

## **Disaster News Update –December 3 to 9, 2007**

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

- **Drought:** Hawaii, Oregon, California, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida
- **Fire:** South Carolina, California, New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina
- **Heavy rain / Flooding:** Washington, Oregon
- **Severe Winter Weather:** Indiana, Pennsylvania, Washington, Oregon
- **Shooting Rampage:** Nebraska
- **Strong winds:** Washington

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

- [Washington](#): Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (12/8)
- [Oregon](#): Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (12/8)
- [Indiana](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (11/30)
- Fire Declarations: [New Mexico \(11/21\)](#)

### **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS**

#### **Obama proposes expanded national service programs** (AP, 12/6)

Democrat Barack Obama on Wednesday advocated a major expansion of the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps and other national service programs, declaring, "This will be a cause of my presidency." The Illinois senator said the government is not keeping pace with those who want to help. "We will create new opportunities for all of us to serve," he said at a rally at Cornell College. Obama evoked the memory of President Kennedy and his Peace Corps volunteers, saying, "JFK made their service a bridge to the developing world." Despite growing anti-Americanism around the world, he said, "the American people are not the problem, they are the answer." Obama, a senator from Illinois, said he also would expand the all-volunteer military but would "never send them to fight in a misguided war." "The burden of service has fallen more and more on the brave men and women of our military," he said, citing "tour upon tour of duty in a war with no end." For returning troops, he said, "We will enlist veterans to help other veterans to find jobs, and to pitch in at VA hospitals and nursing homes." His plan would:

- Expand AmeriCorps from its current 75,000 positions to 250,000, with new units to deal with education, clean energy, health care and homeland security.
- Expand service programs involving retired people and anyone over 55.
- Double the size of the Peace Corps from its current 7,800 volunteers to 16,000 by its 50th anniversary in 2011.
- Set goals for middle school and high school students to give 50 hours a year of public service, and for college students to serve 100 hours a year.

**Oregon emergency officials say ham radio operators unsung heroes** (AP, 12/5)

When parts of Oregon were overwhelmed by wind and water during the recent storm, vital communication often was lacking, with trees down and across phone lines and cell coverage limited. Even the state police had difficulty in reaching some of their own troops. But ham radio worked. In fact, amateur radio operators were heralded by state emergency officials as heroes. Ham radio is more than just a hobby to some. It can set up networks for government and emergency officials to communicate when other communication services fail. "One of the problems in this is always communication," Gov. Ted Kulongoski said after a visit Tuesday to Vernonia and a fly-over there and other affected areas. "I'm going to tell you who the heroes were from the very beginning of this...the ham radio operators. These people just came in and actually provided a tremendous communication link to us." A network of at least 60 volunteer amateur radio operators working along the coast and inland helped from keep crucial systems such as 911 calls, American Red Cross and hospital services connected. They relayed information about patient care and relayed lists of supplies needed in areas cut off by water. In addition to getting an FCC license to operate, certain groups of operators are cleared by the federal government to work as emergency responders. "You are amateur in name only," said Steve Sanders, a spokesman for District One of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, which helped in several key counties hit by the storm.

**COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS**

**Seniors, Ability First make disaster kits together** (Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, 12/8)

Two of the Inland Valley's more fragile communities are working together to help others. Community Senior Services based in Claremont has received a grant from the Tarjan Center at UCLA Spencer-Russell Service Inclusion program. It will allow seniors to work with young disabled people from Ability First to package disaster preparedness kits. The group hopes to complete 50 kits so they can be distributed to frail seniors. Community Senior Services has worked in the area for 33 years and is a lead agency providing programs and services to seniors. Ability First is formerly known as the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California and it has helped disabled individuals for 80 years. Since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the homes and lives of so many in 2005, communities have been looking at ways to help ease the pressure of first responders in an emergency. Key to that effort is to encourage and help people take care of themselves for the first 72 hours. The Inland Valley joint effort involves the compiling and distribution of home disaster kits containing such items as nonperishable food, flashlight and batteries, fresh water and toiletries. Ability First students will meet Tuesday to help decorate the containers. The joint months-long program will culminate the week of Jan. 14 to honor the late Dr. Martin Luther King and his Day of Service. Coordinators of the event will be Gwen Alber, senior companion program director; Sandee Hayden, RSVP director; Scott Snider from the city of La Verne; and Graciela Castro, who will oversee training and education with local fire, police and hospital services.

**San Jose FD to give away smoke detectors Saturday** (San Jose Mercury News, 12/6)

The San Jose Fire Department and Los Bomberos of Northern California plans to give

away smoke detectors Saturday and will help install them. Starting at 11:45 a.m. at Washington Elementary School, at 100 Oak St., 450 smoke alarms will be given away. For those who live within a 10-block area of the school, Los Bomberos, a community firefighters group, will help install them. The smoke detectors were donated by the Rotary Club of Saratoga and San Jose, Lowe's and Home Depot. San Jose fire Chief Darryl Von Raesfeld and the Firefighters Local 230 will also be at the school to help distribute the smoke detectors. Having a smoke alarm can double the chances of surviving a fire, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, part of FEMA, which aims to reduce life and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies.

**Better technology to track evacuees with special needs** (Houston Chronicle, 12/5)

After dealing with massive, chaotic evacuations that followed hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the state of Texas has hired telecommunications giant AT&T to help it improve the way it handles future disaster relocations. AT&T has delivered a new system to the state that can help emergency workers better track "special needs" evacuees, or those who are unable to drive themselves to safety after a disaster. The \$4 million project - being called the country's first statewide evacuation system - uses gear including hand-held scanners and chip-implanted wristbands to make sure evacuees arrive safely and can be located by loved ones. The Governor's Division of Emergency Management ordered the new evacuee-management system this summer after reviewing the way it handled hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Jack Colley, chief of the Division of Emergency Management, said the state had a significant test of the then-incomplete SNETS system when it braced this summer for the arrival of Hurricane Dean. Although the storm petered out before it ran aground, emergency officials prepared to evacuate portions of South Texas, giving AT&T and the state a chance for a massive test to make sure the new program was in working order. Under the new system, dubbed the Texas Special Needs Evacuation Tracking System, state workers would register evacuees' names and drivers' license numbers into a database, then issue each with a plastic wristband imbedded with a radio-frequency identification chip. "In Katrina and Rita, the state was dealing with situations where they didn't know where some of the evacuees were taken," said Lesia Dickson, technical sales consultant for San Antonio-based AT&T. "There was understandable stress from those evacuees' families. They wanted to make sure that didn't happen again." Emergency workers using portable Motorola Inc. scanners would be able to read the chips on wristbands to track which evacuees board rescue buses or when they arrive safely at a shelter, Dickson said. With SNETS, the state can attach ID chips to pets' collars to make sure families and their animals can be reunited once they reach safety.

**MA Communities Become StormReady** (MA Telegram & Gazette, 12/5)

Significantly enhanced after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency requires every community to have an emergency management director and a plan for responding to natural and man-made disasters or other emergencies. A handful of communities, including Shrewsbury and Worcester, have gone a step further. They are among only five in the state, along with Southwick, Taunton and Carver, to have completed a rigorous, six-category checklist and become recognized as "StormReady" by the National Weather Service. Six Flags New England in Agawam and Harvard University are also among the 1,276 StormReady sites in the United States,

Guam and Puerto Rico. "You're never going to have a storm-proof town, because storms can occur anywhere, but the StormReady program helps communities ensure they have worked to their fullest to be prepared to respond to weather emergencies as best as they can," said Glenn A. Field, warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service forecast office in Taunton. The program, started in the Midwest in 1999, has six requirements: a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center; three to four ways to receive NWS warnings; one to four ways to monitor hydrometeorological data; one to four ways to disseminate warnings to residents; annual weather safety talks and trained spotters and dispatchers in the community; and a formal hazardous weather operations plan, as well as exchange visits by the local emergency manager and NWS officials. Were a major storm headed toward Shrewsbury, emergency management personnel would be notified by MEMA via weather radios and police teletype. Five-hundred-pound rotating sirens on utility poles at each of the three fire stations would emit an ear-splitting tone for eight seconds, followed by a loud voice announcement of an impending tornado. The announcement would be broadcast on the town-run cable-access channel and regular television and radio. "We do have an advantage over most communities," said Mr. Arnold. "We might get 15 to 20 minutes warning, tops. But in terms of fleeing for your life or getting yourself to a safe area in whatever building you're in, that could make an enormous difference." Each community's plan is designed to address many hazards - winter storms, dam failures, tornadoes, earthquakes, flooding, terrorism incidents and hazardous materials spills - and has information about the emergency operations center, evacuation procedure, designated shelters and the protocol for contacting medical professionals, tree cutters and other emergency services.

**ALERT class covers basic medical assistance** (Vallejo Times Herald, 12/30)  
Flushing burns, bandaging wounds and splinting broken bones were among the skills participants learned last week in Vallejo's second ALERT training course's fourth installment. The first six-week All Emergency Response Team course produced 25 graduates, and the current one may turn out about 20, said Vallejo Fire Department Capt. Ann Cavanaugh, the ALERT instructor. The idea is to train Vallejoans to create neighborhood teams citywide, she said. Another of DHS-sponsored six-week series is likely to begin in February, she said. Last week, the importance of gloves to avoid cross contamination was stressed, as was the need to protect victims' privacy. "What happens in the treatment area, stays in the treatment area," Cavanaugh told team members. How to assess disaster victims brought into makeshift treatment areas was last week's focus. The approach to a victim depends on consciousness. If the victim is conscious, team members were told to ask the victim's name and age and if they remember what happened as well as to help assess their physical and mental conditions. If unconscious, the victim should be gently shaken and spoken to clearly and loudly near their ear. Members were also instructed to watch body movements for indications of pain. In an emergency, team members will be asked to help authorities determine the number and severity of injuries in their area and perform urgent treatment for those who would likely die waiting for help otherwise. Students were taught how to check for broken bones and internal bleeding and how to stabilize those with burns, trauma, fractures and sprains.

## **RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Tens of thousands without power in wake of ice storm** (Associated Press, 12/9)

Tens of thousands were without power and the governor declared a state of emergency in the wake of an ice storm that glazed roads and snapped power lines as it moved across Missouri on Sunday. Gov. Matt Blunt also activated state emergency operations and the Missouri National Guard to aid communities affected by a storm that was expected to continue through midweek. At Kansas City International Airport, about two dozen flights had been canceled by mid-afternoon Sunday. At Lambert International Airport in St. Louis, 13 flights were canceled Sunday morning, but most flights were running on time by late afternoon. The brunt of the storm hit central, southwest and northeast Missouri, where utilities reported tens of thousands without power. The storm developed when a cold boundary collided with moisture from the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico. AmerenUE in St. Louis reported a total of 36,414 power outages in St. Charles, Lincoln, and Warren counties in eastern Missouri, as well as the Jefferson City area, where ice-laden trees were falling down. About 40,000 Empire Electric customers had lost power, primarily in the Joplin, Webb City and Bolivar area. St. Clair County in west central Missouri reported outages countywide, including in Collins and Osceola. The Cedar County towns of Stockton, Caplinger Mills and Jerico Springs in west-central Missouri also were without power. Susie Stonner with the State Emergency Management Agency said Missouri was hit by two storm systems that dropped sleet and freezing rain. One storm moved east across the state from Kansas City; a second one traveled northeast from Springfield up the Interstate 44 corridor. Another storm was expected Monday night into Tuesday, but was expected to clear out by Wednesday, National Weather Service meteorologist Benjamin Sipprell said. Communities reported ice as much as three-quarters of an inch thick, he said.

### **More Assistance for Oregon Counties** (FEMA, 12/9)

FEMA announced that additional federal assistance will be available for individuals and communities in Columbia and Tillamook counties. The additional assistance was granted to help homeowners, renters, and businesses recover from the effects of the severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides beginning on December 1, 2007, and continuing. Federal assistance for emergency protective measures and debris removal, including direct federal assistance was made available for Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook, and Yamhill counties under the President's December 8, 2007 major disaster declaration. "FEMA will continue to coordinate with the governor to assess the need for more federal aid to assist in response and recovery efforts" said FEMA Administrator David Paulison. Residents of Columbia and Tillamook counties may be eligible for assistance under FEMA's Individual Assistance program. The Individual Assistance program can help eligible applicants with temporary housing assistance, uninsured personal property and medical, dental, and funeral expenses caused by the disaster, and other serious unmet needs.

### **More Assistance For Washington Counties** (FEMA, 12/9)

FEMA announced that additional federal assistance will be available for individuals and communities in Grays Harbor and Lewis counties. Federal assistance for emergency

protective measures and debris removal, including direct federal assistance was made available for Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston counties under the President's December 8, 2007 major disaster declaration. The additional assistance was granted to help homeowners, renters, and businesses recover from the effects of the severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides beginning on December 1, 2007, and continuing. "FEMA will continue to coordinate with the governor to assess the need for more federal aid to assist in response and recovery efforts," said FEMA Administrator David Paulison. Residents of Grays Harbor and Lewis counties may be eligible for assistance under FEMA's Individual Assistance program. The Individual Assistance program can help eligible applicants with temporary housing assistance, uninsured personal property and medical, dental, and funeral expenses caused by the disaster, and other serious unmet needs.

**Maui County hoping to receive federal disaster declaration** (Associated Press, 12/9)  
Maui County officials plan to seek a disaster declaration and FEMA aid to help it recover from this week's storm. Heavy rains and winds caused a flash flood in Kula and electrical and water failures throughout the island. Residents are cleaning up debris from the massive wall of water, rock, mud and debris, including logs and trees, that swept through the area Wednesday. The flooding swept one house 100 feet from its foundation. County officials are still working on damage estimates from the storm and looking at its impact on Lanai and Molokai, as well as remote rural areas such as Kaupo and Kahikunui. But county spokeswoman Mahina Martin told the Honolulu Star-Bulletin that Maui would seek a disaster declaration and aid from FEMA. She said once the disaster assessment is completed, it will be forwarded to state Civil Defense and the Governor's Office for their recommendation. Martin said the county has had difficulty completing its investigation because the weather was preventing officials from surveying affected areas by air. The American Red Cross found 142 Maui residents affected by the storm. Richard Dewinetz, president of the Maalaea Surf Homeowners Association, said workers cleaned out the mud in their parking lot after water swept in from a newly installed drainage channel at the Mokulele-Piilani highway project.

**President Declares Major Disaster for Washington** (FEMA, 12/8)  
FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Washington to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides beginning on December 1, 2007, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance, under the Public Assistance program in Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston counties. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Thomas P. Davies as the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Davies said damage surveys have been scheduled and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are completed.

**President Declares Major Disaster for Oregon** (FEMA, 12/8)

FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Oregon to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides beginning on December 1, 2007, and continuing. FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the assistance was authorized under a major disaster declaration issued for the state by President Bush. The President's action makes federal funding available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance, under the Public Assistance program in Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook, and Yamhill counties. Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures for all counties and tribes within the state. Paulison named Glen R. Sachtleben as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected area. Sachtleben said damage surveys have been scheduled and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are completed.

**Devastated NW Starts Drying Out** (Disaster News Network, 12/8)

Residing in the Pacific Northwest has been likened by residents there to living in heaven. Over the past few days, according to one disaster response coordinator, it has become like living in hell. "It's devastating," said Noreen Goplen, coordinator for the Lutheran Northwest Disaster Response Team, referring to the massive flooding, mudslides and hurricane force winds which battered the coastal areas. The back-to-back storms which pummeled the region earlier in the week left at least eight people dead, flooded an untold number of homes and businesses, knocked out telephone and electric services and forced the shutdown of numerous roads including Interstate 5 which links Seattle and Portland. Preliminary damage estimates for Washington alone have been put at nearly \$1 billion. "I've been working disasters in the Northwest since the floods of '96 and I've never seen anything like this," said Goplen, who also serves as head of the Oregon Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. "We're looking at much heavier losses this time." Goplen described the damages as "extreme." "We've sent teams in today to start assessing the destruction and so far, the reports are not good," she said. "Acres and acres of trees have been blown down in mass. They've fallen on houses and power lines or they're just laying on the ground like matchsticks. Power is out, which means there is no heat. People were trying to stay warm in their cars but as they ran out of gas, they couldn't get more because electricity is required to run the gas pumps."

**CA Evacuation Orders Lifted** (Disaster News Network, 12/7)

Evacuation orders were lifted Friday for residents in canyon areas in Orange County after the threat of mudslides and flooding from rainstorms eased in the wildfire-ravaged area. Forecasters had predicted up to 3 inches of rain across burn areas in Southern California, but rainfall was lighter than expected. Only about one-half to 1 inch of rain fell in Orange County, while 2.5 inches was reported in San Diego County. A flash flood watch issued by the National Weather Service for the region was in effect through Friday for several areas, including mountain areas in Riverside, San Diego and San Bernardino counties, the Santa Ana mountains and foothills and San Diego County valleys. Residents in

Modjeska, Williams and Silverado canyon areas in Orange County, who were under a mandatory evacuation order, were allowed to return home Friday morning. It was the second time in two weeks that residents had been told to leave their homes due to the threat of mudslides. Reports from the area Friday said most residents had refused to leave. In San Diego County, officials made reverse 911 calls Friday to homes in the Poomacha burn area advising residents to closely monitor weather reports and to consider evacuating if conditions warranted. Showers were forecast for the region through the weekend.

**Possessions and lives left in pieces** (Seattle Times, 12/7)

For two days, Norm Leach's house sat stewing in the Chehalis River's muddy floodwaters. Now he's afraid there's little worth saving from his home of 38 years. "Everything is ruined," Leach said as he stepped through the rubble of what used to be his living room. With the floodwaters finally receding, Leach and dozens of his neighbors spent Thursday mucking out their homes, tallying their losses and venting their frustrations. "I called FEMA twice and they said they can't do anything," Leach said. "But, hell, think about Katrina it took them three weeks to get down there." FEMA says it can't respond to requests for help unless President Bush declares an emergency. Gov. Christine Gregoire asked for that declaration Thursday. There still is no clear estimate of the number of people flooded out of their homes in Lewis County. Wearing chest waders, a "Wishin' I Was Fishin' " hat and smoking a cigarette as he worked, Leach said it wasn't all the wrecked furniture and appliances that bothered him most. Instead, he said, he's upset about losing things he can never replace like the 1890s heirloom violin he'd hidden under his bed. "It's in pieces," said Leach, a 64-year-old retired logger. Centralia is a town that's had more than its share of heartache lately. More than 500 people lost their jobs a year ago when the nearby TransAlta coal mine shut down. Who knows how many jobs will be lost at least temporarily since the local Wal-Mart and other businesses were flooded out this week. This neighborhood on the south side of town, which sits on the opposite side of Interstate 5 from the Chehalis River, was particularly hard-hit by the flood. Residents say the water came up fast and without warning before dawn Tuesday after the floodwaters burst through a nearby dike. Leach said it's the first time he has seen the neighborhood flood.

**Phones, power slow to come back in northwest Oregon** (Associated Press, 12/6)

The damage that tandem storms caused to power and phone lines along the Oregon coast was worse than initially thought, but progress was reported.. Qwest said Wednesday night it had completed repairs on its main fiberoptic system on the north coast, restoring telephone, high-speed Internet and other services. But spokesman Bob Gravley said some work such as reconnecting individual residences remains to be done. Other recovery continued apace. Cell-phone service was being restored. People left shelters, with the Red Cross reporting about 370 remaining Tuesday night. Highways continued to reopen, but U.S. 26, the Sunset Highway, remained closed in its western reach, and Oregon 38, the Umpqua Highway, was closed from Reedsport to Elkton due to a landslide. In Clatsop County, where about 23,000 Pacific Power remained without power, utility crews found damage to a major transmission line was more extensive than thought, said Doug Johnson, spokesman for the Bonneville Power Administration. Pacific Power said service

may not be restored until Thursday or Friday and was installing a two-megawatt generator at Cannon Beach to provide power in the meantime. South of Clatsop County the Tillamook People's Utility District reported about 11,000 of its 19,000 customers still without power on Wednesday. Inland, Red Cross relief workers, state officials and prison inmates converged on Vernonia, a Coast Range timber town that was overwhelmed by fast-rising floodwater on Monday and Tuesday.

**Drought conditions worsen in Southeast** (USA Today, 12/5)

Townsppeople stood in the withering heat at grocery stores and community centers, waiting to fill plastic jugs with water. Tanker trucks rumbled down the highways, bringing relief to a thirsty town suddenly gone dry. That was the scene 13 years ago when the Georgia city of Macon ran out of water. But it could also be a glimpse of the very near future in Atlanta and some other cities in the drought-stricken Southeast. They may be down to just a few months of easily accessible water, and the faucets could run dry if reservoirs aren't replenished soon. The state of Georgia said it has lined up contracts with vendors to bring in bottled water and tanker trucks that could dispense water into jugs, jars and buckets. "Are we going to get to that point? I don't know. But the most important thing is to be prepared," said Buzz Weiss, spokesman for the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. But the state, the city of Atlanta and the Georgia National Guard, which could be called into action by the governor to deliver water in an emergency, have yet to work out the details of exactly where the water would be distributed and how, saying it is too soon to say where it might be needed. In any case, those are just emergency measures for supplying people with the water they need for drinking, cooking, bathing and flushing the toilet. Atlanta and other communities have yet to settle on a long-term solution if the water runs out. State and city officials have talked about building more reservoirs, pipelines and pumps, but they have not adopted a plan, and none of those ideas are quick fixes. "We don't think that the worst-case scenario is likely, but we are thinking about what we might do if we don't get rain before next summer," said Atlanta city water spokeswoman Janet Ward. "We are pretty much looking at every option." Bill Bozarth, director of the Georgia arm of the government watchdog group Common Cause, wondered why the state has not come up with a plan yet. "You would think the water crisis would start to become more of a priority," he said. Time may be running out.

**CA Wildfire Ash Can Pose Health Risk** (Disaster News Network, 12/5)

Ash and burned soil from Southern California wildfires in October may pose human health and environmental problems as well as threatening drinking water supplies, according to a preliminary study by the U.S. Geological Survey. The samples, taken from residential areas burned by the Grass Valley and Harris wildfires as well as 26 other sites, can contain "somewhat elevated" levels of metals including arsenic, lead, zinc and copper. "Ash from burned wildlands can also contain caustic alkali materials, though at lower levels than the residential ash," the USGS said. The findings were not unexpected, according to the USGS. "These findings are consistent with the scientific knowledge about wildfire ash that has led counties in California to issue advisories regarding appropriate precautionary measures to avoid health problems associated with exposure to the ash," said Geoffrey Plumlee, a USGS lead author of the study. Among the

precautionary measures suggested were use of appropriate respiratory protection, gloves, long-sleeved shirts and long pants, dust mitigation measures, and washing of skin contacted by the ash. Those measures may be especially important to faith-based and community groups that have been working to clean up burned sites throughout Southern California. The study also warned of environmental damage from rainfall runoff.

## **PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS**

### **[A rough hurricane season is seen in 2008](#)** (Philadelphi Enquirer, 12/8)

The 2008 hurricane season is likely to be less kind to the United States than the one that ended officially last week, according to forecasters at Colorado State University. For next season, which begins June 1 and ends Nov. 30, they foresee 13 named storms - those with winds of 39 m.p.h. or better - one fewer than this year. But the forecasters, Philip Klotzbach and William M. Gray, warn of a high likelihood that at least one major hurricane, with winds of 111 m.p.h. or more, will make U.S. landfall, which did not happen this year. The 2007 season left an early holiday present for U.S. taxpayers. Not a single major disaster was declared for a hurricane this year, according to Ashley Small, spokeswoman for FEMA. By contrast, FEMA has committed \$37.8 billion to cleaning up hurricane damage from the 2005 season - about \$350 for every U.S. household. The total for 2006 was \$2.6 billion. Not that the 2007 season was without drama. For the first time on record, two deadly Category 5 hurricanes, with winds over 160 m.p.h. - Dean and Felix - made landfall in the same season. Yet only one full-fledged hurricane, Humberto, reached the U.S. mainland, and it was a Category 1, with a peak wind of 90 m.p.h. Klotzbach and Gray said the odds of a major hurricane hitting the United States next year were about 15 percent above normal. They also predicted a more vigorous season overall in terms of storm intensity and duration. They say they expect seven hurricanes, storms with winds of 74 m.p.h. or more, or one more than average. Researchers are trying to figure out what happened during a 2007 season that got off to a strong start, then faded at September's end. The Colorado State team and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration had issued menacing forecasts.

### **[Debris Flow Hazard Maps For Southern California Released](#)** (FEMA, 12/7)

Maps showing the potential for destructive mudflows in the wake of recent Southern California wildfires were made available to the public and emergency responders today by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The maps estimate the size of potential debris flows, commonly known as mudflows, and the areas that could be affected when rainfall begins on recently-burned areas. "Fast-moving, highly destructive debris flows triggered by rainfall are one of the most dangerous post-fire hazards," said Dr. Sue Cannon, the USGS scientist who led a team of experts that developed the hazard maps. USGS today unveiled 10 maps that show potential volumes of debris flows from basins burned by the Buckweed, Santiago, Canyon, Poomacha, Ranch, Harris, Witch, Rice, Ammo, Slide, and Grass Valley Fires in October and November. The maps will be used by the National Weather Service to provide debris-flow warnings to the public, by FEMA to use in conjunction with their flood-inundation maps, and by local and state emergency managers. "These maps are designed to provide emergency managers with tools to

implement protective measures to preserve values at risk, including life and property," said Lee Rosenberg of the Multi-Agency Support Group (MASG) that represents federal and state agencies. "Knowing the areas most vulnerable to a particular hazard is critical in preparing to meet the needs of that community when an emergency strikes," said Henry Renteria, Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES). "The new maps are a brand new tool emergency managers and first responders can use in their planning and response efforts."

**'Superhighway' for Disaster Relief** (Disaster News Network, 12/5)

In the wake of a disaster, getting the right relief supplies to the right people at the right time can often be problematic. An outpouring of inappropriate or unusable items – however well-intentioned – have prompted responders to describe the situation as the "second disaster." A new Internet-based program that has been introduced is designed to help match up specific needs with donations. The Aidmatrix Network connects FEMA, state emergency management offices, charities and donors. The program is funded partially through Homeland Security and several large corporate donors. The program will soon contain information about the need for volunteers as well as availability of volunteers. The program was originally developed several years ago as an online national donation management program. It was expanded in June to connect FEMA and others involved in disaster response and recovery. "Basically, it allows 'one-stop shopping' for those who have something to donate and for those who need donations," said former Wisconsin Gov. Scott McCallum, president and chief executive officer of Aidmatrix. "Partnering corporations can post product they wish to donate. Then, for instance, in a disaster situation, government agencies or nonprofits can post their needs. The donations can easily be matched up."

**Landslide Risk Could Increase In Next Few Weeks** (Seattle Post Intelligencer, 12/4)

The record-breaking rainfall across much of the coastal Pacific Northwest may have tapered off, but experts warn that a risk of more landslides persists and could increase over the next few weeks even without another big soaking. About a dozen landslides were reported in Seattle on Monday, and far more throughout Western Washington and Oregon. "If the rain keeps up long enough, you're going to see more landslides, and you're going to start seeing the deeper landslides," said Ed Harp, a landslide expert with the U.S. Geological Survey in Denver. "Those are a lot bigger and, in most cases, pretty damaging." Any short burst of heavy rain in the next few weeks almost certainly would trigger more landslides, experts said. Prolonged periods of less heavy rainfall could still increase the risk of slides as the ground becomes even more saturated. "This is now landslide season," said Timothy Walsh, chief hazards geologist for the state Department of Natural Resources. The past two days of heavy and warm rain, which broke river flood-rise and rainfall measurement records in some locations, were preceded by snowfall. This, Walsh said, "loads up the system for sliding" by massively saturating the ground. "That's the same thing that happened in the winter of '96 and '97," he said.

**Cops Remind Shoppers About Terrorism** (RecordOnline.Com (NY), 11/29)

An international tourist, having heard about Woodbury Common Premium Outlets' global status, stakes out the facility during a shopping trip. Then, during subsequent trips, he

plans out an attack that would cripple major thoroughfares to New York City, as well as cost some of America's top retail stores millions of dollars in earnings. While such an attack remains a reality only among armchair theorists, law enforcement isn't taking any chances. That's the rationale behind an annual show of force called "Operation Safeguard" that deployed 70 officers from 25 law enforcement agencies in Orange, Rockland and Sullivan counties to various shopping centers yesterday. The deployment, which included state police, county sheriffs' offices and local police, is meant to thwart a potential terrorist attack through a public education campaign, as well as create an unannounced presence at local malls and the roads that feed them during the busiest shopping season of the year. "There's no hard and fast intelligence of a terrorist threat to local malls, but when we discuss vulnerabilities in our area, those are the places that concern us," said state police Maj. Ed Raso, one of the coordinators of the event. Such retail stores are considered "soft targets" by anti-terrorism officials, because they have no armed guards or heavily fortified entrances. Terrorists tend to prefer such targets, as they are easier to attack, and because they deal a psychological blow to their enemies by incurring mass casualties, Raso said.

## **GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS**

### **Blanco: Road Home safe, "fully funded"** (The Advocate, 12/9)

A state hurricane recovery rebuilding program threatened by a lack of money is now safe and fully funded, Gov. Kathleen Blanco said Friday. An allocation of \$3 billion from the federal government last month secured the Road Home program, which provides buyout or repair grants to homeowners with severe damage from hurricanes Katrina or Rita in 2005. Blanco said she made nine trips to Capitol Hill in Washington over the past two years and committed \$1 billion of the state's budget to fund the \$11.5 billion program. "We can now say with confidence that we should not have to go back for more money for the Road Home program," Blanco said. "The Road Home is fully funded, and I think our citizens can rest easy with that knowledge," she said. Louisiana Recovery Authority Executive Director Andy Kopplin said the program is expected to provide grants to 151,000 to 159,000 homeowners. On Dec. 1, the state stopped taking applications and were able to tell for the first time how many grants were needed. The Louisiana Recovery Authority is the planning and coordinating body that was created in the aftermath of the hurricanes to lead rebuilding efforts. The hurricanes destroyed more than 200,000 homes and 18,000 businesses. The Road Home program faced a funding shortfall due to higher levels of damage than originally estimated, lower than expected payouts from insurance companies and federal restrictions on more than \$1 billion in federal Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds, Blanco said.

### **Children Still Dealing With Hurricane Mental Trauma** (American Health Line, 12/8)

At least 46,600 Gulf Coast children are experiencing mental health problems and other serious aftereffects of the 2005 hurricanes, according to a study by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University and the Children's Health Fund, the New York Times reports. For the study, researchers examined school enrollment statistics, data from the federal census and FEMA, and data from a study that has been following about 1,250

families displaced by the storms. The study found that about 163,000 children were displaced by the hurricanes and that about 81,000 to 95,000 children have returned to Louisiana and Mississippi. Researchers estimate that 46,600 to 64,900 children are experiencing serious poststorm problems. The researchers' continuing study of Gulf Coast families found that nearly one-third of the children examined have developed depression, anxiety or behavior disorders since the hurricanes. The children who are most at risk are those who have returned to their home states of Louisiana and Mississippi but lack stable living situations, according to the study. About 11,200 children were still living in FEMA trailers at government or private trailer parks at the end of September, but the number has been declining as the government begins closing the parks. In addition, many of the children have limited access to medical care, and many in Mississippi have lost health insurance and physicians, the report found. Roberta Avila, executive director of the Mississippi Coast Interfaith Disaster Task Force, said, "We still have a lot of families in trailers, and the stress of living in that situation is really tough," adding that she is hearing increasing reports of problems with children ranging from trouble completing homework to suicide.

**Back to New Orleans, but no home** (Christian Science Monitor, 12/5)

Over the past 10 months, Steven Gioustover has slept on the floor of a friend's federally provided trailer, in a shuttered elementary school, and on a cot at the Ozmann Inn, one of only two operating homeless shelters for men in New Orleans. With just over 200 beds available in a city with more than 10,000 homeless, he's fortunate to have a roof over his head. A growing number of homeless take shelter in a plaza each night - under a park gazebo, in nylon tents erected on the lawn, and under the eaves of nearby state office buildings in an encampment that's sprung up right in front of City Hall. The camp, now several months old, is emblematic of the dilemma facing New Orleans as it tries to rebuild after hurricane Katrina flooded large swaths of its neighborhoods in 2005. An ongoing housing shortage, high rents, rising costs of living, and a dearth of federal and state housing assistance have made it difficult for many of the city's lower-income returnees to find affordable rental housing. Last January, the city had more than 12,000 homeless people in New Orleans - double the number that were here before Katrina. In a city that is still only 60 percent of its former size, if anything, the homeless population is growing, homeless advocates say. The camp in Duncan Plaza has become a distinct embarrassment for the city, while similar homeless encampments have sprung up under the Interstate 10 overpass just a few blocks away. "Children and the elderly should never be living in a situation like this," says city Councilwoman Stacy Head. "Conditions are not safe, and we need to find an alternative. Then there may be a move by the city to disperse the camp."