

Disaster News Update – May 26 to June 1, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Minnesota, Wyoming, Florida, New Mexico
- **Fire:** Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Iowa:](#) Severe Storms, Flooding, and Tornadoes (5/25)
- [Rhode Island:](#) Severe Storms and Inland and Coastal Flooding (5/25)
- [Kentucky:](#) Severe Storms, Flooding, Mudslides, and Rock Slides (5/25)
- [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)
- 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

CA Volunteers Help Build Gulf Coast Homes (Ledger Dispatch (CA), 5/30)

While some people are wondering why disaster relief is taking so long to rebuild the Gulf Coast, one local woman is trying to help solve the problem. Emily Beck, 20, a 2005 Amador High School graduate, has spent the last 66 days in Pascagoula, Miss., helping with the 100 Homes in 100 Days project to try and get 100 families back into their Hurricane Katrina devastated neighborhood. Five disaster relief organizations joined forces and formed a coalition to create the 100 Homes in 100 Days program, Beck said. Their purpose is to create a template for faster disaster relief, and to address the bigger issue of the lack of affordable housing in the Katrina devastated areas and see if and how well it works. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Mississippi Home Again, Hope Has a Face Foundation and Jackson County Community Services Coalition created 100 Homes in 100 Days that focuses on rebuilding entire neighborhoods in a compressed time frame, according to its Web site. When completed, the project's template will be released so it can be replicated elsewhere to rapidly provide a permanent affordable housing solution for Mississippi and elsewhere.

NC Disaster Planners are Looking for Volunteers (Citizen Times, 5/30)

North Carolina emergency medical services are looking for medical and non-medical volunteers in the event of a disaster. Any North Carolina resident who is willing to volunteer to be deployed locally, regionally, statewide or federally in a disaster is encouraged to register through SERVNC, an Internet-based registry. Those interested should go to www.servnc.org to register. Participants will be asked contact information, deployment preference, medical history, occupation and skills. If not already assigned to a response team, registrants may request to join a team already listed on SERVNC. In the event of an emergency, the system will electronically check the volunteers' medical credentials and send a message to volunteers via e-mail, telephone or pager, and provide information about the mission and instructions for accepting or declining the mission.

Session to help prepare churches for the worst (The Decatur Daily, 5/26)

The Volunteer Center of Morgan County is asking helping congregations, individuals and families to be prepared for disasters. "Disaster Preparedness for Churches" will be at St. Paul's Lutheran Church's Fellowship Hall, 1700 Carridale St. S.W., June 11 at 6 p.m. The free event's primary focus is to help congregations care for members in times of disaster and to develop a preparedness plans, said Yolanda Dunbar, faith-based program coordinator at the center. The Rev. Steven Arndt, pastor of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, who ministered in disaster recovery in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, urges churches to plan now. "In times of crisis, a church's ministry can shine brighter than ever before by being prepared and by partnering in larger networks of faithful ministry unto our neighbors," he said. Arndt said churches can offer faith, hope and love desperately needed during large-scale disasters and smaller tragedies. They can be ready to help their own members and then be available to work with other churches, community agencies and local governments, he said.

TSO Trains Amateur Radio Operators to Support Preparedness (TSA, May)

Pensacola TSO Jeff Smith trained 30 TSA volunteers to use emergency high frequency radio equipment during disasters. The 30 also qualified for amateur radio technician class operator licenses. Employees participating in the May 9 training traveled from Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Arizona and New York State. "Pensacola is fortunate that we have a TSO who is a highly experienced amateur radio operator, trainer and examiner," said FSD Steve Earnest. "His volunteer efforts have given the agency tremendous in-house capability that would have been expensive for the agency to replicate using contractors." The Federal Communications Commission requires licensing for HF – or ham – operators, who can be invaluable when telephone and cell phones are inoperable.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

Emergency expo set at church (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/31)

Riverside Baptist Church in East Jefferson, LA, is hosting a free emergency preparedness event for the community on June 3rd. Several guest speakers will discuss the various aspects of emergency preparedness. Supplies for emergency kits will be given away. Tables will also be set up with information and literature from several organizations.

Families Helping Families will offer identification cards for children, and the American Red Cross will provide tips on how to prepare for emergencies. The Third District Fire Department will demonstrate the "Smoke House" and other emergencies it handles, and FEMA will explain emergency prep kit information as well as what to do before an emergency happens. The Jefferson Parish Emergency Alert System will conduct a registration. The Community Emergency Response Team will hold a sign-up for Orleans Parish residents who lack the resources to evacuate. And Ochsner's Blood Mobile will be on hand for those wishing to donate blood. And officials with the Louisiana SPCA will offer tips on how to prepare for your pets' safety.

San Francisco Trains Chinese-American Population (Disaster News Net, 5/29)

Zai nan ying bian - "prepare against natural disasters" - is one the San Francisco Fire Department is trying to spread throughout Chinatown and the Asian-American community, which makes up more than 30 percent of the city's population. To accomplish its goal, the department offers a free 20-hour hands-on course to help residents prepare for and respond to a possible disaster. It is part of the city's ongoing Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) training program. What makes the classes here different than similar programs taught around the U.S. as part of Community Emergency Response Training is that it is taught entirely in Cantonese. The class is taught by bilingual firefighters from the department. "It's the exact same program we teach to English speakers," said Lt. Erica Arteseros, the program coordinator. "Nothing is unique except we're addressing people in the language they are most comfortable in." Mui said most people in Chinatown were not prepared for a disaster, such as a fire or an earthquake.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Six weeks later, Georgia fires still raging (Christian Science Monitor, 5/30)

Six weeks after they first flared, the massive forest fires dogging south Georgia and north Florida remain largely out of control. Wildland firefighters in the South extinguish more wildfires - 45,000 a year - than any other region. In that light, the demoralizing effect that the Okefenokee Swamp fires are having on veteran firefighters is drawing attention beyond these pine plantations. The state's inability to keep the fire from rushing out of the swamp and into the pine lands is kindling a debate over lagging forestry budgets, the impact of climate change on fire-suppression tactics, and the trend of timber companies divesting from the woods, taking manpower and equipment with them. Sparked in mid-April by a combination of downed wires and lightning, the amalgam of fires now known as the Georgia Bay Complex - Bugaboo Scrub, Sweat Farm, Big Turnaround, and Kneeknocker - has already burned more than a half-million acres, exceeding the enormous fires that burst through the region in 1953 and 1954. The latest fires were declared a federal disaster April 17, entitling the state to federal aid. In an average year, wildfires burn 8,000 acres in Georgia; the Sweat Farm fire alone burned 10,000 acres in one night last week.

FEMA Approves Fire Management Assistance Grant For Florida (FEMA, 5/30)

FEMA has authorized the use of federal funds to reimburse costs to Florida to fight the Okeechobee Fire Complex in Glades, Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. Florida requested a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) late yesterday afternoon, and it was approved last night. The complex includes about 20 fires, the largest being the Frog Light Fire which is burning on the Lake Okeechobee lake bed. Approximately 120 residences are threatened in the communities of Buckhead Ridge and Robberson Drive. That involves some 360 people, all of whom are under a voluntary evacuation order issued last night.

5.2 Million To Help New Hampshire Recover From April Nor'easter (FEMA, 5/30)

In the one month that has passed since President Bush declared a major disaster for New Hampshire on April 27, more than \$5.2 million in grants and low interest disaster loans have been approved to help New Hampshire residents recover, according to figures released by FEMA and New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM). The following is a summary of ongoing recovery efforts, as of close of business May 29:

- 1,713 individuals have applied for assistance in the six New Hampshire counties designated for individual assistance
- \$2,598,952 in Housing Assistance has been approved for 992 applicants
- \$199,974 in Other Needs Assistance has been approved for 156 applicants
- \$2,329,000 in loans has been approved by the SBA - to date, 1,402 home loan and 199 business loan applications have been issued
- \$144,304 in Public Assistance has been obligated to reimburse local governments and certain private non-profits - to date, 199 Requests for Public Assistance have been received from eligible applicants
- 727 people have visited one of the 11 Disaster Recovery Centers that opened in the disaster-affected areas
- 941 people have visited Mitigation Workshops, and 381 people received individual mitigation counseling

Kansas Disaster Assistance Expands to Individuals in Nine Counties (FEMA, 5/29)

Homeowners, renters and business owners in Clay, Cloud, Comanche, Leavenworth, Lyon, Reno, Rice, Saline and Shawnee counties who suffered damage as a result of the early May severe storms, tornadoes and flooding are now eligible to apply for federal disaster assistance. "Adding these counties means residents in 17 Kansas counties may now qualify for grants and loans to help with their disaster recovery," said Michael L. Karl, federal coordinating officer. Barton, Edwards, Kiowa, Osborne, Ottawa and Phillips, Pratt and Stafford counties were previously designated. In addition, local governments and certain eligible private nonprofit organizations in Barton, Comanche, Dickinson, Edwards, Ellsworth, Jackson, Kiowa, Lincoln, Osage, Ottawa, Pottawatomie, Pratt, Stafford and Wabaunsee counties may apply for Public Assistance grants for debris removal, emergency services related to the disaster, and the restoration of damaged public facilities.

President Declares Major Disaster For Iowa (FEMA, 5/25)

The head of FEMA announced that federal disaster aid has been made available for the state of Iowa to help people and communities recover from the effects of severe storms, flooding and tornadoes during the period of May 5-7, 2007. 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 affected individuals in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Ida, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, Shelby, Taylor and Union counties. Federal funding is also available to state and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe storms, flooding and tornadoes in Audubon, Cass, Clark, Crawford, Decatur, Fremont, Harrison, Ida, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, Ringgold, Sac, Shelby, Taylor and Union counties. Federal funding is available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

Poll: Coastal residents still not prepared for hurricanes (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/31)

Many people along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts still lack a hurricane survival plan and don't feel vulnerable to storms, despite Katrina's dramatic damage and pleas from emergency officials for residents to prepare before the season starts, according to a poll released Thursday. 44 percent of people who live within 30 miles of the shore in 18 Atlantic and Gulf Coast states say they feel "not too" or "not at all" vulnerable to a hurricane, or to related tornadoes and flooding, according to the Mason-Dixon poll. The poll also surveyed people farther inland in those states and found those residents were not as concerned or as prepared for hurricanes.

CSU Forecast Remains Unchanged (Disaster News Network, 5/31)

One day before the official start of the 2007 Atlantic hurricane season, researchers at Colorado State University released their updated forecast, sticking to an earlier prediction of a "much more active" season that includes 17 named storms, nine of them hurricanes. "We continue to call for a very active Atlantic basin hurricane season in 2007," they said. "Landfall probabilities for the United States coastline are well above their long-period averages." The report, by Philip J. Klotzbach and William M. Gray, mirrored the report they issued April 3, which called for a total of five major hurricanes. The report said there was a 74 percent chance that at least one major hurricane - a Category 3 or greater - would hit the U.S. coastline. It said there was a 50 percent chance of the storm striking the East Coast including the Florida peninsula and a 49 percent chance of it slamming the Gulf Coast. The possibility of a hurricane making landfall in the Caribbean was described as above average.

Blanco announces emergency preparedness Web site (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/31)

Louisianians have a new Web site for hurricane season intended to link the public with emergency preparedness information, Gov. Kathleen Blanco announced Thursday. The site — www.emergency.louisiana.gov — offers information on hurricane evacuation,

preparation, shelters and traffic routes, and will serve as a source of information after a storm hits, Blanco's office said. The site also has links to state agencies, FEMA and the federal homeland security office. The state also offers free copies of evacuation guides, with different versions for southeast and southwest Louisiana. Those pamphlets are available in the New Orleans, Lafayette and Lake Charles areas as well as smaller coastal towns, at Wal-Mart, Lowes, The Home Depot, state police offices, emergency management offices and state transportation department offices.

FEMA review finds minor problems in disaster plans (USA Today, 5/30)

The government has found few shortcomings in state disaster plans as it finishes preparing for an unusually active hurricane season, FEMA Administrator David Paulison said Tuesday. FEMA has been reviewing coastal states' plans for gaps that could compromise their ability to respond after a hurricane or other disasters. Those analyses, which are not complete, have found only small problems. "There's nothing I've seen where I've said this is a problem," Paulison said. He says state and federal agencies are ready for this year's storms. Officials are in a last dash to prod coastal residents to get ready for the Atlantic hurricane season, which will begin Friday, and to finish plans to fix problems that left governments and aid agencies swamped after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Among those areas:

- Delivering help. Paulison has said FEMA will begin moving people and supplies even before a disaster is declared. The agency can track many of its shipments by satellite to keep vital supplies from being lost or sent to the wrong place.
- Speeding aid. FEMA has set up mobile centers that can register people for disaster aid more quickly. The SBA is able to handle applications faster. FEMA also is taking steps to deter fraud in its disaster programs.
- Providing shelter. The American Red Cross has tripled its warehouse space and stockpiled enough supplies to shelter 500,000 people.
- Strengthening state plans. In North Carolina, for example, authorities can deploy supplies to emergency shelters to help them take care of people's pets.

Vitter blasts FEMA's storm-relief readiness (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/30)

Sen. David Vitter, R-La., is raising concerns about the federal government's ability to respond to a major disaster during what is predicted to be an above-average hurricane season that begins Friday. In a letter released to DHS Secretary Chertoff, Vitter writes that there are "no usable emergency supplies," such as food and water, positioned in Louisiana, and that the Federal Emergency Management Agency doesn't have contracts in place to rapidly get them. Moreover, he said the food, water and generators needed at medical special-needs centers, which were put in place in advance of the 2006 hurricane season, have been removed and not been replenished. Vitter expressed concern FEMA isn't even doing as much as it did in 2006. As an example, he said, FEMA arranged last year for the use of Amtrak trains to evacuate people from the New Orleans area, but this year "FEMA has refused without explanation" to make similar arrangements.

HHS Launches the Pandemic Flu Leadership Blog (Government Technology, 5/29)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has launched the Pandemic Flu Leadership Blog, a five-week-long blog about pandemic preparedness. Participant

bloggers include some of the nation's most influential business, health care, faith-based and community leaders. This online event is part of a new campaign to help Americans prepare for a potential influenza pandemic and engage U.S. leaders in the challenge to help others prepare. HHS is one of the first government agencies to utilize the participatory nature of the Internet to create a dialogue around a specific issue or campaign. This effort to engage individuals in an online conversation is the one of many steps HHS will be taking to carry out its campaign to encourage Americans to prepare. View the blog: <http://blog.pandemicflu.gov/>

Focus on sheltering, storm experts urge (Houston Chronicle, 5/27)

More than half of all evacuees from Hurricane Rita lived on ground high enough to avoid a surge of water from even the most powerful storms. Some hurricane experts say most of these 1.5 million "shadow evacuees" must heed the mantra of emergency planners - run from water, hide from wind - if Houston's next evacuation is to avoid the myriad problems of Rita's exodus. Marc Levitan, director of Louisiana State University's Hurricane Center in Baton Rouge, La., and Walter Maestri, former director of emergency management for Jefferson Parish, La., both said the key is offering inland residents credible options for sheltering in place. "There are two main strategies for reducing exposure to hurricane hazards: evacuation and sheltering," Levitan said during a recent hurricane conference at Rice University. "Houston has embraced one, but it has, apparently, forgotten the other one." The city will focus on making sure the public understands which areas are in surge zones, clearly marking them on maps and by ZIP codes, said Dennis Storemski, Houston's director of public safety and homeland security. But the decision to evacuate outside of those zones, he said, is a personal one. "We're encouraging employers to open the doors of their office buildings to their employees." Some employers have adopted a policy of housing their employees during hurricanes. About 600 family members of employees boarded at The Methodist Hospital during Rita, and the hospital has formalized its boarding policy to include pets.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Deadline for free razing is near (New Orleans Times Picayune, 5/31)

City and federal officials differed Wednesday on whether today is the deadline for New Orleans residents to apply for free demolition of their storm-battered houses. Pat Robinson of the city's Office of Planning and Development said she thought this is the deadline, but Mike Park, director of the Army Corps of Engineers' Louisiana recovery field office, said homeowners can continue to file applications by calling the city's hot line at 311. Park said time is short, however, because the federal government will pay the full cost of the demolitions only through Aug. 29, the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. After an application has been filed, it can take about 45 days to review whether the building is in a historic neighborhood and, if so, have it considered by a city preservation agency. Once a demolition is approved, contractors working for the corps have 30 days to remove the building. The corps has completed 3,386 residential demolitions and is reviewing 138 applications, Park said, but that total represents less

than 25 percent of the 15,000 houses that initial estimates after Katrina said would need to be demolished.

New corps chief says personally committed to rebuilding (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/31)

A year after his predecessor acknowledged the Army Corps of Engineers' responsibility for the catastrophic flooding in Hurricane Katrina, the newly appointed head of the agency toured this still-battered city Thursday to get a sense for the work ahead. Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp said he is committed to ensuring the corps does exemplary work in repairing and upgrading the city's flood defenses to withstand most major storms. "We're going to break our backs getting there," Van Antwerp, who was appointed chief engineer about two weeks ago, told a news conference on a bridge over the 17th Street Canal, the site of one of the worst breaches in the city's levee system during Katrina. He said building trust in his agency is a top priority.

Many Katrina evacuees in Houston still unemployed (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/30)

Nineteen months after Hurricane Katrina sent evacuees from New Orleans streaming into Houston, more than 5,000 heads of households among them are still unemployed despite the city's booming economy, officials say. The number of jobless is contributing to the sense among some Houston-area residents that the storm's victims are a drain on the city and have worn out their welcome. After the storm, a quarter-million evacuees were brought to Houston, welcomed by Mayor Bill White, who threw open the Astrodome. Even before the storm, many were desperately poor, unemployed and on welfare or food stamps. About 12,000 families are still getting federal aid for housing, the city said. Of that group, about 5,500 heads of households are unemployed, not counting those who are elderly and disabled, city officials said.

Deadline for Road Home Application is July 31 (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/29)

Louisiana homeowners with damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita have until July 31 to apply for aid through the state's Road Home program, officials announced Tuesday. The program gives out grants of up to \$150,000 per homeowner. Insurance proceeds and federal disaster aid are counted against the grant award, and homeowners who lived in a flood plain and didn't have flood insurance receive a penalty on their award.

"Homeowners with damages to their homes who have not yet applied should do so right away," Michael Taylor, director of the Disaster Recovery Unit in the governor's Office of Community Development, which is overseeing the Road Home, said in a news release.

Gulf Region Gains Help In New Law On War Funds (NY Times, 5/27)

State and local governments in Gulf Coast areas devastated by the 2005 hurricanes will no longer be required to pay 10 percent of the cost of repairing their roads, schools and other public works, under a provision of the emergency war spending bill approved by Congress. Louisiana officials had said that the need to cover some of the repair costs themselves, instead of having the federal government assume all costs, was significantly slowing their recovery efforts. They praised Congress for making the change, which they estimated would save the state and its affected communities at least \$775 million.

Mississippi will also benefit from the change, to a lesser degree. The Bush administration had earlier opposed lifting the requirement, but after long and intense negotiations with

Congress over the much larger provision financing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the president signed the bill yesterday. In addition to the direct financial advantage, the waiver will reduce the paperwork that local governments must complete to get federal financing for infrastructure, which will save some money and hasten rebuilding.

Elderly Victims Feel Forgotten in Mississippi (WLOX, 5/25)

In the almost 21 months since Katrina, south Mississippi has gone from being a retirement mecca to a community that's struggling to meet the needs of its seniors. The three coastal counties lost hundreds of affordable places for seniors to live. And more will close in the coming months. Those closings rattled a few nerves inside the Lyman Senior Center on County Farm Road. That's where a tired and sometimes overwhelmed Beverly Troth cut squares for a new quilt. "It's been an adjustment," the 65-year-old said, referring to the lifestyle change she's endured since Hurricane Katrina came ashore. "There's a lot of depression trying to start over when you have nothing to start over with." Just when Troth thought she could enjoy the golden years of her life, Hurricane Katrina cut apart her Orange Grove home. Since then, she's seriously thought about leaving the community.

Feds Give \$195 Million for Primary Care in Gulf States (N.O. Times Picayune, 5/25)

The HHS Secretary announced he would release a new round of grants totaling \$195 million to support health care needs along the Gulf Coast, especially among patients who do not have health insurance. About \$100 million will flow to clinics in the greater New Orleans area that provide primary care to poor and uninsured patients -- the population that would otherwise rely on emergency rooms for basic medical needs, such as vaccinations. Louisiana will also receive \$35 million to recruit doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists and \$26 million to help hospitals and mental health centers absorb the rising cost of wages. Alabama and Mississippi will receive a combined \$34 million.