

## **Disaster News Update – January 13 to 18, 2007**

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

- **Chemical Release/Accident:** Kentucky (Derailed Train), New York
- **Drought:** Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Arizona
- **Fire:** California, Texas, Oklahoma
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Texas, New York, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Missouri, Oklahoma, California, Iowa, Arkansas, Indiana

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

- [Missouri](#): Severe Winter Storms and Flooding (1/15)
- [Oklahoma](#): Severe Winter Storms and Flooding (Emergency Declaration (1/15))
- [Nebraska](#): Severe Winter Storm (1/7)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Winter Storm (1/7)
- [Colorado](#): Snow (Emergency Declaration (1/7))
- [Colorado](#): Snow (Emergency Declaration (1/7))
- [Missouri](#): Severe Winter Storms (12/29)
- [Oregon](#): Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (12/29)
- [Illinois](#): Snow (Emergency Declaration (12/29))
- Fire Declarations: None in the last 30 days

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Alabama Baptists' Airlift Kitchen to Become Nationwide Model** (AL.Com, 1/18)

Alabama Baptists' new airlift kitchen will become the model for Baptists nationwide who wish to build one like it for disaster relief, said Tommy Puckett, state disaster relief coordinator through the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. The kitchen broken down and stored in 12 containers that fit easily on almost any airplane was deemed Baptists' most efficient model by the North American Mission Board (NAMB), according to Puckett.

#### **CSU's network of 1,000 weather watchers gets grant to expand** (Denver Post, 1/17)

The day 10 inches of rain fell over part of Fort Collins, national weather officials didn't understand how intense the storm was until it was too late. Tiny Spring Creek flooded July 28, 1997, and five people died in the swirling waters. That was the day Colorado State University meteorologist Nolan Doesken decided Colorado must have more weather watchers. "We just needed one report saying 'Folks, we've just had 5 1/2 inches of rain and it's still pouring,'" Doesken said. "We might have issued a flash-flood warning one or two hours earlier." The incident led to the creation of a CSU-led network of 1,000 Coloradans who now wake before 7 each morning to take note of fresh snow, total rainfall and the amount of snow on the ground. They report major storms in real time - typing in data online or calling it in by phone. That network - the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, or CoCoRaHS - is now going national. The

federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has given CoCoRaHS a \$585,000 grant to expand.

## COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

### [Hancock Co. \(MS\) relief workers report mystery skin lesions](#) (WMC-TV, 1/18)

MS Department of Health officials are investigating bizarre skin lesion and blisters reported by many storm-relief volunteers working in Hancock County. For the past several months, health officials have collected evidence and interviewed workers, said Robert Travnivcek, the department's district medical director. Epidemiologists will determine whether the lesions are part of a disease outbreak, a rise in a common infection or simply a coincidence involving unrelated volunteers, who are all working in Hancock County and bothered by similar afflictions.

### [Governors lose in power struggle over National Guard](#) (Stateline, 1/12)

A little-noticed change in federal law packs an important change in who is in charge the next time a state is devastated by a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. To the dismay of the nation's governors, the White House now will be empowered to go over a governor's head and call up National Guard troops to aid a state in time of natural disasters or other public emergencies.

## RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

### [Oklahoma prepares for another winter blast](#) (Associated Press, 1/18)

Thousands of Oklahomans who have been without power for nearly a week braced Thursday for the arrival of heavy snow even as they tried to recover from a deadly ice storm. Gov. Brad Henry requested a major federal **disaster** declaration, which would make people in hard-hit counties eligible for housing grants and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses. He had already declared a state of emergency.

### [More than 121,000 in MO still without power after ice storm](#) (Associated Press, 1/18)

With temperatures still below freezing, more than 121,000 Missouri homes and businesses waited for power to be restored Wednesday, three days after what the National Weather Service called the worst storm in 50 years. The weekend mix of freezing rain and sleet left up to 2 inches of ice on trees and power lines that knocked out electricity to more than 330,000 customers, mainly in the state's southwest.

### [Bush Approves Missouri Disaster Request](#) (Kansas City Info Zone, 1/17)

Gov. Matt Blunt announced President George W. Bush granted his request for a major disaster declaration following the deadly ice storms that swept across the state over the past weekend. Blunt noted the severe winter storms caused eight deaths and knocked out power to over 330,000 Missourians. Local officials have established 89 shelters which have assisted approximately 3,000 citizens.

**Arkansas Governor Declares a Disaster** (The Morning News, 1/17)

AR governor Mike Beebe declared Benton County a state disaster area Wednesday, and hundreds of Northwest Arkansans remained without power. All Sulphur Springs residents were without electricity Wednesday, said Kristina Hartley, public works director. The city struggled to get a generator running to operate its sewer lift station and water pumps. Some sewage spilled, but Hartley was uncertain how much. Arkansas National Guard members have been helping Sulphur Springs since Monday afternoon, clearing debris from the roads and working to restore power, she said.

**Storm assistance sought for southeast Colorado** (Denver Post, 1/17)

Gov. Bill Ritter asked for federal financial assistance to offset livestock and agricultural losses across southeast Colorado caused by recent blizzards. Ritter did not ask for a specific amount. But any money would help with feeding and watering livestock stranded by the storms, locating and disposing of carcasses, and boosting the economic recovery for affected counties. The request is separate from the federal disaster declaration this month handed down by President Bush to help with costs of snow removal and emergency rescue.

**CA Governor Declares State of Emergency** (Yuba Net, 1/17)

Gov. Schwarzenegger issued the following proclamation in the counties of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Tulare and Ventura resulting from severe freezing conditions. Additional counties will be added to the proclamation as warranted. The Governor also directed the Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture to request immediate assistance from the United States Department of Food and Agriculture and federal Small Business Administration.

**Storm Leaves 60 Dead, Thousands Shivering** (CNN, 1/17)

Americans were shivering coast to coast after winter tightened its icy grip, dropping temperatures, downing power lines and making traveling in some areas treacherous. One icy storm blamed for at least 60 deaths in nine states spread snow and freezing rain all across Texas. Hundreds of National Guard soldiers and airmen are helping in four states hit hard by winter weather. According to the Guard:

- In Texas, 23 Guardsmen were helping with stranded motorists.
- In Missouri, 371 were helping support shelters and working on debris removal, water distribution and other tasks.
- Equipped in Oklahoma with generators, Humvees, and five-ton trucks, 63 Guardsmen were helping support power generation and water distribution.
- A small number also were helping with outages and water distribution in Arkansas.

**Derailed Train in Kentucky Releases Toxic Chemicals** (CNN, 1/16)

Rail cars that caught fire after a freight train crash near Louisville, Kentucky, were being allowed to burn to destroy hazardous materials inside them. The fiery derailment prompted authorities to evacuate everyone within a mile of the wreck as a pall of thick,

black smoke began to spread across the town of Brooks, about 20 miles south of downtown Louisville.

**As swollen rivers surge, flood-wary residents cringe** (Columbus Dispatch, 1/16)

The professionals say the Ohio River will be 3 feet below flood stage at Marietta. Local residents, however, have heard that line before. They heard it in 2004, then experienced the most disastrous flooding to strike Marietta in 40 years. So after four days of rain that sent water coursing down the Muskingum River toward the Ohio, the locals were on watch.

**Ice damage may surpass \$250 million** (Omaha World Herald, 1/16)

Nebraska may have sustained more than a quarter-billion dollars in damage from the back-to-back ice storms that struck in late December, Sen. Ben Nelson said Monday. After touring central Nebraska, Nelson, D-Neb., said that in his years of public service he's never seen storm damage of this magnitude. The Nebraska Public Power District reported Monday that storm damage and related expenses, such as buying outside electricity, could push its costs to \$180 million. The Southern Power District has said its damage could reach \$80 million.

**USDA provides more than \$42.5 million in disaster recovery** (Press Zoom, 1/16)

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced that an additional \$42.5 million will be provided to help with natural disaster recovery efforts in 13 states. This funding provides recovery assistance for natural disasters that occurred between December 2005 and June 2006.

**Bush Declares Emergency Federal Aid for Oklahoma** (FEMA Press Release, 1/15)

FEMA Director David Paulison announced that federal aid has been made available to supplement state and local response efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms and flooding beginning on January 12, 2007, and continuing.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

**Operating Costs Are Imperiling Disaster Fund** (New York Times, 1/18)

The federal government's biggest program to help people rebuild after natural disasters is on the verge of running out of operating money because of budgeting problems at the agency that runs it, the Small Business Administration. If Congress does not intervene in the next month or so to cover the administrative costs of the program, it will have to shut down, according to an internal agency memorandum given to The New York Times by a critic of the agency.

**Plan Will Allow 911 and 311 Lines to Accept Digital Images** (New York Times, 1/18)

NY Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced a plan yesterday that will allow emergency 911 call centers and the popular 311 service line to receive digital photos and videos from callers. The city will be the first in the nation to incorporate digital images into its 911 system.

**Rural America More Prepared but More Vulnerable** (Medical News Today, 1/17)

From winter storms, to earthquakes, to terrorism -- when a disaster strikes a community, who fares better, a rural community or an urban one? A new study at the University of Illinois attempts to understand the differences in how rural and urban citizens across the US respond to disaster. Preliminary results show that although rural residents may be more directly involved in responding to crisis, their location also makes them more vulnerable.

**New Orleans to Consider the 'Carless'** (The Advocate, 1/16)

John Renne, assistant professor of urban planning and transportation studies at the University of New Orleans, said Hurricane Katrina exposed just how vulnerable the estimated 130,000 carless New Orleanians are during emergencies. But Renne stresses that New Orleans is not alone. Evacuation plans in most major cities across the country fail to adequately take into account the needs of the elderly, disabled and transit-dependent populations, he claims.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**FEMA might delay trailer cutoff** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/18)

FEMA officials have told the governor's office that FEMA probably will extend the loans of trailers and rental subsidies for more than 100,000 displaced Louisiana families past Feb. 28, when they are scheduled to expire. The federal agency is under increasing pressure from the state's congressional delegation, Gov. Kathleen Blanco and private relief agencies to keep the rental aid flowing. Moreover, FEMA knows that the heavily damaged housing market in and around New Orleans provides few alternatives for renters and others even 16 months after Hurricane Katrina.

**Recovery Authority Struggles to Get Rolling** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/17)

Billed as the most powerful tool for getting thousands of blighted and tax-delinquent properties back into commerce, the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority is still lumbering to its feet four months after Mayor Ray Nagin committed to jump-starting the agency to aid in recovery.

**Students report education decline** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/17)

New Orleans high school students believe the quality of their education has declined since the flood, along with the physical condition of many of their schools. At least half plan to attend college out of state. And students are evenly split on whether to return after college, with many doubting they'll find job opportunities here after graduation.

**LA Asks FEMA for Another Year With Trailers** (The Advocate, 1/17)

Louisiana's congressional delegation wants the federal government to keep paying for people to live in FEMA trailers, mobile homes and rental units for another year. FEMA's transitional housing program is scheduled to stop next month for people driven from their

homes by Hurricane Katrina and in March for those displaced by Hurricane Rita. A cutoff would affect more than 100,000 households.

**Road Home Trying to Reach Minorities** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/17)

The state's Road Home program administrator has hired a marketing company that specializes in reaching black, Vietnamese and Hispanic communities in south Louisiana. EBONetworks LLC, based on Camp Street in New Orleans, is formulating a strategy to reach out to minorities who may be among an estimated 25,000 stragglers who have either chosen not to participate in the Road Home or don't fully understand what the program could do for them.

**New Orleans Feels the Pain of Mental Health Crisis** (USA Today, 1/16)

Sixteen months after Hurricane Katrina tore this city apart, a hidden sort of damage is emerging. Local officials see it in reports of suicides, strokes and stress-related deaths. They see it in the police calls for fights and domestic violence. They see it in the long waiting lists for psychiatric care that they have no way to provide.

**High Costs Threaten Housing Plans** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/16)

Dozens of proposals for affordable housing complexes in the New Orleans area are at a standstill because insurance and construction costs are so high that even housing tax credits issued through the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act aren't enough to make the projects feasible financially. The Louisiana Housing Finance Agency has awarded \$121.6 million in tax credits to 97 projects in Orleans, Jefferson and St. Tammany parishes to build 11,162 units of affordable and mixed-income housing. But developers say that with insurance costs having risen from 200 percent to 600 percent on apartment complexes since Hurricane Katrina, tax credits aren't enough to plug the gap.

**Louisiana Now Bears the Brunt of Katrina Anger** (Houston Chronicle, 1/16)

FEMA used to be the four-letter word of choice for many frustrated local officials after Hurricane Katrina. These days, many city and parish leaders are more likely to curse the state when they complain about the pace of storm recovery. Much of the growing tension between state and local officials in Louisiana stems from delays in a federal program that reimburses local officials for a host of infrastructure projects, including road repairs, public building construction and debris removal.

**LRA juggles money to pay parishes' costs** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 1/13)

St. Tammany Parish President Kevin Davis welcomed the Louisiana Recovery Authority to the north shore Friday with a \$3.6 million bill. That's what his government owes for debris removal starting this month, when the federal government stopped paying the total bill for cleaning up the five parishes hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina. To help Davis and other local leaders pay their 10 percent share of uninsured damages to government property and other recovery costs, the LRA voted Friday to redirect about \$100 million it had budgeted for other public assistance programs.