

## **Disaster News Update – March 24 to 30, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** California, Arizona, Texas, Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Alabama
- **Fire:** Minnesota, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia
- **Hail:** Texas
- **Landslides:** Ohio, Illinois, Oregon
- **Severe Winds:** California, Texas
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Wyoming
- **Structure Fire:** Maryland (multiple apartment buildings)
- **Thunderstorms:** Texas
- **Tornadoes:** New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Nebraska

### **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)
- Fire Declarations: [Florida \(3/26\)](#), [California \(3/11\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Florida Baptists Holding Disaster Training** (The Witness, 3/29)

Six regional disaster relief training sessions will be offered throughout Florida. Trainings are divided into phases for new and former volunteers and also offer applied training in specialty skills for recent responders. Areas of applied training include feeding, clean-up and recovery, child care, water purification, spiritual care and emergency communications. Registration is onsite at each training location. Cost is \$25 for phase one and \$10 for phase two. For more information on Florida Disaster Relief training or how to build a disaster relief unit, contact the Disaster Relief and Recovery Department at 800-226-8584, ext. 3121 or email [disaster@flbaptist.org](mailto:disaster@flbaptist.org).

#### **500,000 People Have Helped Rebuild MS** (Christian Science Monitor, 3/27)

Mississippi state officials estimate as many as 500,000 people have come to provide hands-on assistance since Katrina. The federal government has provided relief money – some \$26 billion to Mississippi alone – but it's the hearts and hands of everyday people that are putting storm-torn lives back together. The relief groups have made a difference. Jim Nelson, MS assistant secretary of state for business regulation and enforcement, says in many cases nonprofits have trumped bureaucracy in speed and efficiency. "In the early days after the hurricane, the federal government was disorganized," says Mr. Nelson, whose office oversees every charity registered in the state – including 94 different Katrina groups. "The charitable groups were able to get into the coast more quickly and hit the ground running."

**Operation Blessing Rebuilds in the Gulf** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/26)

College student Nicole Rotert plank by plank rebuilt the floor of the locker room at the Edward A. Kattengell Center in Arabi one day last week. Rotert, a biology major from Dana College in Nebraska, arrived with construction experience and a desire to help Hurricane Katrina victims during her spring break and signed on with Operation Blessing International, the humanitarian arm of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network. Rotert's sweat-and-tears efforts are part of a \$300,000 facelift and reconstruction project at the Kattengell Center expected to be finished by mid-May. The project aims to transform the circa-1932 gym and its adjoining field, which had been untouched since Katrina flooded the area under more than 5 feet of water.

**Americorps helps seniors, disabled with tree debris** (Buffalo News, 3/25)

Senior citizens and disabled people who need help cleaning their yards of debris left over from the October storm will be getting it from Western New York AmeriCorps. The effort, which will employ 49 people for 10 weeks until the end of May, was developed under a joint initiative between AmeriCorps and the Workforce Investment Board, using state and federal disaster recovery funding. The workers will remove branches and debris from the yards of residents throughout Erie County. Assistance is available at no cost to any senior citizen or disabled individual in Erie County who was affected by the October storm. Teams will remove branches and debris from yards to the street for removal by municipal highway departments.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

**Belleville, IL Looking for Disaster Training Volunteers** (News Democrat, 3/26)

The city is seeking volunteers to participate in disaster training with the American Red Cross. An informational meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., today at City Hall, 101 S. Illinois St. Training may include emergency shelter management, CPR and case management. Trained volunteers would be called upon to work in shelters in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. For more information call Mayor Mark Eckert's office at 233-6810, ext. 239.

**Jewish Federation Offering Relocation Grants** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/25)

Its numbers sharply reduced by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans' Jewish community is about to launch a novel rebuilding campaign to recruit as many as 1,000 Jewish families to New Orleans with offers of moving grants, loans and other economic incentives. The unusual initiative -- maybe unique in the recovering city -- is part of an aggressive, multipronged effort by the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans to repair and perhaps even expand the Jewish community beyond its pre-Katrina numbers. The community plans to market New Orleans to Jewish families nationally as a city filled with opportunities for pioneers interested in rebuilding a battered Jewish community, as well as the broader city.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Federal Grants To Restore Tornado-Damaged Infrastructure** (FEMA, 3/29)

The destructive tornadoes that swept through Alabama on March 1, left behind a path of destruction - homes destroyed, trees toppled and lives disrupted. In addition to homes and personal property destroyed, the tornadoes inflicted heavy damage on schools, public buildings and left piles of debris to be cleaned up. These damages to public property fall into a separate category of assistance called Public Assistance available to Coffee, Henry and Wilcox counties.

### **American Red Cross Responds to CO Tornado** (KKTV, 3/29)

The American Red Cross Southeastern Colorado Branch in Pueblo has deployed to Holly, Colorado to respond to the tornado that occurred late Wednesday evening. The Red Cross Emergency Response Vehicle and cadre of disaster response volunteers are on site in the affected area delivering emergency services such as sheltering and feeding. Working with the Garden City, KS and Denver, CO Red Cross chapters, the Pueblo Red Cross branch is opening a shelter for the displaced families at the Anna Bryce Building, 206 N. 3rd St. in Holly. Additional volunteer teams will be deployed to Holly today to conduct an impact assessment. Initial reports indicate that as many as 60 homes have been damaged. The Pueblo Red Cross branch will continue to provide for the urgent needs of food, clothing and shelter and has teams of volunteers on stand-by to begin individual client casework and counseling services.

### **Tornado Cleanup Begins in Colorado** (Disaster News Network, 3/29)

One woman died and eight people were hospitalized in Holly, CO, after the twister hit the town with little warning. The tornado was one or more than 60 twisters that hit primarily rural communities in multiple Midwestern states on Wednesday. Recovery efforts were under way, with the Salvation Army sending in a mobile kitchen and Adventist Community Services setting up a command trailer to serve as a centralized emergency response post. The American Red Cross was also on the scene and opened an emergency shelter. FEMA officials were on the scene and SBA representatives were scheduled to arrive Friday to also assess damages.

### **FEMA Assessing NM Tornado Damage** (NM Business Weekly, 3/28)

FEMA officials joined state and local officials on Tuesday in conducting a preliminary damage survey of the areas affected by the storms. FEMA officials will determine from this evaluation whether or not the damage is severe enough to qualify as a federal disaster, which could make the region eligible for federal disaster aid. One person has died in Clovis from injuries sustained in the storm, and 35 were injured. According to a news report on the Web site of the Clovis News Journal, approximately 75 homes and businesses were destroyed, and about 500 structures were damaged. Richardson has declared a disaster in Curry, Quay and Roosevelt counties, which makes those counties eligible to receive state funds for emergency response and cleanup. Officials with the Governor's Office indicated they didn't know when federal aid resulting from a presidential disaster declaration would be forthcoming.

**FEMA to aid victims of Alabama tornado** (Birmingham News, 3/28)

Word spread quickly about the FEMA center set up Tuesday in Adamsville, and by that afternoon, at least 30 residents whose homes or businesses were damaged in a March 1 tornado had come in to seek assistance. A preliminary disaster assessment showed residents had the resources to handle the loss from the tornado, said FEMA spokeswoman Jamilah Fraser. But the city of Adamsville and several politicians appealed this assessment and proved that local and state means had been exhausted. FEMA reassessed the Westwood Gardens subdivision and surrounding area and determined "there was enough damage to qualify for individual disaster assistance," said Fraser. Susie Cathey, of the Adamsville Mayor's Office, said city officials are pleased that FEMA has changed its decision.

**Counties Added to Iowa Declaration** (PressZoom, 3/27)

Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division ( HSEMD ) and FEMA announced that Mahaska and Polk Counties have been added to the Presidential Disaster Declaration for Iowa counties affected by recent severe winter weather. This presidential disaster enables public agencies to be eligible to receive federal disaster aid. Public entities in 48 Iowa counties will be eligible for public assistance and debris removal as the result of severe winter weather that began February 23, 2007. The counties included in the declaration are Benton, Black Hawk, Boone, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Calhoun, Cedar, Chickasaw, Clinton, Des Moines, Fayette, Floyd, Franklin, Greene, Grundy, Hamilton, Hardin, Henry, Howard, Humboldt, Iowa, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Johnson, Jones, Keokuk, Lee, Linn, Louisa, Mahaska, Marion, Marshall, Mitchell, Muscatine, Pocahontas, Polk, Poweshiek, Story, Tama, Van Buren, Wapello, Washington, Winnebago, Winneshiek, Worth, and Wright.

**Alabama Disaster Assistance Expands To Include Jefferson County** (FEMA, 3/26)

Homeowners, renters and business owners in Jefferson County who suffered damage as a result of the March 1 severe storms and tornadoes are now eligible to apply for federal disaster assistance. FEMA and the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) have been working together to help Alabama residents recover since March 3 when the president declared the disaster. "Adding Jefferson County means that residents in seven Alabama counties – Coffee, Dale, Dallas, Henry, Jefferson, Montgomery and Wilcox – now qualify for individual Assistance," Gracia Szczech, federal coordinating officer, said.

**FEMA Adds County to GA Declaration** (WRDW, 3/25)

It's been nearly a month since an EF-2 tornado destroyed homes and lives. Today Warren County storm victims say they finally have some hope. FEMA has added Warren County to the federal disaster list for storm aid. Neighboring McDuffie County received federal relief from FEMA almost instantly, but warren county waited 25 long days to be added to the list.

**MS Needs \$500 Million for Recovery** (Disaster News Network, 3/23)

Eighteen months after Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast, nearly \$500 million is still required to meet the unmet needs of the poor and displaced in six Mississippi

counties, according to the head of a disaster relief organization. And with less than 90 days until the start of the 2007 hurricane season, more than 15,000 homes are still in need of rehabilitation and repair, said Roberta Avila, executive director of the Mississippi Coast Interfaith Disaster Task Force, an umbrella organization for groups involved in the disaster recovery.

**\$5.8 Million In Disaster Aid Approved For Alabama** (FEMA, 3/23)

Since President Bush declared a major disaster for the State of Alabama 3 weeks ago, significant amounts of federal aid have begun to flow into the affected areas. Families, individuals and business owners who suffered damage from the severe storms and tornadoes of March 1, have been approved to receive approximately \$5.8 million in assistance from FEMA and SBA. Below is the breakdown of federal aid for the six counties affected by the storms and tornadoes as of the close of business Wednesday, March 21, 2007:

- **1,656** households have registered for Individual Assistance.
- **\$1,070,009** has been approved through the Individuals and Household Program. Of that, FEMA has provided **\$709,317** in Housing Assistance and **\$360,692** in Other Needs Assistance (ONA).
- **\$4,728,700** in loans has been approved by the SBA for homeowners, renters, individuals and business owners affected by the severe storms and tornadoes. Of this, **\$4,671,000** has been approved for home loans and **\$57,700** has been approved for businesses.
- **845** home inspections have been requested. To date, all of the **845** requests have been scheduled and **832** have been completed. There are currently **3** inspectors in the field.
- **1,694** people have visited the six Disaster Recovery Centers established to meet the recovery-information needs of individuals in the counties affected by the March 1 tornadoes. One center remains open in Enterprise.

Eligible counties include Coffee, Dale, Dallas, Henry, Montgomery and Wilcox.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

**Experts Discuss Coastal Risks** (Disaster News Network, 3/29)

Disaster mitigation experts and responders may not be able to change the public's desire to live along the U.S. coast, but they can help publicize and plan for the risks, according to attendees at the 19th Disasters Roundtable workshop. Everyone should also be working together toward that goal, they said. The workshop, "Protecting Lives and Property at our Coastlines," touched on issues including responsible development, building codes and how disasters impact small businesses.

**Agencies converge for annual disaster training** (Myrtle Beach Online, 3/28)

More than 500 emergency managers, responders and volunteers will be in Myrtle Beach this week, not because there is a disaster, but to learn the latest on preparing for one. The 2007 South Carolina Hurricane/Emergency Management Workshop, presented by the S.C. Emergency Management Division, begins today and concludes Friday. The annual

event helps local officials plan how they will work with the community and other local agencies to prepare for a tropical storm or other threat.

**AR bill requires emergency plans to include daycare** (DeWitt Era Enterprise, 3/28)

If HB 2211, “The Emergency Preparedness for Child Care Facilities Act,” becomes law, the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services will be required to share a list of all licensed day care centers with the Department of Emergency Management. Childcare facilities will be included in emergency preparedness plans and exercises. The state will notify childcare facilities of emergency shelters in their area and the centers will be required to notify parents annually of the designated shelters that are closest to the childcare facility.

**Jefferson to try out text alert system** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/26)

Jefferson Parish wants to get immediate alerts to its residents, so it is piloting a notification system that would send mass text messages to citizens' cell phones. The program would tailor the notices to specific neighborhoods, sending the warnings only to people in danger, authorities said. The parish expects the direct link to constituents to come in especially handy when hurricanes threaten, both to tell residents when their areas should evacuate and to send specific damage information about their neighborhoods afterward. Administrators already divide the parish into 27 emergency response zones, the same areas used to chart debris collections. Parish crews ostensibly would survey each zone daily and send out updated descriptions so evacuees know when roads are cleared and public services restored so they can return.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

**Slidell extends trailer living** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/28)

Slidell residents affected by Hurricane Katrina will have until one month after the second anniversary of the storm to continue living in or storing belongings in temporary trailers in their front yards. The Slidell City Council unanimously adopted a resolution Tuesday giving residents another six months, until Sept. 26, to keep temporary trailers, recreational vehicles and any housing supplied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency on residential properties. On Sept. 28, 2005, the council decided to allow trailers, vehicles and FEMA-supplied housing on residential property for one year. When the September 2006 deadline arrived, council members extended the ordinance six months. On Tuesday, the council approved a second extension.

**Surge in Homelessness Hits New Orleans** (Christian Science Monitor, 3/28)

While New Orleans has long struggled with poverty, the face of homelessness has changed since Katrina, advocates say. The population now includes the chronically homeless who never left the city or have returned; residents who lost their homes to the flood and have run out of federal assistance – or may have never received assistance – and cannot afford higher rents; and thousands of Latino workers who came to rebuild the city, many of whom brought their spouses and children and cannot find a place to live.

**Project Recovery ending next month** (MS Sun Herald, 3/27)

William Hathorne, a resident of the FEMA trailer park on the old Gulfport VA property, is almost over the storm. He still needs a little help though, which he got Friday from Project Recovery, a FEMA-funded crisis counseling group which helps locals fill in the gaps in assistance for things like mental health care and other services. "I'm really worried... if they come in and say I got to go," Hathorne said after his visit from smiling, blue-shirted Project Recovery workers. Those gaps in care endangering people like Hathorne are about to get wider, as Project Recovery is ending its mandate and FEMA is ending its commitment to mental health services on the Coast next month. Many mental health services providers in the region say the end of that commitment is coming at a terrible time, as many long-term mental health needs are only now beginning to surface and heavily tax an already overtaxed system.

**House Votes to Extend Katrina Tax Credit** (Washington Post, 3/27)

The House on Tuesday approved a two-year extension of a program offering tax credits for construction of low-income housing in areas hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The \$237 million bill, passed by voice vote, would extend the current deadline within which affordable rental units must be occupied by two years, through the end of 2010. It also makes it easier for homeowners to benefit from tax-exempt bonds issued by local governments for renovations and refinancing residential mortgage loans.

**Gulf Coast Residents Fighting Depression** (Sun Herald, 3/26)

The first few months after Hurricane Katrina, most Coast residents were in shock, say experts. Around the one-year mark, people here started really digesting what happened and what it means to their lives and depression started to sink in, experts say. As that passes and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression appear in the area, average Coastians have few places to turn to escape the ever-present hurricane destruction, be it in shattered buildings or lives. "It means that every single night when people go home they are reminded of the crisis," said Dr. Thomas Yarnell of the Gulf Coast Counseling Center. "Their ability to cope is wearing down little by little. I am seeing that in my private practice: more symptoms are starting to show up. Even some of the stronger people are starting to wear down. Now I'm seeing people who are just worn out."

**Road Home eyeing Mississippi system** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/26)

As Louisiana officials wrangled last week over how to satisfy federal complaints about the Road Home program -- while still protecting grant recipients from mortgage company claims -- eyes turned to Mississippi, which has long since devised an arrangement that appears to balance the interests of lenders and owners of storm-damaged homes. Under the first phase of a federally financed rebuilding program, lenders holding grant applicants' mortgages dole out money in a lump sum, without use of staged payments as construction proceeds -- Louisiana's past practice. Mississippi's version of the Road Home, called the Homeowners Assistance Program, allows lenders to siphon off enough money to cover overdue mortgage payments, but blocks them from demanding other payments on a home loan. The two states' programs are fundamentally alike in allowing

grants of up to \$150,000, after subtracting insurance benefits. And like Louisiana's Road Home, the Mississippi program was criticized for a slow start.

**19 months later, hurricane-rebuilding money slow to flow** (Associated Press, 3/25)

Of the \$151 million in federal rebuilding aid the city received in the first 18 months following Hurricane Katrina, less than 10 percent went into permanent public repairs and reconstruction. The rest - about \$137.7 million - went for such things as debris removal, temporary roofs for storm-battered buildings, and overtime and other expenses of the emergency response, city finance officials say. None of it comes close to the \$1 billion or more the city says it will take just to restore what Katrina ruined. Blame higher-up bureaucracy, the city says.

**Gulf Coast Relief funds may get lost in Iraq war** (New Orleans Times Picayune, 3/24)

More than \$6 billion in recovery relief for the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast could fall victim to the political battle about how to manage troop deployments in Iraq. A provision in the bill passed narrowly Friday by the House orders President Bush to bring most combat troops home by September 2008, drawing a new veto threat from the White House. The president also complained about "billions for pet projects" in the bill "that have nothing to do with winning the war on terror." The Senate is to take up its version of the supplemental spending bill next week.

**Convict Ban Attached to Gulf Coast Housing Act** (Washington Times, 3/22)

House Republicans yesterday forced through an amendment barring convicts from receiving taxpayer housing assistance, attaching it to a Gulf Coast recovery bill, which passed overwhelmingly. "We must ensure that residents returning home have access to safe, affordable and quality housing," said Rep. Bobby Jindal, Louisiana Republican, whose measure was added to a bill created to protect public housing ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Some Democrats, including Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts, said victims of Katrina were being held to a higher legal standard than other recipients of low-income housing across the nation.