

Disaster News Update – March 10 to 16, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Chemical Release:** New York (Propane Train Derailment)
- **Drought:** California, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, Texas, North Dakota
- **Earthquake:** Ohio
- **Flooding:** Texas
- **Fire:** California, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida
- **Thunderstorms:** Hawaii
- **Tornado:** Ohio

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Iowa:](#) Severe Winter Storms (3/14)
- [California:](#) Severe Freeze (3/13)
- [Indiana:](#) Snow (Emergency Declaration - 3/13)
- [Alabama:](#) Severe Storms and Tornadoes (3/3)
- [Georgia:](#) Severe Storms and Tornadoes (3/3)
- [Louisiana:](#) Severe Storms and Tornadoes (2/23)
- [Pennsylvania:](#) Severe Storms and Flooding (2/23)
- [New York:](#) Snow (Emergency Declaration) (2/23)
- [Oregon:](#) Severe Winter Storm and Flooding (2/22)
- [Washington:](#) Severe Winter Storm, Landslides and Mudslides (2/14)
- Fire Declarations: [California \(3/11\)](#), [New Mexico \(2/24\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Lutheran Students Bring Hope to the Gulf (Worldwide Faith News, 3/14)

Dressed in white a hard hat with a respirator over her face, Lisa Evans, a senior at Valparaiso University said, "We're here to bring hope. We can make a big difference in just one week." Standing in front of a Hurricane Katrina-damaged house March 5 in New Orleans, Evans joined more than 800 college and university students participating in "What a Relief!" during the 2007 spring break. What a Relief! is an opportunity for students and others in campus communities to spend their spring break helping survivors of the 2005 hurricane season rebuild. Lutheran Disaster Response is organizing What a Relief! Students participating in What a Relief! this year represent some 34 U.S. colleges and universities, 13 of which are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). They're working in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas between February 25 and March 31.

Students on break will help gut houses (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/11)

In an effort to accelerate the rebuilding of neighborhoods in Orleans Parish, almost 10,000 volunteer college students from across the nation will arrive in New Orleans this month to gut thousands of Hurricane Katrina-damaged houses. Both destroyed properties

still untouched and partially gutted houses are eligible for gutting. This includes rentals up to a quad where owners occupy one of the units. Property owners who wish to be included on the consolidated gutting list are urged to call 311 or (504) 658-2093, the city of New Orleans Information Hotline, Mondays through Fridays from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Those calling will be asked to provide their name, contact information and complete address of the property to be gutted. The project is spearheaded by the Gutting Taskforce, a newly created team of the Greater New Orleans Disaster Recovery Partnership (GNODRP).

Interfaith group holds free fair to help residents prepare (Sacramento Bee, 3/10)

If disaster strikes, there's a good chance that Holly Reynolds will be ready. She keeps a year's supply of food under her daughter's bed. Bottled water is tucked away in the master bedroom of Reynolds' Pocket-area home. Each member of her family has a 72-hour emergency kit. Reynolds is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and being prepared for a rainy day -- especially a really rainy day -- is a fundamental part of her faith. All of this was going through Reynolds' mind last year as she and church members left a city meeting on emergency planning. Reynolds heard about police evacuation routes and official emergency plans. But, Reynolds wondered, who was helping families prepare? Reynolds talked with others from her church's ward, and soon they were meeting with worshippers from other congregations. The result is the Pocket Emergency Preparedness Fair -- believed to be the first interfaith effort of its kind in Sacramento -- which will be held today at Kennedy High School. Topics include school disaster plans, preparing emergency kits, animal rescue, flood insurance and resources for disabled people.

FL Volunteer Village Set To Open (Disaster News Network, 3/9)

A "volunteer village" to house teams helping people affected by the Feb. 2 tornadoes in central Florida is expected to be opened soon by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. The village, scheduled to open by April 1, will be able to house 60 to 90 volunteers. The housing idea grew out of discussions between the Central Florida Presbytery and Volusia Interfaith Interagency Networking in Disaster (VIND) and Lake and Sumter County Emergency Response (LASER). "As we were talking about needs . . . we identified that there would be a need for a village," said Paige McRight, executive presbyter for the Central Florida Presbytery. McRight said the village would remain for as long as needed to help people recover from the deadly Groundhog Day tornadoes, which destroyed hundreds of homes in Lake, Sumter and Volusia counties. The village will be on the property of the Duvall Presbyterian Home in the Volusia County town of Glenwood.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

County aids in tornado recovery (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 3/15)

DeKalb County sent eight workers with heavy equipment to the city of Americus last week to help clean the tornado-ravaged South Georgia community. Chief Executive Officer Vernon Jones led a convoy of county dump trucks and other vehicles used to remove downed trees and other debris. Jones said in a news release that the devastation

was "indescribable" and that he was glad DeKalb had the resources and equipment to help. Jones and his sanitation workers left early Wednesday and returned Friday.

CO Community Offers Day Care Disaster Training (YourHub.Com, 3/15)

North Metro Fire and Rescue, in Northglenn, CO, is offering a free training course for owners and operators of child care centers. From the course description: "If a fire occurred in your facility, what would you do? If a tornado ripped around the area, how would you react? What do you need? Where would you go? These are difficult questions to answer...especially when you have no warning and are caring for children and their worrying parents. Adams County and the City of Aurora in partnership with North Metro Fire Rescue District are asking you to join us for an opportunity to enhance your emergency planning, procedures, and response to an emergency or disaster. This FREE training will include information on what to expect from emergency responders, what are your responsibilities, how you can evacuate, training, staffing, and YOUR response to incidents."

VA First to Offer First Responder Credentials (Government Technology, 3/13)

On September 11, 2001, the Pentagon site was swarming with first responders from across the region. Arlington County -- responsible for incident command -- struggled to quickly ensure that only credentialed responders had access to the most sensitive areas of the scene. Now, six years later, Arlington is piloting the nation's first test of a new, high-tech identification card -- FRAC, which stands for First Responder Authentication Credentials. Arlington has issued more than 1,400 FRAC cards to emergency services workers, enabling quick, authorized access to emergency scenes across multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

"Emergency Preparedness Week" in Pennsylvania (Government Technology, 3/13)

Governor Edward G. Rendell has proclaimed March 11-17 as "Weather Emergency Preparedness Week" in Pennsylvania. Throughout the week, county and local officials will test plans and procedures for response to severe weather conditions. Governor Rendell noted that recent natural events are a reminder that being adequately prepared is essential to protecting public safety and safeguarding property. He urged Pennsylvanians to be prepared for all types of severe weather.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Floodwaters surprise Browns Valley (MN Star Tribune, 3/14)

What surprised the people of Browns Valley early Wednesday was that the swirling Little Minnesota River had risen so quickly - and that the flood was coming from the wrong direction. "It's the first time since about 1947 that the flood came from the west," said Traverse County engineer Larry Haukos. "The wrong part of town is flooded." As many as 50 houses were flooded early Wednesday and more than 100 people were evacuated in the western and northern parts of the city, some by boat or heavy road equipment run by city officials and volunteers. Sixty people registered at a shelter set up by the Red Cross in the Browns Valley School.

TN Tornado Recovery Nearing Completion (Disaster News Network, 3/14)

Recovery from destructive tornadoes last year in central Tennessee is nearing an end, but local responders say they will still help residents whose needs linger as they continue to rebuild. Tornadoes ripped a path through Sumner and Davidson counties last April, damaging at least 1,000 homes. The small towns of Goodlettsville, Gallatin and Hendersonville were severely damaged. While many residents had some insurance, responding agencies provided assistance to those whose insurance was not enough to cover the total cost to repair or rebuild. The agencies also helped those who were uninsured. "We've helped at least 65 families," said Judy Vecchione, director of the Goodlettsville Help Center. "We're still helping some that are just now rebuilding. We expect to keep helping as they rebuild, and to help recruit more volunteers."

SBA Loans Offered in Dumas (Disaster News Network, 3/13)

Storm victims in tornado-ravaged Desha County will be eligible for low-interest disaster loans from the Small Business Administration. The disaster declaration comes after the Federal Emergency Management Agency denied a request for federal assistance for the area. The SBA opened a disaster loan outreach center Tuesday morning at the First United Methodist Church in the Desha County town of Dumas. Several dozen residents visited the center shortly after it was opened. Under the SBA program, individuals and businesses can apply for loans to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate or personal property.

Vermont's capital braces for possible river flooding (Boston Globe, 3/12)

About 100 volunteers in Vermont's tiny capital city yesterday shoveled tons of sand into more than 2,000 sandbags and distributed them to downtown businesses, churches, and homes. These are the days of worry - a flood may be coming. In 1992, a devastating flood poured into the center of Montpelier, causing more than \$5 million in damage and forcing several businesses to close permanently. Now, a large section of the Winooski River has frozen, just as it did before the 1992 flood, and the community is taking extensive precautions - and feeling a dreadful sense of déjà vu.

Year after tornado, families are still rebuilding lives (St. Louis Post Dispatch, 3/12)

If you take a quick look at the landscape around Silex, you wouldn't know that a tornado tore through there one year ago Tuesday. But look a little closer and you'll see trees along the highways with their tops snapped off. Look even closer, and you'll notice some families getting particularly edgy when they spot storm clouds. The tornado ripped a 20-mile path across Lincoln County shortly after 1 a.m., destroying six homes and a building at a business and damaging several other buildings. No one was killed, but one man's leg was amputated. The families have found new places to live, rebuilt their homes or continue to rebuild.

Volunteer Agency Assistance Available (FEMA, 3/12)

Louisiana residents who suffered losses from the Feb. 12 and 13 severe storms and tornadoes and continue to have unmet needs may seek help through a number of volunteer groups coordinated by a long-term recovery committee. Residents may dial 2-

1-1 on their phones to obtain information on local volunteer agencies working in their parish. The "211" operators have phone numbers, program and services information, locations, hours of operation and other relevant resources. Those who call 211 may be referred to resources including housing assistance, counseling services, employment opportunities and health services.

California Wildfire Causes Evacuations (Yahoo News, 3/11)

Residents of about 200 Southern California homes were ordered to evacuate on Sunday as a brush fire whipped by hot gusting winds scorched 500 acres near a large hillside community, firefighters said. Fire officials said two homes had burned in the fast-moving blaze in brush about half a mile from the Anaheim Hills neighborhood in Orange County, about 35 miles south-east of Los Angeles. "This is very dangerous firefight. The terrain is quite rugged and the homes are at the top of the ridges. The fire picks up speed as it runs up the hill and as it runs through the canyons," Orange County battalion chief Ed Fleming said.

30 FEMA trailers headed to Dumas (Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 3/10)

The first shipment of mobile homes and travel trailers was expected to arrive in Desha County on March 10th, two weeks after a tornado bore down on the Delta town of Dumas and rendered some 80 homes unlivable. The federal government, while denying a disaster declaration for the county, did make 23 fully furnished mobile homes and seven travel trailers available for displaced residents. "We're happy and pleased to get the trailers," Dumas Mayor Marion Gill said. "We're happy and pleased people have a place to live, but that's a token effort in meeting the total needs we have." Indeed, state and local officials expressed disappointment Friday that President Bush did not declare the county a federal disaster area, which would have allowed for more federal assistance.



PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

FDNY Gives Away Smoke Alarm Batteries (Government Technology, 3/13)

The New York Fire Department distributed more than 150,000 free batteries for smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors throughout the City last week. The 9-volt batteries were donated by the FDNY Foundation, a non-profit group that supports many FDNY initiatives and fire safety-related programs. The Mayor and Fire Commissioner made the announcement at Engine 68 / Ladder 49 in the Bronx.

USDA Awards Weather Radio Grants to Rural America (Gov't Technology, 3/13)

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced the award of more than \$415,000 in grants for Weather Radio Transmitters to extend the coverage of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather Radio All Hazards (NWR) early warning system to seven rural communities. The NWR is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting 24 hours a day from National Weather Service offices to alert people of approaching dangerous weather and other emergencies, including natural, environmental and public safety alerts.

Local chemical spill plans not always disclosed (Columbus Dispatch, 3/11)

A family planning to build a new home might want to know whether any dangerous chemicals are stored nearby. So might an entrepreneur shopping for commercial property. For those reasons, among others, a federal law says the information should be public. But there's a complicating factor: The same list might be of interest to a terrorist. The Ohio attorney general's office says state law gives officials the right to shield some records containing information that could endanger security. Because the law is vague, local authorities are left to decide what qualifies.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

New Housing Resource Available for Displaced Families (FEMA, 3/15)

A new housing resource is available online to help individuals and families displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The Housing Portal website, operated by FEMA, provides listings of available rental property throughout the United States. The website - rims.fema.gov/hportal/home.htm - allows people to search for housing by state, city, county, or zip code. Users can specify their exact housing needs. The listings include information such as handicap accessibility, number of bedrooms, amount of deposit, and included appliances and utilities. Rental properties are also available in the Gulf Coast area.

FEMA trailers Removed Daily from Jeff. Parish (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/15)

Crews are removing about 44 FEMA trailers from Jefferson Parish every day, gradually thinning the rows of boxy housing units that lined neighborhood streets and symbolized the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Reporting on their efforts to haul away trailers as residents finish repairing homes, FEMA officials said Wednesday that 7,850 trailers have been carted away from Jefferson Parish since July, a removal rate of more than 1,000 a month. Local officials, who listened to a FEMA briefing at the Parish Council meeting, welcomed the news. They are preparing to enforce a March 31 deadline for homeowners to clear their yards of trailers no longer needed.

Road Home Program Reaching Out to Applicants (Associated Press, 3/14)

Louisiana's Road Home program, criticized by lawmakers for too slowly disbursing grants for homeowners ousted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, is hitting the road to reach more applicants. The program, which provides repair money and buyouts to homeowners in storm-ravaged neighborhoods, opened a temporary office this week in suburban Dallas. It's the first of several mobile centers planned nationwide.

Rescuers can get mortgage savings (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/14)

Police officers, firefighters and other first responders in Louisiana can get below-market financing to buy homes through a program designed, in part, to keep them from leaving the state. The Louisiana Housing Finance Agency's First Responders Program is offering a mortgage interest rate of 5.5 percent. "That's a savings of more than \$19,000 over the life of a 30-year, \$150,000 loan," said David Gilyot, president of the mortgage division at Liberty Bank, one of the lending institutions participating in the program. The current

market rate is about 6.12 percent, he said. The First Responders Program is scheduled to end June 5. Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, nurses and certified nurse assistants must reside in one of the many parishes affected by Hurricanes Rita or Katrina. "Louisiana's first responders have made tremendous sacrifices in helping to restore our communities," said Wayne Woods, chairman of the agency's governing board.

Katrina still wallops small businesses (USA Today, 3/13)

Katrina damaged nearly eight times as many homes as businesses, but business losses of nearly \$21 billion exceeded home losses, says Property Claim Services, which tracks insured damage. Businesses' claims are often more complex and expensive. The Insurance Information Institute estimates that more than 95% of homeowner claims have been "settled," meaning that the insurer has decided how much to pay the homeowner. In some cases, though, homeowners are still disputing the insurer's payout. The institute has no comparable figures for business claims. A higher percentage of business than homeowner claims are thought to remain open, in part because some insurers release payments in installments during rebuilding, and many businesses aren't done with construction.