



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE APRIL 20, 1999 1:00 P.M.
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR REQUESTS SBA ASSISTANCE IN WAKE OF TORNADO

(JACKSON) – Gov. Kirk Fordice this morning requested the Small Business Administration declare a disaster in Jones County, clearing the way for federal low-interest loans for tornado victims.

The request follows a preliminary damage assessment conducted yesterday afternoon with local, state and federal officials. The SBA administrator may declare a disaster when 25 or more homes within a jurisdiction sustain major damage or are destroyed, with 40 percent uninsured losses on the structures. Typically, one county is declared a disaster area, and the contiguous counties are attached to the declaration.

In addition to the SBA request, the Gov. Fordice directed MEMA to open its Disaster Housing Program to storm victims. Available statewide, the State Disaster Housing Program can provide up to three months rental assistance or minimal repair money for homeowners, or, in the case of people who are already renting, one month of rental assistance. The amount of the grant is determined based on an application-by-telephone process.

To apply for the State Disaster Housing Program grants, persons whose homes have been made unlivable by the storm may telephone 1-800-434-4243. The DHP hotline is staffed 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Although the American Red Cross is still in the field in Jones, Covington and Jasper counties, initial estimates indicate about 135 homes in Jones County were affected by the F3 tornado that struck during the night on April 14.

In Covington County, initial emergency management reports indicated one home was destroyed, four homes and one mobile home sustaining major damage. Covington officials had no reports of deaths or injuries.

In Jasper County, reports indicated two homes and three mobile homes were destroyed; and four homes sustained major damage. Most of the damages occurred in the Moss community, where the volunteer fire department sustained a direct hit and was destroyed by the tornado. Local officials also report five injuries and eight people left homeless after the storm.

The Red Cross has established a service center at 401 Oak Street in Laurel to continue to assist tornado victims. ARC served more than 2,400 meals during the response. The Salvation Army is distributing furniture, clothing and blankets. The Salvation Army also fielded mobile feeding units to the disaster site.

While the SBA is under no specific timeframe within which to render a decision whether or not to grant a disaster declaration, state officials expect a decision at least by the weekend. If SBA does declare a disaster, a service center will be established in close proximity to the disaster area.

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