

Disaster News Update – May 19 to 25, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Georgia, Alabama, California, Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Minnesota, Tennessee, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina
- **Fire:** California, Nevada, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Florida
- **Flood:** Kansas

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [South Dakota](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes and Flooding (5/22)
- [Massachusetts](#): Severe Storms and Inland and Coastal Flooding (5/16)
- [Connecticut](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (5/11)
- [Kansas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (5/6)
- [Vermont](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (5/4)
- [Texas](#): Severe Storms and Tornadoes (5/1)
- [West Virginia](#): Severe Storms, Landslides, Flooding, and Mudslides (5/1)
- [New Hampshire](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (4/27)
- [New Jersey](#): Severe Storms and Inland and Coastal Flooding (4/26)
- [Maine](#): Severe Storms and Inland and Coastal Flooding (4/25)
- [New York](#): Severe Storms and Inland and Coastal Flooding (4/24)
- [Maine](#): Flooding (4/20)
- Fire Declarations: [New Jersey \(5/16\)](#), [California \(5/10\)](#), [Georgia \(5/9\)](#), [Florida \(5/8\)](#), [Florida \(5/7\)](#), [Georgia \(5/5\)](#), [Florida \(5/2\)](#), [Georgia \(4/26\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

Animal Rescue New Orleans Still Feeding Cats/Dogs (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/20)

Robin Beaulieu is shelter director for Animal Rescue New Orleans (ARNO), a grassroots organization that has been aiding lost and abandoned animals since the storm. While many of the rescue groups that arrived to round up animals soon after the storm have finished their searches, parish animal control units, the Louisiana SPCA and the volunteer staff of ARNO are working to save the cats and dogs still homeless. Compounding the problem, each month such animals are producing dozens of new litters, essentially in the wild. State law mandates that all animals found by animal control be held for five days, which gives pet owners the chance to claim lost pets. In Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes, officials allow ARNO to oversee the mandatory hold. In Orleans Parish, the animals go to the LA/SPCA, where they're given medical and behavioral tests to clear them for adoption. On a case-by-case basis, animals that do not pass the tests -- if they are not healthy or have not been socialized -- are then given the chance to be picked up by ARNO volunteers and/or rescue individuals who rehabilitate animals.

Disaster relief groups work together (Grand Rapids Press, 5/19)

Two churches with a common history will start doing more in common under a new agreement. Reformed Church World Service funds emergency response across the globe. But typically, the office of the Reformed Church in America seeks out partners other than

the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. The new pact, announced last week, means that the RCA will try to do more work with neighboring CRWRC, said Betty Voskuil, RCWS coordinator. RCWS currently partners on disaster relief efforts with Lutheran Disaster Response, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and other groups affiliated with Church World Service, of which the CRC is not a member. The RCA and CRWRC are not merging but rather will promote greater collaboration that leaders hope will produce more effective disaster response.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Fire Sparks Response Unit Plan (Disaster News Network, 5/24)

After seeing the devastating impacts of wildfires, hurricanes and tornadoes on people and communities, James Roberts is determined to help. "We need to get involved in some type of disaster relief ministry," said Roberts, pastor of the Pine Grove Baptist Church in Lake City, Fla. "We want to put together a team that can go to actual disaster sites and perform whatever ministry or services that we can perform." To achieve that goal, Roberts is attempting to get some or all of the more than 30 Southern Baptist churches in the Lake City area to join forces to respond to disasters. A wildfire still burning in northern Florida was the latest in a series of events that helped spark the idea to create a local faith-based response group, Roberts said. The church has made its facilities available to firefighters who have been battling the Bugaboo fire in northern Florida. It also has served as a relief center for people who fled from Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and from Hurricane Katrina one year later, he said. The Groundhog Day tornadoes in central Florida, which killed 21 people and destroyed more than 500 homes, struck about 80 miles from Lake City.

Caregivers Swap Storm Tips (St. Petersburg Times, 5/23)

When Hurricane Katrina clobbered the Mississippi coast, the Delta Health Group nursing home company figured it had prepared well. Its four homes on high ground near Pass Christian had installed private generators and stocked up on extra food, water and medicine, said president Scott Bell. But they forgot one thing: scary men with rifles. In hurricanes, security becomes a top priority, right up there with transportation and power, Bell told industry colleagues who met this week at the Don CeSar Beach Resort and Spa to learn about disasters. The hurricane summit, now in its second year, helps nursing homes in gulf states learn from one another's harsh experiences. They are driven by a sobering Katrina statistic: 71 percent of the people who died in New Orleans were older than 60. More than half were older than 75.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Winds Continue to Push GA Wildfire (Disaster News Network, 5/25)

Windy conditions continued to push a wildfire in southeastern Georgia across containment lines on Thursday, prompting a mandatory evacuation for residents in a rural area on the northwestern edge of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Sustained

winds with gusts of more than 20 miles per hour pushed the fire across containment lines that had been put in one day earlier. The fire was racing through "high volatile fuel" of pine plantations and tinder-dry underbrush, said Daniel Westcot, a spokesman with the Joint Information Center. "It's pushing hard on the western side," Westcot said. "It's a battle every day." Officials have said fires at the Georgia-Florida border were expected to continue burning until "fire season-ending weather events occur, such as several tropical storms." "It could be weeks right now even with the containment numbers we have right now," Westcot said. "If it jumps containment lines, we could be here for several more weeks or even a month." The mandatory evacuation order came about 24 hours after officials warned residents to be prepared to evacuate on short notice. About 15 to 20 homes, located about 15 miles from Waycross, were threatened, he said.

Disaster Assistance Expanded For Four Maine Counties (FEMA, 5/24)

Residents of four additional Maine counties can now register for federal disaster assistance for damages related to the Nor'easter that struck Maine in mid-April. This aid is in addition to that already approved following the declaration of a federal disaster by President Bush on April 25. Individuals or Households in Knox, Lincoln, Oxford and Sagadahoc counties can register for assistance online at www.fema.gov or by calling toll-free 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).

Midwest Towns Face Flooding (Disaster News Network, 5/24)

Several towns in central Kansas' Saline County were evacuated early Thursday due to high water. Parts of the region received more than 7 inches of rain in several hours Wednesday, forcing residents in Ogden, Bavaria and Hedville out of their homes. It was the second time in several weeks that the same area has been hit by heavy rain. The National Weather Service said minor flooding was possible in Iowa and Nebraska over the next few days. Flood warnings were in effect for Adair and Cass counties in Iowa, with some highways and roads closed due to high water. Southeastern Nebraska waterways were rapidly rising as well, with warnings out for several rivers. Officials warned motorists not to drive through flooded roads.

Greensburg Insured Losses \$153 Million (Disaster News Network, 5/24)

Insured property losses from the May 4 tornado which leveled the rural farming town of Greensburg are expected to top \$153 million, the Kansas insurance commissioner reported Thursday. Commissioner Sandy Praeger said \$82 million of insured property losses have already been paid. She based that figure on information provided by 33 insurance company groups, which represent approximately 85 percent of the top volume writers of property insurance in the state. "It is estimated that when all claims are completed for final adjustment, the insured property losses from the Greensburg tornado will likely exceed \$153 million," she said. Praeger praised the insurance companies for their response in Greensburg. She said about 80 percent of affected policyholders had received emergency funds from their insurance companies within seven days of the tornado. Only one complaint was received out of 1,900 claims, her office reported.

TX Towns Struggle to Recover from Twister (Disaster News Network, 5/21)

The communities of Cactus and Tulia are struggling to recover one month after a tornado left more than 300 homes and businesses in ruins, according to reports from the two Texas towns. "Cactus is a Hispanic community that's very impoverished," said Harvey Howell, a Presbyterian Disaster Assistance national response team member who traveled to the region days after the April 21 tornado. "There is a desperate need for housing. Coupled with that, there is essentially no operational (chapter of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) and few community organizations to respond." Tulia, a town of about 4,700 people located 114 miles south of Cactus in the Texas Panhandle, was coping with similar recovery issues, he said, but noted Cactus was faring much worse.

2 Counties Granted Help; 2 Others Denied Storm Aid (New York Times, 5/20)

There was good news and bad news last week for business owners and homeowners who sustained damage in the northeaster last month. Last Monday, Gov. M. Jodi Rell announced that President Bush had signed a disaster declaration related to the April 15 storm, making towns, cities and some nonprofit agencies in Fairfield and Litchfield Counties eligible to be reimbursed for 75 percent of the cost of repairs. "The April 15 storm was unlike anything we have seen in two decades or more, and its effects are still being felt," Mrs. Rell said in a statement. But last Wednesday, Wayne E. Sandford, the deputy commissioner of the State Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, said FEMA had denied assistance for Hartford and New Haven Counties. Mr. Sandford also said the agency had denied assistance for individuals and private businesses throughout the state that were damaged in the storm. Mrs. Rell said the state would appeal the decision on individual assistance; Mr. Sandford said the state had not yet determined if it would appeal the decision on public assistance for Hartford and New Haven Counties.

Eight Kansas Counties Now Qualify For Disaster Assistance (FEMA, 5/19)

Homeowners, renters and business owners in Barton, Osborne, Ottawa and Phillips counties who suffered damage as a result of the May severe storms, tornadoes and flooding are now eligible to apply for federal disaster assistance. FEMA and the Kansas Division of Emergency Management (KDEM) have been working together to help Kansans recover since May 6 when President Bush issued the major disaster declaration. "Adding these counties means that residents in eight Kansas counties now qualify for Individual Assistance," Michael L. Karl, federal coordinating officer, said. Edwards, Kiowa, Pratt and Stafford counties were previously designated. In addition, local governments and certain eligible private nonprofit organizations in Barton, Edwards, Pratt and Stafford counties may now apply for Public Assistance grants.

Faith Based Recovery to Help Eagle Pass (Disaster News Network, 5/19)

A faith-based long-term recovery committee designed to help hundreds of Eagle Pass residents who are not expected to be eligible for government assistance has been created in this impoverished Texas town. "The faith-based people are trying to help the people who would fall through the cracks," said the Rev. Harlene Sadler of the First United Methodist Church in Eagle Pass. Sadler estimated that 40 percent of the 440 Maverick County residents who have already registered for assistance with FEMA will be ineligible for aid because they are undocumented. The county has also formed an agency to help

affected residents. Many others who need assistance – mostly illegal aliens - are either afraid or unwilling to register with FEMA or with the county government for fear of calling attention to themselves. Most "ebb and flow" across the border with Mexico and often lack any documents, even a utility bill, to prove that they were actually living in the U.S., Sadler said. Many do not speak English.

CA's growers eligible for loans (San Francisco Chronicle, 5/19)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated 13 California counties natural disaster areas because of the combined effects of drought in October and prolonged freezing in January that destroyed about \$800 million in citrus crops. The designation, announced by the department on Thursday and lauded by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Friday, makes growers eligible to apply for low-interest emergency loans from the USDA Farm Service Agency. The freezing temperatures occurred from Jan. 12 to 24 and did significant damage to California's citrus belt in Fresno and Tulare counties. There are about 12,000 workers in citrus packing houses and harvesters in those counties and elsewhere in the state, and more than 9,000 of them have filed unemployment claims.

Hundreds Seek Help in SD After Flood (Disaster News Network, 5/19)

More than 300 families have requested flooding cleanup help from disaster response agencies in Aberdeen and more volunteers are needed to assist, according to one of the responding organizations. Some areas of the city are still under water. "There is a high level of frustration," said Lisa Adler, director of Aberdeen area programs for Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of South Dakota. "We've talked to some families whose homes were condemned and they can't live in them. They're not sure what they'll do next." More than 8 inches of rain fell in the region May 4-5. City engineers have condemned 25 homes, and more were being assessed. Some condemned homes may still be salvageable. South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds has requested a federal disaster declaration for Aurora, Beadle, Brown, Clark, Davison, Hanson, Hutchison, Jerauld, Miner, Sanborn, Spink and Yankton counties.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Hurricane forecasters see a busy season (Houston Chronicle, 5/23)

Federal scientists weighed in on the upcoming hurricane season Tuesday, and their report echoes that of other forecasters: The 2007 hurricane season will produce a greater number of storms than usual. NOAA's report calls for 13 to 17 named storms, up to 10 of which might become hurricanes. About 10 tropical storms and hurricanes form during an average year. Federal officials, including DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, took the opportunity to warn coastal-dwelling Americans not to become complacent about the coming season, after a relatively mild hurricane season last year. Sea-surface temperatures are even warmer this year than in 2006, and climate scientists say they could approach levels of the record-breaking 2005 season - the year of hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma.

Jeff lets \$10 million in post-storm contracts (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/23)

Amid the focus on preparing for the coming hurricane season, the Parish Council has decided to address a possible aftermath. The council unanimously sanctioned spending \$10.1 million on eight contracts to clean up the parish in the wake of a hurricane. Such a preemptive move has become a habit for the council since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 exposed major shortcomings in the local government's immediate response to widespread damage, Councilman John Young said. Recovery and repair contracts were awarded without a full review process. To ward off a similar fall-out during the 2006 hurricane season, the council awarded contracts for the work in advance. Wednesday's action repeated the 2006 effort, assigning contractors to repair damaged infrastructure, from broken sewer lines to downed traffic lights. As before, the contracts will expire in a year. Signing the contracts does not obligate the parish to spend the money, Young said. Payments will be made only if a disaster triggers the need.

Hurricane preparations target storm surge areas (Houston Chronicle, 5/22)

Harris County (TX) officials said they are as prepared as they can be for hurricane season, which begins June 1. The key question, they said, is whether local residents have taken appropriate precautions. "The government can only do so much," said Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, who is facing his first hurricane season as the county's chief executive. Area residents must recognize whether they live in one of four zones, delineated by ZIP codes, that might be placed under a mandatory evacuation order because of a storm surge, officials said. An estimated 300,000 people in Harris County live in the surge zones. Emergency management officials encouraged residents of surge zones to familiarize themselves with the four main evacuation routes out of Houston - Interstates 45 and 10, U.S. 59 and Texas 290 - which will become contraflow freeways preceding a hurricane landfall.

Super nail takes a blowing, keeps holding (AR Democrat Gazette, 5/19)

Popular Science Editor Mark Jannot calls Ed Sutt's HurriQuake nail - "dazzlingly humble." The nail doubles a house's resistance to high winds, adds 50 percent more resistance to earthquakes, fits into existing nail guns and adds only \$15 to the cost of an average 2,000-square-foot house. "In the past," Sutt told Popular Science, "fastener companies had focused on how to manufacture nails. I wanted to look at how structures perform based on the nails that are used." He noted that the roofs and sides of houses weren't blown or sucked off during high winds surrounding hurricanes (and tornados) or the shaking and shear of earthquakes. Instead, the reason for damage and destruction was the failure of nails holding the roof and sheathing to the frame.

Businesses Falling Short in Preparing for Disasters (Boston Globe, 5/19)

In the wake of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and increasing demand on the electricity grid, the business community has been pressured to increase its preparation for disaster planning. Emergency drills, table-top exercises, and testing are standard for telephone and wireless companies, which provide essential communications service for government officials and regular people. Still, the vast majority of businesses - especially midsized or small businesses - are unprepared. A survey of businesses with fewer than 1,000 employees

conducted by the Ad Council in December 2006 found that 47 percent said their company had an emergency plan; up from 39 percent the year before. The Department of Homeland Security launched the Ready Business Campaign in 2004, devoted solely to helping businesses develop and practice to be ready in case of an emergency.

Agency expects extreme summer drought (LA Times, 5/19)

Federal meteorologists expect "extreme" drought conditions this summer in Southern California, offering more bad news for firefighters who are already dealing with record dry weather. The NOAA forecast dashed the hopes of some officials that the region's bone-dry winter and spring would give way to a mild summer. The evidence is clear: Both Lake Mead and Lake Powell on the Colorado River are at half capacity, Patzert said. Downtown L.A. has received less than 4 inches of rain this year and is set to claim a record for its driest season. Drought conditions in Southern California have historically coincided with catastrophic wildfires. Dry conditions in the late 1950s and early 1960s contributed to the Bel-Air/Brentwood fire of November 1961, which destroyed nearly 500 homes and prompted the first brush-clearance laws. The 1993 fires in Malibu and Laguna Beach, which also destroyed hundreds of homes, also came during a major drought. Southern California has experienced numerous wildfires this winter and spring. Homes were destroyed in Malibu and Beverly Hills, while hundreds of acres were scorched in Orange County.

LA shelter capacity drops by 16,000 (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/19)

LA state officials lowered their guaranteed shelter capacity for this hurricane season from about 109,000 to about 93,000, in part because an agreement with Alabama may not yield as many out-of-state spaces as previously thought. If the Alabama circumstances do not change, Louisiana officials could find themselves at least 13,000 beds short of the space necessary to house evacuees dependent on government-provided transportation. Executives at the state Department of Social Services, which has primary responsibility for shelters under Louisiana's emergency response plan, said federal officials are in Alabama working to address the potential shortfall. Additionally, state officials briefing reporters listed the capacity of Louisiana's medical needs shelters at 1,400, half the planned capacity that the state released earlier this week. There is no master list of potential occupants to measure whether that capacity is adequate.

GAO Issues Report on School District Preparedness (GAO, 5/17)

Events such as the recent shootings by armed intruders in schools across the nation, natural disasters, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and potential pandemics have heightened awareness for the need for school districts to be prepared to address a range of emergencies within and outside of schools buildings. Congress has raised concerns over school preparedness, with a particular interest in how federal agencies provide assistance to school districts. This testimony discusses preliminary findings related to GAO's review of emergency management in school districts, including (1) the roles of federal and state governments in establishing requirements and providing resources to school districts for emergency management planning, (2) what school districts have done to plan and prepare for emergencies, and (3) the challenges school

districts have experienced in planning for emergencies, and communicating and coordinating with first responders, parents, and students.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Hancock County accepts cottages (MS Sun Herald, 5/24)

Hancock County became the first coastal Mississippi county to accept cottages on wheels as a way to get people out of FEMA travel trailers nearly 20 months after Katrina. The first version of the cottages, which are actually 400-square-foot, wheeled modular homes, is expected to begin rolling into Mississippi next month. A second, larger version that has two or three bedrooms will follow. Between 4,500 and 6,000 homes eventually will be distributed in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson counties. They will go to hurricane victims still living in FEMA trailers, but not all trailer residents will receive cottages. They are being doled out through a random selection process. The cottages are being bought with \$281 million in federal grants. The units, reportedly able to withstand wind blasts of 150 miles per hour, will be distributed as part of a 24-month program. The guidelines allow them to be donated to local governments, purchased by occupants or auctioned off after the program ends.

U.S. Officials Say Fund Was Limited To Flooded Homes (Washington Post, 5/24)

The massive federally funded program for rebuilding hurricane-damaged Louisiana homes is short nearly \$3 billion largely because Louisiana officials are compensating thousands of homeowners who were not originally supposed to benefit, according to an analysis by the Bush administration. The money was supposed to pay for rebuilding flooded homes but not those damaged by wind, said federal officials. The Louisiana administrators of the program, however, are on track to dole out an estimated \$2.6 billion to cover damage in homes that were not flooded, and that policy explains why the \$6.9 billion program for homeowners is short by nearly half. State officials responded that it is unfair to compensate some owners but not others, depending on which hurricane phenomenon wrecked their home. "The Bush Administration has been asking us to discriminate against storm victims since day one," Andy Kopplin, director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, said in a written statement last night. "We rejected it then and we reject it today."

Rural wells may be in danger (MS Sun Herald, 5/23)

Rural residents of the Gulf Coast face a looming public health problem: contaminated drinking water. Mississippi Valley State University's Louis Hall said contaminants from hastily-disposed-of hurricane debris could pose a serious health problem for rural communities. Because much of the debris from hurricane recovery efforts was simply thrown into landfills, Hall said, he's concerned that toxic chemicals could filter into the water table, posing a much greater risk to residences using wells than those on public water supplies. Hall said this kind of water table contamination has the potential to be much more serious than the relatively limited contamination he found in areas flooded by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. For the most part, Hall said, the hurricanes did not bring new

contaminants to either New Orleans or the Mississippi Gulf Coast. And he found virtually no cancer-causing chemicals in his samples.

As rebuilding of N.O. continues, recovery plan OK'd (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/23)
Nearly 21 months after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, the City Planning Commission voted to adopt the "citywide strategic recovery and rebuilding plan" developed by the United New Orleans Plan. No one on the commission or its staff expressed much enthusiasm for the plan, which was created by outside planners and consultants at a cost of several million dollars, and it is unclear what practical effect approval of the plan will have. Rebuilding already is well under way in some neighborhoods, and prospects for obtaining the more than \$14 billion in federal, state or private money needed to carry out the plan's laundry list of 95 infrastructure and other recovery projects are uncertain at best. It also is unclear how the plan's sweeping citywide recommendations will mesh with the list of 17 targeted recovery zones where Ed Blakely, director of the city's Office of Recovery Management, wants to focus rebuilding efforts. Blakely's plan calls for spending \$1.1 billion in public money to spur private investment in the 17 zones, and not even the source of that \$1.1 billion is assured.

Part of debris removal program ending (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/22)
FEMA will stop its private property debris removal program in Orleans and Jefferson parishes May 31. Despite past extensions for other government-funded debris programs, the private property program -- in which the Army Corps of Engineers goes into yards to pick up dead trees, downed shingles and other random items strewn around by the flood -- has run its course, FEMA spokesman Ronnie Simpson said. There are three different federally-funded programs for removing debris, all of which FEMA paid for in full until Dec. 31, and has paid for at 90 percent since. In addition to the private property debris removal, the government will remove debris left curbside -- most often material from guttings or reconstruction -- until June 30. FEMA will also continue to perform free demolitions and haul off the resulting debris until Aug. 29.

State Sup. Thinks N.O. Will Have Enough Classrooms (NO Times Picayune, 5/22)
Citing scaled-back enrollment projections and intensified work at New Orleans schools, state Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek believes the Recovery School District will have enough space for students at the start of the 2007-08 school year. A new analysis indicates public schools will see 6,000 to 7,000 new students this fall, about half the 13,000 additional students previously projected, Pastorek said. That would put total enrollment by August at roughly 33,000 students in the entire public school system, with most of the new students expected to enroll in Recovery District schools. Pastorek said he believes the system can provide enough classroom space through a combination of renovated buildings and modular campuses. "I think this is very doable by August 1, but it's not guaranteed," Pastorek said during a meeting with reporters.

State still settling its hurricane claims (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/22)
The state of Louisiana, like many of its residents, is haggling with insurance providers over the amount and precise causes of damage left behind by the 2005 storm season, holding up \$200 million in claim payments. "We're having the same problem that our

citizens are having," state facilities director Jerry Jones told the House Ways and Means Committee as it discussed the state's construction budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1. The gap involves three companies -- XL Insurance America Inc., Continental Casualty Co. and Underwriters at Lloyd's -- according to documents provided by the state Office of Risk Management. The insurance woes, according to Jones and J.S. "Bud" Thompson, state risk director, combine with the inflexibility of FEMA's Public Assistance Program to form twin barriers as the state works to repair or replace more than \$1.7 billion worth of property. The total damage estimates are mostly for state agency buildings, public colleges and universities, and New Orleans City Park, all of which are covered collectively under property insurance secured by the risk management office.

Public housing sits empty and waiting (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/22)

Despite oft-heard protests about the dearth of public housing in New Orleans, the Housing Authority of New Orleans said that it has at least 283 apartments repaired, cleaned and ready for former public housing tenants. Problem is, it can't seem to entice former residents to return. The reasons for residents' delayed returns are complex, from the city's struggling public school system and lack of health care to the long-standing turf wars that make the idea of transplanting families from one end of New Orleans to the other a realistic risk of running into violence. Housing advocates said many residents are fearful of moving into complexes perceived as rivals.

Carter: Insurance Crisis Hurting Hurricane Recovery (WSBTV, 5/22)

Former President Jimmy Carter said the insurance crisis along the Gulf Coast is wiping out much of the benefit that humanitarian organizations are trying to provide to victims of the devastating 2005 hurricane season. "The federal government has got to take the leadership" in making homeowners insurance more affordable along the Gulf Coast, Carter said Monday while visiting the construction site of two new houses being built by Habitat for Humanity. Carter spent much of the day in Violet, LA, a St. Bernard Parish town about 14 miles southeast of downtown New Orleans, and an area where nearly every house flooded substantially when levees failed along a shipping canal that runs from New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico. The former Nobel Peace Prize winner echoed the frustration of numerous residents in the area who've seen insurance rates skyrocket since the storm, whether their homes were damaged or not. Carter said the typical interest-free, 30-year mortgage payment for the modest, raised, one-floor homes built by Habitat for Humanity run about \$220 per month. Insurance on those same homes can sometimes run as high as \$500 a month, Carter said, essentially tripling the cost of the home to those the house-building organization is trying to help.

Emerging from ruin, Big Easy at crossroads (Chicago Tribune, 5/18)

Nearly two years after Katrina, the Big Easy today is a place of profound contrasts and an uncertain future. Thousands of rotted and ruined houses still line the city's boulevards even as new homes, some of them elevated on stilts 8 feet high, sprout like brave spring crocuses on many blocks. A soaring murder rate is crippling inner-city neighborhoods even as the tourism industry rebounds and developers prepare to break ground for several swank high-rise apartment buildings. State and federal programs intended to help ruined property owners rebuild are barely trickling funds into homeowners' hands even as the

city government presses ahead with a long-awaited plan to revive and rebuild New Orleans block by block. For many Americans, the images of this city are frozen in snapshots from the Aug. 29, 2005. But for many of New Orleans' traumatized residents, the shock of Katrina is finally beginning to give way to new hopes and optimism -- and new fears and dread.

Coastal Communities Debate New Cottages (Clarion Ledger, 5/18)

Katrina victims living in FEMA trailers could begin moving into cottages in June, but only 3 of the 11 coastal cities have committed to the pilot program. Unless the other cities sign off on the program by early June, their residents probably will have to wait longer to receive cottages. The cottages are expected to be delivered on the Coast by mid-to late June and then distributed. "There may be some (cities) that say, 'No, we don't want it,' " Mississippi Emergency Management Agency Director Mike Womack said. "But ultimately, I think all the jurisdictions will allow them ... in their areas." The program is optional. State officials have begun contacting the winners of a random selection process used earlier this month to determine who will receive the cottages. Between 4,000 and 6,000 individuals or families will receive them. The structures range in size from 400 to 800 square feet. An estimated 80,000 people are still living in FEMA trailers.