

Volunteer Groups a Force in Disaster Recovery

Community Groups Come Together to Help Neighbors

DES MOINES – In more than 60 federal disaster declarations this year alone, survivors of tornados, floods and windstorms are discovering that grant monies, low interest government loans and other federal and state disaster assistance, as welcome as they are, leave thousands of dollars in unmet needs.

Iowa's recent disasters – Missouri River flooding along the western border; central Iowa counties slammed by hundred mile-per-hour winds and eastern Iowa counties soaked by torrential rains – have brought home to tens of thousands of Iowa disaster survivors how quickly nature's wrath can overwhelm a community, devastate homes and businesses and leave roads awash in mud and debris.

“Federal and state disaster assistance are always a key to long term recovery,” said Michael Scott, the Federal Coordinating Officer for the western Iowa flooding. “Yet, disaster survivors may find they still have unmet needs such as home repairs and the replacement of personal items. Survivors must look to local faith-based groups, non-profit voluntary agencies and Long Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) for help to augment what comes from state and federal agencies.”

In this community spirit of people helping people, FEMA's Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VALs) are working with the Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council (IDHRC), county emergency managers and other community leaders in Iowa's disaster-affected counties to address the needs of disaster survivors and provide support in the development of LTRCs.

“The long-term recovery work of the IDHRC is very important in the cycle of every disaster, as each disaster starts and ends locally. Government, non-profit and faith-based resources, both material and human, all play a vital role and are all necessary in the recovery effort,” said Jody Dickhaut, president of the Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council.

LTRCs recognize that disaster survivors may have received the maximum assistance under the law, but are still in need of assistance. Currently, in the six federally declared western Iowa counties, meetings are being held to determine the resources available from faith-based groups and other volunteer agencies and how to best direct this help to residents still in need.

In a county-by-county volunteer report in Iowa, Fremont County is a partner with the Southwest Iowa Regional Long Term Recovery Coalition (SWIRLC) and Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD); Harrison County is preparing to support a LTRC, however at this time the county emergency manager is referring disaster survivors to local faith-based groups; Monona County has an active LTRC, Rebuild and Recover Mapleton, addressing the needs of Mapleton's 2011 tornado survivors. The LTRC has coordinated work and hospitality with more

than 1,000 volunteers helping with recovery since the April 9th tornado. More than 200 faith mission, college and AmeriCorps volunteers have completed 45 projects since June 1 for families in need. They anticipate recovery will take 3-5 years. Citizens affected by disasters in Monona County can go to www.mapleton.com/mapletontornadorelief.asap for recovery information or may call 712-881-1489 for assistance. Mills County organized an LTRC with the help of the county emergency manager, the state IDHRC and the SWIRLC, and the Committee is assisting survivors; Pottawattamie County started a COAD in July, 2011 and is preparing to address survivors' unmet needs; Woodbury County has an active LTRC, with the Salvation Army and the Woodbury County emergency manager actively working with a group of government agencies and non-profit organizations.

“The work these LTRCs are doing is highly rewarding,” said Iowa’s State Disaster Coordinating Officer, Pat Hall. “Federal and state disaster assistance is important, as we all know, but without the volunteer agencies and the faith-based groups coming forward to make a difference, full recovery would be much longer in coming.”

For information about Long Term Recovery Committees in your area, contact your local county emergency manager. For more information about the Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council (IDHRC) visit www.idhrc.org.

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