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DRAFT

COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAMS DEPLOY

JACKSON, MS – Teams of community relations specialists will visit Mississippi’s three disaster counties beginning on Sunday to explain state and federal assistance programs to business and homeowners who suffered damage in the severe storms of February 16.

Holmes, Lowndes and Oktibbeha counties were declared a major storm disaster area by President Bush Friday at the request of Gov. Ronnie Musgrove. The declaration made victims of the violent weather eligible to seek state and federal assistance in recovering from uninsured losses.

The community relations teams will consist of representatives of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. (FEMA). Their job is to bring information on assistance programs directly to storm victims.

“We will have community relations people in the disaster areas as long as they are needed,” said John D. Hannah, the official in charge of federal recovery operations. Hannah assigned a team to each of the disaster counties.

Robert Latham, MEMA director, said emergency management officials in each of the counties would advise the teams. “These face-to-face meetings with victims are vital to giving them assurance that they will receive help in getting their lives back on track.”

Residents of the declared counties who suffered losses in the storms must register for assistance by calling FEMA’s toll-free number, **1-800-462-9029**. The number for the speech or hearing impaired is **1-800-462-7585**.