

## **Disaster News Update – July 28 to August 3, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** California, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, Hawaii
- **Fire:** Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, South Dakota, Michigan
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** Colorado, Texas, Arizona, Kansas, Connecticut
- **Technological Accident:** Texas (Poisonous Gas Leak)
- **Transportation Accident:** Minnesota (Bridge Collapse)

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

- [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)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [New York](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [Texas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (6/29)
- Fire Declarations: [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 \(7/6\)](#), [Utah \(6/30\)](#), [California \(6/29\)](#), [Hawaii \(6/28\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **FL Salvation Army gets New Canteen** (Florida Weekly, 8/2)

Should another hurricane hit Southwest Florida, the Salvation Army will be better prepared to meet the community needs thanks to the purchase of a new canteen. Although resupply trucks frequently fill up the canteens when food, ice and water run low, there have been times during past hurricanes when everything has been given out and services had to be shut down for the day, said volunteer Johnny Christmas. "We take care of whomever with whatever is needed," said Christmas. "The Salvation Army does everything for free." The new canteen cost \$130,000. Most of the money came from disaster services, but individual contributions amounted to \$20,000 and the Salvation Army received a \$10,000 grant from United Christian Giving. The new canteen will be able to serve 1,000 meals at a time or up to 2,500 meals a day. This is almost twice as much as the old canteen was able to supply. It is one of seven new canteens distributed statewide, according to Florida Salvation Army spokeswoman Dulcinea Cuellar. She said the other canteens went to St. Petersburg, Tampa, Jacksonville, Miami, Panama City and Fort Lauderdale.

## COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

### [Community Helps Businesses Prepare for Disaster](#) (The Garden Island, 8/2)

Just about every community leader who is key to seeing the island through a natural disaster gathered at Kaua'i Community College Tuesday to talk about emergency preparedness with local businesses. The American Red Cross along with The Gas Co. partnered to host the event. Invited were department heads and directors of pivotal private and public organizations, agencies and businesses. "The Gas Co. really wanted to open the dialogue (about preparing for disaster) and spark discussion among businesses," Olomana Marketing spokeswoman Andrea Maglasang said. The discussion was divided into two panels: primary responders and essential services. Among the panelists were representatives from the state and county Civil Defense; Kaua'i Red Cross; the departments of Health, Fire, Police, Water and Transportation; Wilcox Memorial Hospital and the county's Office of Economic Development as well as the island's gas, electric, fuel and phone companies. Across the board, the message was clear: Prepare, prepare, prepare. As a three-part series, Tuesday's panel represented the most prepared entities on-island. But the message echoed over and over again was that the effort doesn't end with them.

### [Community Tool to Alert Residents in an Emergency](#) (New York Times, 7/29)

A week before a portion of Daniels Farm Road, a major artery in Trumbull, was closed because of sewer work, the police called about 2,500 residents and businesses to let them know. When there was a threat of violence at the high school, the superintendent contacted parents that evening to ease concerns. And homeowners were warned by the police when there was a recent spate of burglaries. All this information was relayed by phone through the town's emergency notification system. Soon, most towns in the state will be able to make similar calls. Many towns are using federal Homeland Security funds to buy warning systems that can call thousands of residents at a time to alert them to a problem. "It's a huge tool for local officials to use to notify residents of a pending disaster," said Wayne E. Sanford, deputy commissioner of the state's Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Mr. Sanford said more than 40 municipalities in the Hartford region, and about a dozen in Fairfield County, were using federal security money to buy emergency calling systems from Reverse 911, the company that won the state's bid for the contracts with the towns. By next year, almost half of the state's 169 municipalities should have the system, Mr. Sanford said.

## RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

### [Panel OKs emergency funds for recovery from bridge collapse](#) (GovExec.Com, 8/3)

In the wake of the devastating bridge collapse in Minneapolis Wednesday evening, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on Thursday authorized emergency funds for the recovery effort. The bill (H.R. 3311) was passed by a unanimous voice vote without debate. Sponsored by House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar, D-Minn., the bill authorizes \$250 million in relief funds for the state of Minnesota to use in the repairs of the Interstate-35W bridge. The eight-lane bridge, a

major Minneapolis artery, was in the midst of repairs when it buckled during the evening rush hours Wednesday. Dozens of cars plummeted more than 60 feet into the Mississippi River. The bridge was crowded with traffic, and a train had been passing beneath the roadway at the time it fell.

**Nine dead in bridge collapse** (The Advertiser, 8/2)

At least nine people were killed when a bridge over the Mississippi buckled and collapsed, plunging cars and trucks into the waters below. Dozens of vehicles fell or were crushed as sections of the 20m-high eight-lane bridge were sheared off during the evening rush hour yesterday. Authorities confirmed nine deaths and said 20 people were missing. After four hours of frantic rescue efforts before night fell, the head of the fire department said the focus today would shift from search to recovery. Jim Clack said more than 60 people were taken to hospital and it was unlikely more survivors would be found. In Washington, Department of Homeland Security officials said there was no sign that the bridge's collapse was the result of terrorism. Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty said the 40-year-old steel-arch bridge was last inspected last year and no structural problems were found. There was, however, structural work taking place on the bridge.

**Montana, Idaho Battle Growing Wildfires** (Disaster News Network, 8/2)

Wildfires across Idaho and Montana kept fire crews busy for yet another day Wednesday with little relief in sight there or for other Western states. The nation's top priority fire was the Meriwether blaze burning about 37 miles northwest of Helena in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. The fire, which has now charred more than 31,000 acres – 10,000 more than just a day earlier – has forced the evacuation of nearly 120 homes. Some of those residents may be allowed to return home Thursday. The fire, which was started July 21 by lightning, was 10 percent contained. No date was given for when the fire might be completely contained. Elsewhere in Montana, the Ahorn fire about 30 miles west of Augusta, was reported to have grown to more than 45,000 acres since it began June 28. The lightning-sparked fire was only 2 percent contained. Twenty-seven homes in the area have been evacuated. The Skyland fire near Glacier National Park expanded to more than 19,000 acres and remained at 5 percent containment. Residents in the area have been advised to evacuate. The fire began July 23 and previously forced the evacuation of employees and guests at the Summit Station Lodge.

**Federal Agriculture Disaster for Tennessee Counties** (ABC news, 8/1)

The USDA approved the State of Tennessee's request for an agricultural disaster designation for all 95 Tennessee counties. The designation makes Tennessee farmers affected by drought conditions eligible to be considered for low-interest emergency loans through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), helping farmers offset crop losses suffered this growing season. "This is the news Tennessee farmers have been waiting to hear," said Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN). The period from January through May was the driest five-month period in Tennessee in more than 100 years. The ongoing drought conditions have caused many of Tennessee's livestock producers to sell entire herds due to inadequate hay production and water sourcing. At the urging of the State and members of the congressional delegation the USDA granted a similar disaster designation in June for farmers affected by April freeze that caused extensive crop damage across Tennessee.

**Knee-High Corn in August Dries Up Farmers' Hopes** (Washington Post, 8/1)

Despite scattered thunderstorms across the Washington region in recent days, farmers in Virginia and Maryland say that this summer has the makings of an agricultural disaster. Corn-crop losses in Maryland -- worst in Southern Maryland and on the lower Eastern Shore -- could range from 30 to 70 percent. In Virginia, where the southwestern part of the state has been especially hard hit, the corn-crop losses could reach as high as 80 percent. Grass pastures have died in the dry heat, forcing farmers to supply their livestock with more expensive, less nutritious hay. And the hay crop has been anemic, leaving farmers with little feed for the winter. Unless it starts raining soon, some farmers might have to import hay from other regions to keep their animals fed. And others may liquidate their herds, said Earl F. "Buddy" Hance, Maryland's deputy secretary of agriculture. State and local authorities are scrambling to help. Last week, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to declare a disaster area in Maryland counties hurt by the drought. The declaration would render drought-affected counties eligible for low-interest loans. Virginia has also petitioned for the designation.

**Eight More Texas Counties Eligible for Public Assistance** (FEMA, 7/31)

Public Assistance to repair damaged infrastructure is available in eight additional Texas counties. Communities in Bee, Denton, Medina, Parker, Runnels, Smith, Starr and Tarrant counties may apply for assistance to recover from severe storms, tornadoes and flooding beginning June 16 and continuing. PA funds are now available to 42 Texas counties. Public Assistance is available to eligible applicants for debris removal and disposal, emergency services related to the disaster, and for the repair or replacement of damaged public facilities such as roads, buildings and utilities. Eligible applicants include state, county and local government and some private non-profits such as educational and medical facilities. FEMA will provide 75 percent of the cost of eligible projects. State and FEMA officials will hold applicant briefings in affected areas. These briefings will introduce potential aid recipients to the Public Assistance process and address initial questions. Following these briefings, each potential applicant will submit a Request for Public Assistance. FEMA will assign a Public Assistance Coordinator to each applicant to ensure each applicant's needs are met throughout the process.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

**Disaster Training Center Proposed for Hawaii** (Insurance Journal, 8/2)

The country's only dedicated center for natural disaster preparedness could be located at the University of Hawaii's Manoa campus. Plans for the training center at the university were included in a conference report approved by the Senate in a 85-8 vote. U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, said the nation's first responders need state-of-the-art tools and a high level of training to keep Americans safe in the aftermath of a natural disaster. "In the wake of the Gulf Coast hurricanes, it became apparent that our country is not adequately prepared to handle such situations," Inouye said. The proposed "Center for Excellence for Natural Disaster Preparedness Training" at the university still must be voted on by the House of Representatives and considered by President Bush. Funding for

the center will have to be applied for next year. The center would conduct research and develop models and tools for monitoring natural hazards and evaluating risks to urban areas. It would also plan for the response, recovery and reconstruction of communities in the aftermath of natural disasters. The center would be managed through the university, but it wouldn't necessarily be located on campus, said Gregg Takayama, a spokesman for the school. It hasn't been determined whether the center would require a new physical structure.

**Slow start of storm season means little** (San Antonio Express-News, 8/1)

Two months into the 2007 hurricane season and there haven't been any major storms, but forecasters say the worst could still come for Texas. Before the June 1 opening of hurricane season, meteorologists had worried that the cooling weather condition La Niña in the eastern Pacific Ocean would drive this season, but the first eight weeks have produced just three minor storms. "It looks like La Niña is not developing as strong as they are expecting," said Joe Arellano, the National Weather Service's meteorologist-in-charge for the San Antonio region. "It could indicate that the activity is not going to be as high as they expected." Historically, however, the Atlantic hurricane season does not peak until late summer and fall. In 2004, the first storm formed around Aug. 1, ultimately turning that year's hurricane season into one of the busiest in years. That was before the devastating 2005 season, which included August's Hurricane Katrina and September's Hurricane Rita. "The fact that nothing has occurred yet is not an indication of the kind of a hurricane season" it is going to be, Arellano added. But with many Texas areas seeing record amounts of rain for several weeks, some emergency management officials said there might be more reasons to worry, should a hurricane hit the state this year.

**Evacuation drill a near no-show** (LA Times, 7/29)

At 10 a.m. Saturday, police officers raced up the winding, narrow streets of Park Oak Drive in the Hollywood Hills, airing screeching sirens and shouting brush-fire evacuation orders over loudspeakers. Yes, this was a large, highly organized drill to test the city's capacity to evacuate a hillside neighborhood of 400 homes. Yes, nearly three months ago Griffith Park was ablaze in what could be the worst year for brush fires in many seasons. Yes, more than 250 firefighters, police officers and other city officials showed up ready to facilitate the mass exercise. But no, no thank you, the vast majority of residents said when asked Saturday to take part in the voluntary drill. On a quiet, balmy morning, only about 40 people decided to fake-evacuate. "I'm undressed!" shouted a woman from the top of a two-story home, after a police officer persistently knocked on her door. The woman didn't leave her home. "It was a very unpleasant way to start the day," said pastry chef Sam Godfrey, 22, after the 10 a.m. siren woke him and he turned away a police officer asking him if he wanted to evacuate. Susan Swan, president of the Hollywood United Neighborhood Council, said some residents did leave their homes around the designated time. But they went shopping or out on errands. They didn't realize they were also supposed to meet at the school evacuation center. "I think they didn't know the sign-in was so important," she said, adding that residents appreciated the effort by fire officials.

**FEMA urging flood policy renewals** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/29)

An unusually large number of people who bought flood insurance after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have not renewed their policies, and FEMA is urging people to get them up to date before they lose coverage for the height of hurricane season and lose eligibility for future disaster assistance. Bill Barton, a community outreach specialist at FEMA in New Orleans, said that 100,000 new flood insurance policies were sold in Louisiana after the 2005 hurricanes, but 14,613 of those new policies had not been renewed as of the end of April. FEMA always sells a bunch of new policies after a storm, and there's always a drop-off as the good intentions fade with the memories of the flooding. But losing 14 percent of the newly purchased policies is more than usual, Barton said. "That's a pretty high percent," Barton said. "That gave us a wake up call." Not renewing flood policies is a problem, Barton said, because they're a requirement of federal disaster aid. Anyone who got a disaster assistance loan from the Small Business Administration is required to keep up flood insurance as a condition of the loan. Discontinuing a flood policy also would render someone ineligible for federal assistance if another disaster occurs within three years.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**FEMA is responding responsibly to trailer air-quality concerns** (USA Today, 8/2) (David Paulison, FEMA Director) FEMA's response to recent formaldehyde complaints could have been better, but only part of the story has been told. Following the unprecedented deployment of more than 100,000 housing units after the 2005 hurricane season, a relatively small number of occupants expressed concern about air quality in their travel trailers. Last year, we became concerned that complaints from trailer occupants were growing in number, so FEMA consulted with a diverse group of health and environmental experts. These officials helped FEMA address many of the concerns raised by occupants experiencing symptoms associated with exposure to elevated levels of formaldehyde. Last summer, FEMA notified trailer residents about the issue, provided mitigation tips and, in some cases, provided occupants with a different trailer. Additional steps to respond to formaldehyde-related concerns continue. FEMA has distributed more than 70,000 flyers to occupants describing the potential risks of exposure to formaldehyde and created a toll-free number for trailer occupants with questions or concerns. FEMA has also temporarily suspended the installation, sale, transfer or donation of travel trailers in its inventory.

**LRA moves to cut deficit by \$1 billion** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/31) With Road Home applications surging the day before the deadline for homeowners to apply -- an influx likely to add to program's estimated \$5 billion deficit -- the Louisiana Recovery Authority took action Monday to reduce the gap with \$1 billion, a good-faith gesture to satisfy Congress, which the state needs to fill the rest of the gap. At its monthly board meeting, the LRA also confronted problems with slowdowns in the delivery of the homeowner-assistance grants. Meanwhile, the private contractor running the Road Home, ICF International, braced for a crush of last-moment interest, both from reporters and from homeowners who had ignored or avoided the Road Home for its troubled first year of existence. Despite pressure from legal advocates to extend the deadline for

poorer homeowners who may have encountered obstacles to applying, the state held firm that online applications would be taken off the Road Home Web site, [www.road2la.org](http://www.road2la.org), at midnight tonight.

**Nagin meets FEMA deadline** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/31)

Drawing shoe-leather help from volunteers, Mayor Ray Nagin's administration on Monday met a FEMA deadline for providing a list of where repairs to storm-damaged streets are needed, easing friction between the city and federal bureaucrats who control the flow of millions in recovery dollars. The Department of Public Works delivered a DVD that includes initial damage assessments for 13,682 roadway "segments" -- typically blocks -- that account for 1,465 of 1,600 miles of city streets, most in neighborhoods. Major boulevards that account for the rest of New Orleans streets were inspected by city, state and federal officials about a year ago, according to a city report. It remains to be seen how many damaged spots identified by the city will be dubbed eligible for repairs through FEMA's Public Assistance grant program, but the city passed a critical test in federal officials' eyes. "We're pleased to have this completed list," FEMA spokesman Andrew Thomas said. "The cooperation between all parties has been good since the first of June." Steady communication between FEMA and city representatives preparing the list has helped ensure that the reports meet FEMA expectations, he said. The preliminary assessment is the first step in a city effort to qualify for as much as \$300 million to repair minor streets, a giant rebuilding program expected to take as long as eight years, said Robert Mendoza, public works director.

**Make FEMA pay up, officials implore** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/28)

President Bush's czar for Gulf Coast rebuilding had his first meeting with Kenner officials who are pleading for his help in forcing FEMA to hand over millions of dollars they say the city is owed for Hurricane Katrina recovery costs. The city has already spent about \$5.5 million clearing and repairing infrastructure, hauling storm debris and performing other tasks directly related to damage caused by Katrina, but has not been reimbursed for any of it, said city Finance Director Duke McConnell, one of several key aides to Mayor Ed Muniz who attended the hourlong meeting Wednesday with the federal coordinator, Donald Powell. In addition, the city owes another \$2.5 million to \$3 million to a handful of contractors who have done the bulk of that work, McConnell said. "They keep calling and asking when we can pay, but \$5.5 million is as much as we can afford until FEMA pays us," McConnell said, confirming that although none of the contractors has sued the city for unpaid bills, one has talked about doing so.