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Post-Tribune

New vehicles expand emergency services' capabilities

<http://www.post-trib.com/news/neighbors/1540788,homeland.article>

April 23, 2009

By Donna Rettew

Post-Tribune correspondent

Disaster can strike at any time. A tanker truck hauling hazardous materials overturning on the Indiana Toll Road, causing a mass evacuation; a jumbo jet losing its engines and crashing, with multiple casualties expected; a tornado ripping a wide path through a community, affecting the lives of many people.

The state's Department of Homeland Security is charged with responding to nightmarish incidents like those, and two new vehicles recently displayed in Crown Point will help.

John Bryan of Valparaiso, district administrative coordinator for the Department of Homeland Security, said the mobile command post and the mass casualty incident trailer will improve emergency services in this area.

"Emergency agencies will have a mobile incident command post that can support any type of event or incident," Bryan said. "The trailer provides emergency medical services equipment in the event of a mass casualty incident, such as a transportation accident or a multiple shooting."

Bryan is a nurse with a background in emergency medical services and dispatch, so he knows what he's talking about.

He said the command truck provides a centralized area in the field, with all the technical equipment and support that are needed.

"The mobile command post is used in the field for any event where the incident commander requests the vehicle," he said. "It has communications equipment, a weather station, computers, audio-visual equipment and a work station for the incident command staff."

"The mass casualty incident trailer will allow us to treat up to 200 victims in an MCI," Bryan added. "It has emergency medical equipment to support EMS personnel in the field responding to large-scale emergency medical events, with hundreds of victims."

An example, Bryan said, was the 1994 crash of an American Eagle airplane near Roselawn, killing all 68 people on board.

Other examples included last year's flooding and storm damage in Northwest Indiana.

The vehicles are assigned to Indiana Homeland Security District 1, which includes Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Jasper and Newton counties. But according to Bryan, they also could be used in other areas.

"The district response task force can respond anywhere in the state for up to a week, and anywhere in the nation for up to two weeks in support of major disasters and events," he said.

John (Jack) Van Etten of Michigan City is the incident management team leader. Van Etten has been with the Michigan City Fire Department for 16 years and is a line officer. He holds degrees in public safety and fire service management and has also worked in construction, as a commercial diver and in the wastewater industry.

"The management trailer will aid municipalities during a major emergency or planned events that over-exceed their expertise or capabilities," he said. "It can deliver the tools, skills, knowledge and abilities to safely mitigate or manage the occurrence."

The trucks are self-sustaining, fully capable and ready for deployment, Van Etten said.

"These tools will prove to be a great asset when rolled out," he said, passing some of the credit to Alan McCoy of Hobart, who has helped make the project a success.

Don Hess of Merrillville is the mass casualty/medical response strike team leader. He manages emergency medical services for Saint Anthony Medical Center of Crown Point. A paramedic and instructor at Saint Anthony, he is co-chair of the hospital's emergency preparedness committee.

"We are in the process of showing (the vehicles to) emergency responders in the five counties and we will be using this asset for training in the district," Hess said. "Our next event will be at the Gary/ Chicago (International) Airport drill in June."

"The five counties that make up District 1 are very diverse communities," Hess continued. "Each presents unique disaster possibilities. With the industrial, high-population areas to the north and the rural, agricultural areas to the south, the possibilities are numerous."

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Looking back: Area schools safer because of Columbine shooting incident

Friday, April 17, 2009

By Nick Schneider, Assistant Editor

It's been nearly 10 years since the Columbine High School shooting April 20, 1999 that left a dozen students, one teacher, and the two young murderers dead.

The crime was the focal point and impetus for state-mandated, ongoing school safety plans that are now in force in every school in the state of Indiana.

"All this that was at Columbine was pre-meditated murder," say Greene County Emergency Management Agency Director Roger Axe.

Locally, the Greene County School Safety Commission meets periodically to talk about school violence and discuss with law enforcement officials and other first responders how to better protect students in the event of a crime like the Columbine shooting.

The group, which first was organized in 2000, met Thursday night in a meeting hosted by the Bloomfield School District.

Indiana State Police Major Monte McKee, a Daviess County native who works with the Indiana State Department of Homeland Security's fusion center in Indianapolis, was the guest speaker.

Fusion centers are central locations where local, state and federal officials work to receive, integrate and analyze intelligence.

The ultimate goal of a fusion center is to provide a mechanism where law enforcement, public safety, and private partners can come together with a common purpose and improve the ability to safeguard our homeland and prevent criminal activity.

"He (McKee) talked about a number of issues and Columbine was talked about," Axe said. "McKee said any kind of school incident (like Columbine) is really an act of terrorism."

Axe facilitated the meeting and said it went very well.

All five of the school districts were represented. Eastern Superintendent Ty Mungle serves as chairman of the group by virtue of heading up the county's largest school district in terms of the number of students.

Axe said he believes the county is making progress in its state of preparedness in the area of school violence in the last decade

"It think what we have learned is we -- the schools, law enforcement and the emergency service providers -- can not operate in a vacuum. We have to work as a team and that is what we are doing," Axe said.

"In other words, when they roll up on the scene -- we have five different school districts here in the county and there are not going to be five different plans, or five ways of doing things. Our responses are going to be pretty much the same, except in unique situations. I think we have taken some very good steps."

He pointed out that the Greene County Sheriff's Department vehicles all now carry floor plans of all the schools to have in the case of an emergency.

"Just when you think you've got it all down, something happens different. Here is the dilemma, how free can a free society be? We want schools to be places of learning. We don't want to make them fortresses. If we wanted too, we could really make them one of the most secure places around. Is that going to promote an atmosphere of learning and is that going to promote an atmosphere of well being?"

Axe said he makes a habit of sending out a bulletin to all the school districts every time there is a national school crime incident, just to remind them that the chance of similar instances happening locally is always a possibility.

It also alerts school officials to look for copycat crimes.

He also urges the school officials to listen to what the students are saying and try and get a clue of what they are thinking.

"If we talk to these people, many times the situations can be defused because some of these people are alienated and they are isolated. If we can give them a stake in society then we can reach them before so they don't resort to the great equalizer -- the firearm. That is one of the things we have to do and do it better. We've got to be listening and looking for signs," he stressed. "I don't know if it will always work, but I think there will be a time when it will work.

"We are not where we should be, but thank God we are not where we were. I think the public awareness has been raised. I have a sign that hangs in my office that says the five most dangerous words in the English language are 'It can't happen here'. I read that every day."

Bloomfield School Superintendent Dan Sighting says, "Columbine itself was a lesson for schools ... I think we are better prepared today for that kind of situation than we have been prior to this."

Sighting said the school safety group meetings have been beneficial to him in the three years he's served as Bloomfield superintendent.

"We have worked together to make sure our school safety plans through the law enforcement agencies and that we would all be on the same page if God forbid one of those incidents happens," Sighting said.

The superintendent said another key to the preparedness is the institution of a state-required disaster drill once a year.

Sighting said the two bomb threats at his school last year by two female students served as a wake-up call and helped them to get prepared for any other violent acts in the future.

"It helped us get prepared. We don't want to have any more of that, but after every one of those situations we sat down and talked about the things that went well and said these are things that need to change," he explained.

Sighting said his school district in the last three years has taken some steps to make the school safer. Exterior doors are locked during class time and other security measures have been installed.

"Sometimes our parents don't like it, but at the same time we have the best interest of their students at heart," he stressed. "We have a camera and a buzzer with an intercom at the front door of our high school. We feel very secure. We feel our building has become more secure because of that."

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Allen County gets flood-relief funds

Federal assistance may be available for damage in March floods

A month and a half after flooding around the state, 13 counties in Indiana, including Allen, have been granted federal assistance to individuals or businesses for disaster-relief measures.

The funding, announced Tuesday, is for homeowners, renters and businesses that sustained damage March 8-14. To qualify for federal assistance for individuals for disaster relief, a state must have at least 200 homes statewide that were heavily damaged by the disaster.

Indiana barely qualified by that standard, said Bernie Beier, director of Allen County's Department of Homeland Security office, but the aid will come soon.

Beier said he expects assessors from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to be on the ground within a few weeks to inspect homes or businesses that have applied for assistance.

“What typically happens is, FEMA's got a whole menu of services they can provide, so they'll visit those 13 counties,” said Beier. “They'll bring FEMA reps out and kind of redo a lot of what's already been done. They'll go door to door and assess, on the ground, the specific need.”

Homes or businesses in Allen, Carroll, DeKalb, Fulton, Jasper, Kosciusko, Lake, LaPorte, Marshall, Noble, Pulaski, White and Whitley counties are now eligible to apply for federal aid to make repairs to structures or prevent future flooding.

Beier said FEMA will bring to individuals and business a “basket” of assistance and services, and from that the federal workers will tailor individual assistance to each person or business.

The items included in FEMA's disaster recovery are relief measures like temporary housing, home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, but Beier said permanent assistance or repairs will make up the majority of the federal assistance.

Any grant will be based on the value of the home, its location, the extent of damage, and its cost and type.

For instance, if an applicant's home sits in a floodway or flood plain, damage cannot exceed more than 50 percent of the value of the home. If it does, it's not eligible.

Repairs have catches, too.

If a basement has flooded, FEMA will fund work like making sure the structural integrity of its walls is intact, and will assist with basic “life-support things” like making sure the water heater is functioning.

If stairs have been washed away, FEMA will likely pay to rebuild them, but wouldn't recarpet or add handrails. Wall paneling won't be replaced, either, for example. Neither will carpet or cabinets.

Flood-prevention measures could also be funded for individuals, like the installation of flat gates or back-flow valves on basement pipes to prevent sewer backup, or more extreme measures like raising a home up if it is near a waterway.

Every instance will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, Beier said, and the goal is to meet as many needs as possible after an individual's private insurance is exhausted.

“Remember, FEMA's only secondary,” said Beier. “FEMA looks to help bridge the gap for those unmet needs.”

In the event FEMA cannot help, all is not lost for individuals or businesses.

Beier said his office will help point those in need toward local sources like faith-based groups, social groups or the United Way for help.

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Federal Aid Programs For Indiana Disaster Recovery

Following is a summary of key federal disaster aid programs that can be made available as needed and warranted under President Obama's major disaster declaration issued for Indiana.

(Media-Newswire.com) - Following is a summary of key federal disaster aid programs that can be made available as needed and warranted under President Obama's major disaster declaration issued for Indiana.

Assistance for Affected Individuals and Families Can Include as Required:

Rental payments for temporary housing for those whose homes are unlivable. Initial assistance may be provided for up to three months for homeowners and at least one month for renters. Assistance may be extended if requested after the initial period based on a review of individual applicant requirements. (Source: FEMA funded and administered.)

Grants for home repairs and replacement of essential household items not covered by insurance to make damaged dwellings safe, sanitary and functional. (Source: FEMA funded and administered.)

Grants to replace personal property and help meet medical, dental, funeral, transportation and other serious disaster-related needs not covered by insurance or other federal, state and charitable aid programs. (Source: FEMA funded at 75 percent of total eligible costs; 25 percent funded by the state.)

Unemployment payments up to 26 weeks for workers who temporarily lost jobs because of the disaster and who do not qualify for state benefits, such as self-employed individuals. (Source: FEMA funded; state administered.)

Low-interest loans to cover residential losses not fully compensated by insurance. Loans available up to \$200,000 for primary residence; \$40,000 for personal property, including renter losses. Loans available up to \$2 million for business property losses not fully compensated by insurance. (Source: U.S. Small Business Administration.)

Loans up to \$2 million for small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives and most private, non-profit organizations of all sizes that have suffered disaster-related cash flow problems and need funds for working capital to recover from the disaster's adverse economic impact. This loan in combination with a property loss loan cannot exceed a total of \$2 million. (Source: U.S. Small Business Administration.)

Loans up to \$500,000 for farmers, ranchers and aquaculture operators to cover production and property losses, excluding primary residence. (Source: Farm Service Agency, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.)

Other relief programs: Crisis counseling for those traumatized by the disaster; income tax assistance for filing casualty losses; advisory assistance for legal, veterans benefits and social security matters.

Assistance for the State and Affected Local Governments Can Include as Required:

Payment of not more than 75 percent of the approved costs for hazard mitigation projects undertaken by state and local governments to prevent or reduce long-term risk to life and property from natural or technological disasters. (Source: FEMA funded, state administered.)

How to Apply for Assistance:

Those in the counties designated for assistance to affected residents and business owners can begin the disaster application process by registering online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY) for the hearing and speech impaired. The toll-free telephone numbers are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (local time) Monday through Sunday until further notice. Applicants registering for aid should be prepared to provide basic information about themselves (name, permanent address, phone number), insurance coverage and any other information to help substantiate losses.

Application procedures for local governments will be explained at a series of federal/state applicant briefings with locations to be announced in the affected area by recovery officials. Approved public repair projects are paid through

the state from funding provided by FEMA and other participating federal agencies.

FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

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Times-Union

Serving Warsaw and Kosciusko County Since 1854

Thursday, April 23, 2009

FEMA Money Available Locally

Thursday, April 23, 2009

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security announced Wednesday that President Barack Obama approved federal assistance for homeowners', renters' and business property damaged in Kosciusko and 12 other counties by flooding and severe weather that occurred March 8-14.

Kosciusko County Emergency Management Director Ed Rock said hundreds of area homes were damaged in flooding that week. Severe storms hit Northern Indiana March 8, spawning three tornadoes, high winds and heavy rainfall. In some areas, almost 8 inches of rain fell during a 72-hour period. The heavy rain on frozen and partially frozen ground led to flooding conditions throughout the area.

The other counties included in the federal declaration are Allen, Carroll, DeKalb, Fulton, Jasper, Lake, LaPorte, Marshall, Noble, Pulaski, White and Whitley.

Federal Emergency Management Agency individual assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster.

Rock said homeowners whose permanent residence is Kosciusko County are eligible to apply for the federal assistance.

"Even if they don't live in the county all year long, they are still eligible if Kosciusko County is their permanent residence," he said.

Businesses also can qualify for aid. Rock said not only businesses that suffered damage from the weather, but also those whose business was negatively impacted by the disaster. Rock said business owners will have to demonstrate a loss of business in connection with the disaster in order to receive assistance.

Federal funding also is available to the state for hazard mitigation - measures taken to make the state more prepared for future disasters. Rock said Kosciusko County is working on its own hazard mitigation plan. When the plan is completed, he said, the county can apply to the state for some of the federal money allocated for hazard mitigation.

Residents and business owners can begin applying for FEMA assistance immediately by registering online at www.disasterassistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362 or 800-462-7585 (for the hearing and speech impaired). The toll-free telephone numbers are available 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven day a week.

Local taxing units also suffered damage during the severe weather. Rock said the state is still collecting data from counties calculating the amount of damage done by the weather. He said, if the damage is

enough, public assistance for local governments and other taxing units may be available in the near future.

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Kosciusko County residents still recovering from March floods

Originally printed at <http://www.wsbt.com/news/local/43573197.html>

WARSAW — This week President Obama declared a major disaster exists for several Indiana counties that are recovering from severe storms, tornadoes and flooding. All are now available for federal relief assistance.

That assistance will be made available in Kosciusko County. Last month, a number of homeowners in the Warsaw area were hit with flood waters and are still recovering.

Last month, Russell VanCuren's home on Sunset Drive was overtaken by flood waters. He had to be evacuated with his wife. The high water has since gone down, but it's still trickling into his home and delaying repairs.

“The water's still seeping in and that's holding the department from coming in and sanitizing and cleaning a good part of the house,” he told WSBT News.

“Basically it's like heaven right now,” said homeowner Mike Berger. “But it was a lot of water back a month ago, a lot of devastation to the neighbors.”

Some homes are still being repaired and have not been re-occupied by owners.

“There is still one that is not moved in,” explained Mike's wife Linda. “It will still be a while. They had to totally strip the house four feet up.”

Some homeowners were able to keep the flood waters at bay with around the clock sandbagging efforts, but others weren't so lucky.

Word that federal assistance will be made available for flood relief is being well received.

“I think it's going to help the situation a lot, because there was a lot of out-of-pocket expenses paid by the people, and with the declaration it will help a lot,” Mike Berger added.

A FEMA field office will soon be set up in Kosciusko County to file claims. Federal disaster relief funding is also being made to Fulton, LaPorte, Marshall, Noble, Pulaski and Whitley counties. For more information click on the link in the Related Content box.

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13 IN counties approved for weather aid

Aid to help those with homes damaged in March

Updated: Thursday, 23 Apr 2009, 5:06 PM EDT
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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. (WFLI) - Federal assistance was approved today for 13 counties damaged in the flooding and severe weather that took place between March 8 and March 14.

The assistance is available through FEMA, and can include low-cost loans to cover losses of uninsured property and grants for temporary housing or home repairs as well as other programs.

The counties which were approved are Allen, Carroll, DeKalb, Fulton, Jasper, Kosciusko, Lake, LaPorte, Marshall, Noble, Pulaski, White and Whitley.

Residents and business owners who sustained losses in those counties can begin applying for FEMA assistance immediately by registering online at www.disasterassistance.gov or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY) for the hearing and speech impaired. The toll-free telephone numbers are available 8 a.m.-6 p.m. local time, seven days a week.

A state and federal Joint Information Center (JIC) has been established inside the Indianapolis Joint Field Office (JFO). The JIC has been established to provide information regarding President Obama's disaster declaration for severe storms and flooding in Indiana during the period of March 8 - 14, 2009

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