmer-than-normal sea surface temperatures and the formation of a La Niña cycle, which contribute to longer storms and more landfalls.

**Fire Grants Provide Over \$16.5M to Firefighters** (FEMA, 8/10)

FEMA announced the third round of awards under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program. Through this third round of awards, 164 departments will receive a total of nearly \$13 million. In addition, funds from the FY 2006 AFG program will be distributed to 36 fire departments and emergency medical service organizations totaling \$3.7 million. In total, the FY 2007 AFG alone will provide over \$490 million to fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations across the nation, with grants being distributed on a weekly basis over the next several months. "The recent challenges faced by Minneapolis firefighters and first responders, reminds all of us to the importance of these much needed federal grants," said United States Fire

Administrator Greg Cade. "Responding to all emergencies requires the best equipment, training and management of resources are available to this nation's firefighters. We do not know which department will face today's emergencies, but these funds will make it possible for the firefighters to have the right tools to do the right things to protect people as we continue to build a culture of preparedness at the local level." Since FY 2001, and including FY 2007, over \$3.3 billion in AFG funding has been distributed to fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical services organizations for response equipment, personal protective equipment, vehicles, and training. AFG is a highly competitive program. FEMA received more than 20,000 applications requesting over \$3 billion in funding under the FY 2007 AFG

**Website Teaches Storm Preparedness** (Disaster News Network, 8/6)

When Chris Bennett moved to Florida, one of his goals was to make sure he was prepared for hurricane season. "My instinct was to go online and find what types of resources were out there to tell me what I needed to do, what I needed to prepare, what I needed to purchase, basically from start to finish what resources were available to me," he said. What he said he discovered was that the information was available on the Web, but it was spread among various sites and navigating to it often was difficult. "Unfortunately I did not find much out there," Bennett recalled. "There really just wasn't a site devoted to and centered around the issue of family hurricane preparedness." Bennett set out to change that, developing the Web site [www.onestorm.org](http://www.onestorm.org) as a one-stop location where people living in hurricane-prone areas could create a customized hurricane plan for their specific needs. Bennett, along with his business partners, designed the site to incorporate information and recommendations from the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency as well as from local and state emergency management agencies. Listed as advisers to the site are Max Mayfield, former director of the National Hurricane Center, Bryan Norcross, hurricane analyst for CBS News and author of Hurricane Almanac, and Ada R. Monzon, chief meteorologist for Univision Puerto Rico. The site requires a user to spend about 10 to 15 minutes entering personal information – including name, address, age, medications taken, pets and so on – then provides a shopping list of items required during a storm. The user indicates whether those items are on hand, need to be added or if they are not applicable.

**GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**Road Home turns into absentee landlord** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 8/12)

With the ring of a nearby pile-driver clanging on the London Avenue Canal floodwall nearby, Hilton Prosper takes a break from rebuilding his mother's house and glares at the weed-choked property next door, with its shattered yard lamp and tattered strands of blue roof tarp dangling from the sagging eaves. "I was the last one to cut that grass, two months ago. Hey, if it's going to make my house look better, you know?" Prosper said. "But I can't control what other people do." Trouble is, the derelict owners aren't people, but rather a government-created agency: Road Home Corp., the depository for all properties of Road Home grant recipients who opt to sell to the state. Worse, the owner is a government-financed agency in the throes of poverty -- with no immediate plans to gut,

secure or maintain any of the more than 700 properties it already owns, with 91 percent of them in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes, and the nearly 20,000 it expects to eventually buy statewide. Jerry Reaux, chairman of the Road Home Corp., said the corporation is working with a \$2.5 million line of credit, barely enough to hire staff and set up computer databases. His seven-member board has received proposals from companies to maintain and secure the properties, but Reaux, a banker from Lafayette, said they won't be able to sign a contract until the state Office of Community Development sends more federal block grant money.

**St. Bernard wants dead trees removed** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 8/10)

Hoping to clear the parish of potentially dangerous debris before any tropical weather threatens, the St. Bernard Parish Council has authorized parish government to enter private property to take out dead trees and brush. Parish President Henry "Junior" Rodriguez told the council at its meeting this week that dead and damaged trees in danger of falling across evacuation routes or on homes will be the priority. "This is a very serious problem," Rodriguez said. Rodriguez said United Recovery Group, the parish's debris-collecting contractor, won't go on private property without the authorization from the government. He said the Federal Emergency Management Agency will reimburse the parish for taking out the trees and other debris; otherwise the parish doesn't have the money to cover it. It isn't known how much it will cost to sweep the parish for dead trees. But while most council members supported the measure, Councilman Lynn Dean said the measure raises constitutional issues. Dean argued that government shouldn't have the right to enter private property to take down trees, even those that might pose a danger to the community. If a neighbor is worried about another neighbor's dead tree, he should take him to court, Dean said. "This is unconstitutional what we're trying to do here," he added.

**N.O. Homeowners still get notices of demolition** (N.O. Times Picayune, 8/10)

The pink notice that appeared in April on Robert Lucien's flooded house in Gentilly warning of an impending government demolition prompted the lifelong New Orleans resident to take two swift steps: First, Lucien tore down the sticker. Then, he made a bee-line for City Hall. In appealing the condemnation of his home as an "imminent health threat," he offered a letter showing that a nonprofit group planned to clean out the ungutted property, and a city-issued permit he had secured to rebuild. He walked away with a signed receipt assuring him the city would take the house off its list of tear-downs. So it came as a shock when Lucien, who lives in a FEMA trailer park in St. Roch, dropped by his one-story Wilton Drive house on July 12 to find the electricity cut off, the door lock broken and colorful Xs painted on the outer walls. Spotting the telltale signs of impending demolition, Lucien rushed back to City Hall, where a clerk said the house, which by then had been gutted, was scheduled to be knocked down the next day. Though he secured another written confirmation that his home would be spared, he didn't trust it - - and spent the day and night hunkered down in front of his home, girding for a stand-off with bulldozers, which never came. While his house still stands, Lucien fumes over his bungled case.

**Area has 1,700 Katrina refugees** (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 8/8)

Nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, there are still more than 1,288 displaced households from Louisiana living in Atlanta, the Louisiana State Recovery Corps reported Tuesday. In addition, there are at least 429 displaced households living in Marietta, the survey found. Among the hundreds of communities in every state where victims of the historic storm now live, Atlanta ranks third in the number of displaced households, behind Houston and Dallas. The nonprofit research group cautioned that its numbers are likely low because they are based on change-of-address cards. The group conducted a mail survey of about 49,000 of the 71,466 displaced households identified by the Postal Service and received more than 3,100 responses. Population estimates from the Census Bureau show that more than 200,000 people have left Louisiana since Katrina hit in late August 2005. Nationwide, displaced residents are evenly split by race --- 46 percent white and 46 percent black. About 40 percent want to return to Louisiana, while 37 percent do not, and 20 percent are undecided. The primary barriers to returning are moving costs and finding affordable housing, the survey found. But finding a job, crime and levee safety were also cited. Of those who did not want to return, seven in 10 expressed contentment in their current location as the primary reason. The 10 cities with the most households displaced by Hurricane Katrina:

<b>City</b>	<b># of households</b>
Houston	8,726
Dallas	2,050
Atlanta	1,288
San Antonio	1,248
Austin, Texas	1,120
Spring, Texas	1,079
Picayune, MS	944
Carriere, MS	836
Katy, Texas	765
Memphis	705

**Panel hears estimates, pleas for long-term Gulf Coast aid** (GovExec.Com, 8/8)

Trying to get a handle on the long-term costs of recovery from Hurricane Katrina and related disasters, the House Budget Committee learned Thursday that the more than \$100 billion already provided by Congress will not be enough. With some estimates for capital losses amounting to as much as \$150 billion and a State of Louisiana estimate of economic losses of up to \$200 billion, the committee seemed to reel at the prospect for making room over the next several years in federal budgets for recovery programs. Some members questioned whether federal officials are leaning on states and localities hard enough to trim any waste, fraud or abuse in meeting the needs of the four Gulf states hammered by hurricanes Katrina and Rita two years ago.

**Study Says Storms Displaced More People Than Estimated** (Washington Post, 8/8)

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused far more dislocation to Louisiana's population than previously estimated, with tens of thousands more people being forced to relocate than previous population counts have suggested. While other population studies reflected

changes in overall population, they did not capture the vast amount of churning that occurred not only as people left wrecked homes but also as they were forced to leave intact dwellings to find jobs elsewhere and as others moved in to abandoned homes, researchers said. Also released Tuesday was a survey of residents of FEMA trailer parks showing that, for the poorest evacuees, domestic circumstances are now far worse: More are unemployed, many have been the victims of theft and domestic abuse, and about half are unclear about how long they might remain at government-sponsored trailer sites. Previous population estimates in Louisiana focused on the net change in population. For example, previous New Orleans estimates have suggested that about 226,000 have left since the storm. But Tuesday's study, which is based on 2006 data, suggests that the number of people who moved after the storm is considerably higher. About 246,000 left the city, about 50,000 moved from one house in the city to another, and about 20,000 moved in from elsewhere. Overall, in the 18 parishes studied, the storms forced 398,000 to move away and 151,000 to relocate within their parish.