

Disaster News Update – March 17 to 23, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Texas, Arizona, California, Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota
- **Fire:** California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, West Virginia, Indiana, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky
- **Hail:** Texas, Arizona
- **Severe Winds:** Oklahoma
- **Severe Winter Weather:** New York, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania,
- **Structure Fire:** New Jersey

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)
- Fire Declarations: [California \(3/11\)](#), [New Mexico \(2/24\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Out-of-state group brings children cheer (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/22)

Davanta Smith, 9, has a mind of his own. He and other young members of the Woodmere Awesome Ladies of Distinction mentoring program were entertained royally by a group of volunteers from Seekonk, Mass., just a few weeks ago. They participated in arts and crafts and were even introduced to Christian rap music. That is when Davanta decided on his own to demonstrate some New Orleans-style dance routines. "He started dancing, and then everyone else got into it. It was wonderful," said the Rev. Daehler Hayes, a leader of nearly two dozen people who came to the area from the Seekonk Congregational Church to help with post-Katrina recovery efforts. Sara Galliano, an activity coordinator with Catholic Charities, started the process that brought the two groups together.

Volunteers Make a Difference in Disaster Relief (FEMA, 3/20)

FEMA collaborates with volunteer organizations, faith-based groups and charitable organizations in the immediate aftermath of a disaster through the long-term recovery effort. These partnerships ensure that communities get the resources and services they need to get back on their feet. National and local voluntary agencies are a key to

emergency relief in any federal disaster mission. FEMA relies on the fast-moving volunteer agencies to provide immediate shelter and food assistance whenever a disaster threatens an area or as soon as the president declares the need for a federal disaster response. One such group instrumental in the Newton, Georgia, recovery is the Adventist Community Services (ACS), which established food and supply distribution at the Baker County Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) and a supply center at the Sumter County DRC in Americus within a few days of the disaster's strike.

Teens Spend Spring Break Lending a Helping Hand (Disaster News Network, 3/19)
Hyua Jung recalls the horror of seeing pictures when she was in Korea of the massive destruction in Louisiana caused by Hurricane Katrina. Eighteen months later, the teenager was wielding hammer, saw and other tools helping people on the Gulf Coast recover. Jung is one of hundreds of young people from high schools, colleges and universities across the U.S., who have forsaken their typical spring break frolics to help in the recovery effort. Jung found herself cutting plywood with a miter saw and climbing around on the roof of a damaged house installing insulation and plywood as a volunteer in Slidell, La. She described her volunteer experience this month as "pretty cool."

Colleges join forces for Katrina summit (University of TN Daily Beacon, 3/19)
College students from 25 schools have united forces to petition the federal government to create an additional 100,000 jobs for Hurricane Katrina victims on the Gulf Coast. The initiative, which grew from initial interest by Gulf Coast college students to a nationwide appeal, calls for a National Post-Katrina College Summit to be held April 9 through April 14, to which all college students in the United States are invited. The summit will be a week-long effort for students to engage in many activities promoting a re-awareness of Katrina's aftermath as well as the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, the official name of the program designed to create 100,000 jobs for displaced residents, which would cost about \$4 billion to implement.

Volunteers are 'Angels' to Katrina Victims (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 3/18)
A year and a half later, Hurricane Katrina is history. The alarming images of urban refugees are long gone from the evening news. Newscasters are done crying with victims. Celebrities have found new causes to embrace. And yet, the crisis continues. "Things are not OK down there," said Lynne Onufer, program director of Katrina's Angels. "People are still living in tents." Katrina's Angels are volunteers who have not forgotten, and are not likely to for quite some time, that people are in need in Louisiana and Mississippi. The organization recently added Americus, Ga., to its beneficiaries. The rural town was devastated by tornados on March 1.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

County Volunteer Disaster Group In the Works (PA Leader Times, 3/21)
When severe flooding hit parts of the county in June, many organizations and individuals stepped forward to help those affected by floodwaters. Armstrong County Emergency Management Coordinator Randy Brozenick said that while the efforts of everyone

involved was commendable, those efforts could have been even more effective through better coordination. With that thought in mind, Brozenick, and hazmat coordinator Vince Cappo hope to organize a VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Aiding in Disaster) chapter in the county. Brozenick said one organization that was born out of the June floods was the Disaster Relief Organization of Armstrong County. He said coordinated efforts of DROAC to help families after the flood was "impressive."

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

GA Disaster Aid Grows to \$3.3 Million (PressZoom, 3/23)

An additional \$1 million in disaster-recovery grants and loans has been approved to aid families, individuals and business owners who suffered damage from the severe storms and tornadoes of March 1-2. Total funding now stands at \$3.3 million. The following is a breakdown of federal aid for the counties affected by the storms and tornadoes:

- 1,642 households have registered for Individual Assistance
- \$732,103 has been approved through the Individuals and Household Program
- \$2,594,400 in SBA loans has been approved
- 797 home inspections have been requested, and 747 have been completed
- 2,138 people have visited the six Disaster Recovery Centers

\$250,000 added to fund to help tornado victims (AR Democrat Gazette, 3/22)

Gov. Mike Beebe announced Monday an additional \$250,000 allocation from the Governor's Disaster Fund to help people in four southeast Arkansas counties affected by the tornadoes and severe storms of Feb. 24. The \$250,000 comes on top of \$200,000 Beebe previously authorized from the disaster fund for storm victims in Bradley, Desha, Drew and Union counties, each of which was declared a state disaster area. The money is targeted for temporary housing assistance, crisis counseling, emergency food stamps, home repair/personal-property assistance, disaster unemployment benefits and income-tax assistance.

Disaster Counties Seek FEMA Funding (KCRG (IA), 3/21)

FEMA is touring Iowa to make sure cities, counties and other groups get all the money they deserve. This comes after two severe ice storms rocked much of the state less than a month ago. President Bush has declared 46 counties disaster areas. Wednesday, FEMA met with people from six eastern Iowa counties in Cedar Rapids. The only thing as troubling as the storm itself is the paperwork after the storm. There are problems that need to be fixed and questions that need answers.

Fire at Wayne apartments routs hundreds for a night (Newark Star Ledger, 3/20)

Fire ripped through the top floor of a luxury apartment complex in Wayne yesterday, damaging dozens of units and displacing hundreds of residents for the night, authorities said. Some 45 apartments suffered damage from flames, smoke or water, he said. Authorities could not immediately say how many people lived in those units and how soon they would be able to return. The entire building, home to several hundred residents, was declared uninhabitable for the night because the heat and electricity had

been turned off. Most residents were expected to be permitted to return today. The American Red Cross set up a shelter for some residents at Wayne Valley High School. Others were booked into motels.

Small business panel votes to retool disaster relief programs (GovExec, 3/17)

The House Small Business Committee on Thursday approved a bill that revamps the SBA's disaster relief programs in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The bill seeks to update and improve the SBA's disaster relief provisions in light of the unprecedented levels of destruction brought on by the 2005 hurricane season. It sets aside \$3 million for programs. The bill calls for a comprehensive disaster response plan and charges the SBA administrator with conducting a disaster simulation once per fiscal year. It also calls for enhanced coordination with FEMA. It also calls for the administrator to develop and maintain a centralized information system to track communications between the SBA and disaster victims.

Hurricane Wilma Families Feel Forgotten (Disaster News Network, 3/16)

With much of the nation's attention focused on Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts on the Gulf Coast, hundreds of Florida families still trying to recover from Hurricane Wilma feel forgotten, according to disaster responders. It's very difficult for people to realize that (we still need help)," said Sheri Taylor, director of the Palm Beach County Disaster Recovery Coalition (PBCDRC). "We are still getting calls asking for help." Recovery efforts from Hurricane Wilma that hit in October 2005 were slow to get under way "because the emphasis for everybody was on the grave disaster in New Orleans, Louisiana and Mississippi - and we understand that," said Richard Heers, executive director of Collier County's Immokalee Helping Our People in Emergency (IHOPE). "Initially there was not a great response. That's why it's taken so long."

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

North Carolina shares a model for dealing with disaster (AVMA, 3/21)

Hurricane Katrina was a wake-up call for states that hadn't planned how to handle animal issues during disasters. North Carolina received an earlier wake-up call with Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Flooding from the hurricane devastated the eastern section of the state, killing more than 3 million animals—mostly poultry and pigs. The North Carolina State Animal Response Team emerged in Floyd's aftermath. The public-private partnership follows procedures from human emergency management for a systematic approach to dealing with animals in disasters. The SART model emphasizes coordination among organizations and the training of local volunteers. North Carolina has shared the SART model with many states. A number of states have other programs for animal emergencies. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, though, disaster planning has become a national imperative.

March 22 Is Flood Insurance Day (FEMA 3/21)

This week the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is sponsoring the 2007 National Flood Safety Awareness Week (www.floodsafety.noaa.gov). FEMA

joins with NOAA to support the week, especially Flood Insurance Day, Thursday, March 22. Now is the perfect time to remind Mississippi residents about flood risks and how to prepare and protect themselves as hurricane season approaches. "Flooding is the nation's number one natural disaster, occurring both inland and on the coast. It's important to note that flash floods, inland flooding and seasonal storms flood every region of the country," said David Maurstad, Director of FEMA's Mitigation Division and Federal Insurance Administrator. Twenty to 25 percent of all flood insurance claims are filed in low-to-moderate flood-risk areas.

Washington's Mitigation Measures Pay off in Major Savings (FEMA, 3/20)

Over nearly 30 years, millions of dollars have been spent to relocate or elevate over 100 residences in the town of Snoqualmie. Much of the money came from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). HMGP funding, which is administered by the State, provided between 75 percent of the cost to elevate a home. "When large amounts of money are spent on a project such as this, the public often wonders if it was worth it" said Libby Turner, FEMA's federal coordinating officer. "These homes were flooded prior to 1996 and the homeowners had to decide whether or not to go to the extra trouble of applying for mitigation grant money and/or applying for an SBA loan to mitigate against the chance of future flooding. Since Washington's series of winter storms in 2006, many people are contemplating the same decision."

Warnings Sounded for Wildfire Season (Disaster News Network, 3/19)

Fire officials from California to Florida are hoping for the best but preparing for the worst with predictions of a fierce 2007 wildfire season. A harbinger of the fire season already has been seen in several states, from the 2,036-acre wildfire earlier this month that forced evacuations from wealthy enclaves in Orange County, Calif., to the more than 5,000 acres that have burned so far this year in Virginia. While the actual number of wildfires and acreage burned in the first three months of 2007 is down from the previous year, officials say conditions - drought, low snowpack and higher than normal temperatures - all could contribute to creating an extremely busy and active fire season.

NOAA Releases Flood Risk Predictions (NOAA, 3/15)

Scientists at NOAA highlighted near term flooding in portions of the Midwest and Ohio Valley and continued drought in the Southwest as areas of concern from April through June in the agency's 2007 Spring Outlook. "NOAA's National Hydrologic Assessment indicates a flooding potential this spring for southeast Colorado," said Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), director of the NOAA National Weather Service. "The soil moisture is high, due to the melting of an above normal snowpack, which resulted from record snowfall in December and January."

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Pace of Rebuilding After Katrina Slows (Washington Post, 3/22)

The pace of rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina has slowed, leaving New Orleans and some other Gulf Coast areas with less than half the people they had before the storm. And

some of the hardest hit might never regain their population, experts say. The latest Census Bureau estimates, to be released Thursday, say that 10 months after the hurricane, Orleans Parish in Louisiana had slightly less than half the people it did before the storm. Nearby St. Bernard Parish had less than a fourth of its pre-storm population. Other Gulf Coast communities, meanwhile, have grown as hurricane victims fled to nearby cities and Americans continued a decades-long migration to coastal areas, according the new Census Bureau estimates.

Census shows Katrina's effects on populations (USA Today, 3/22)

Hurricane Katrina drained nearly 300,000 people from coastal areas between Texas and the Florida Panhandle, according to new government population estimates that tally for the first time the storm's devastating toll on the Gulf Coast. Katrina also doubled the rate of population growth in nearby counties, which absorbed tens of thousands of people the hurricane displaced, the Census Bureau's estimates show. Together, 22 coastal counties in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida that were declared disaster areas by the federal government because of Katrina lost 10% of their pre-storm population, enough people to populate a city the size of Newark, N.J. That swath of beach towns and bayous had been growing slowly in the years before the August 2005 hurricane. The losses were most pronounced around New Orleans. The city lost half its population -- about 229,000 people -- between July 2005 and July 2006. Neighboring St. Bernard Parish lost three-quarters of its 65,000 residents.

House passes Gulf Coast relief measure (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/22)

In an effort to boost rebuilding along the Gulf Coast, the House passed legislation to take Louisiana off the hook for paying a share of the recovery tab and would -- if financed by Congress -- put more rebuilding money in the pockets of flooded-out homeowners. Over Republican objections, the bill also would help low-income renters by granting federal housing vouchers to those still displaced by the August 2005 storm. It would block the demolition of public housing in New Orleans and force the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to move 3,000 former residents back in by Oct. 1.

Residents support rules on elevation (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/21)

A smattering of St. Bernard Parish residents spoke in favor of flood elevations proposed by FEMA that would require residents inside the hurricane levee system to raise their homes 3 feet, unless they start the rebuilding process before the new rules go into effect. Parish Council members have waited nearly a year to adopt the new elevation requirements released by FEMA last spring because they wanted to give most people a chance to rebuild without being forced to raise their homes. They expect to adopt the advisories at their April 3 meeting.

State may cover cost of moving home (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/21)

Some storm-scattered Louisiana residents could qualify for up to \$4,000 in moving assistance to return to their homes under Gov. Kathleen Blanco's proposed budget for fiscal year 2008. But the \$270 million program still faces bureaucratic hurdles at FEMA, leaving state and federal officials unsure of when reimbursement checks might find their way into applicants' hands. The Blanco administration has dubbed its proposal the

"repatriation travel program." As part of the \$29.2 billion state spending plan unveiled last week, the program would command \$67.3 million in state revenues, which would leverage almost \$202 million in federal funds.

Houses hold up Katrina recovery (USA Today, 3/20)

An ambitious effort to bulldoze more than 9,000 rotting houses still standing after Hurricane Katrina has slowed sharply this year, prolonging the city's attempts to rebuild blighted neighborhoods, city and federal records show. The homes — some almost untouched since Katrina struck a year and a half ago — are a lingering icon of the storm's devastation and one of the biggest obstacles to New Orleans' rebirth. More than half of the houses ruined during Katrina haven't been razed, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates that the debris from them would fill several times the volume of the Empire State Building. New Orleans issued 330 permits to demolish houses in February, down from 458 in September, a USA TODAY analysis of permit records shows. The corps knocked down 118 last month, compared with 612 in December, according to an agency report.

State Farm to Re-Examine Katrina Claims (Washington Post, 3/20)

State Farm Fire & Casualty Co. will re-examine more than 35,000 policyholder claims filed after Hurricane Katrina and "make millions of dollars available" for additional payments, Mississippi Insurance Commissioner George Dale said Monday. Dale said the agreement between his office and State Farm covers homeowners, renters and commercial claims in Mississippi's three coastal counties. The agreement with the Bloomington, Ill.-based insurer includes claims that are in mediation, those that are the subject of pending lawsuits and those that already have been settled.

Master plan to shape N.O. schools (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/20)

After more than a year of opening schools with a hard-to-avoid, seat-of-the-pants approach, public school officials are embarking on a master plan for the politically dicey issue of deciding which schools will reopen from now on. Last week, the state-run Recovery School District, which earlier this year fumbled with contractor delays and, briefly, a student waiting list, joined with the Orleans Parish School Board to solicit bids for a multimillion-dollar contract to map out the future of all public schools. The contract will be awarded and work will begin next month.

Feds Asked to Assist in Katrina Repatriation (The Advocate, 3/19)

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco wants the federal government to help pay the moving expenses of displaced residents who return to hurricane-affected areas. Blanco set aside \$67.3 million for the expenses in her \$29.2 billion state budget proposal. The state is proposing paying 25 percent of the moving expenses, with the federal government picking up the rest, Deputy Commissioner of Administration Jean Vandal told legislators in a briefing Monday.

New Orleans Residents Struggling to 'Stay Afloat' (N.O. Times Picayune, 3/18)

Many New Orleans residents who before Hurricane Katrina had saved and planned for the future saw their savings sapped and their plans scuttled by enormous losses and

lengthy evacuations, financial experts say. And many are now so financially strapped that they can't focus on long-term financial planning for retirement or paying for a child's college education, reports. The financial cost of dipping into retirement and savings accounts during an emergency such as Katrina but not being able to quickly focus on replenishing that borrowed cash can be steep.

FEMA lightens up on students (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/17)

Calling its own tactics "draconian," FEMA said it is using a lighter touch in attempting to recoup disaster assistance from college students flooded out after Hurricane Katrina. FEMA officials said they aren't wiping the slate clean for about 2,000 New Orleans college students. But the agency is attempting to take a kinder and gentler approach to getting the money back by spelling out how students can appeal and training special case workers to talk them through it. FEMA is seeking to recover money from students who lived in dormitories, which are not in the agency's interpretation of the Stafford Act considered to be "primary residences."