

Draft News Release Signature Approval

Release No. _____ Subject _____ Writer: _____

FCO _____ SCO _____

R4 PAO _____ State PIO _____

Program approval initials: IFG _____ Mitigation _____

PA _____ Human Svcs _____ SBA _____ ComRel _____

MEDIA ADVISORY

-- Not for Publication --

The following information is provided for your guidance in reporting state and federal recovery operations in the Mississippi tornado disaster.

DISASTER FIELD OFFICE -- A Presidential disaster declaration authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in partnership with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), to make a wide range of assistance available to stricken communities to help citizens and governments recover. These programs are administered in or near the damage areas in a Disaster Field Office. The field office houses the state, federal and nonprofit officials, who dispense assistance directly to the affected citizens. The essentials for an office that could house hundreds of workers at computer stations with phones, printers, fax machines and all manner of office supplies are generally installed in a rented building in as little as 18 hours once FEMA's big white trucks arrive from staging areas. Fort Gillem in Atlanta is the southeast region staging area. FEMA takes understandable pride in the speed with which disaster field offices are set up and ready to begin work. It is estimated that it would take months to do the same work in the private sector. These offices are administrative only and do not serve disaster victims in person.

RECOVERY CENTERS -- When a disaster has been declared and people need help with applications for assistance, FEMA and MEMA agree cooperatively to open storefront recovery centers in the disaster area. These centers are NOT places where victims apply for assistance. Applications are made by registering with FEMA through the toll-free telephone number. **(1-800-462-9029)** Those who are registered and have received a tracking number can visit the centers to learn the status of their applications in the system and get answers to their questions. They can also contact representatives of a number of other assistance programs such as the U.S. Small Business Administration, Internal Revenue Service, state tax service, crisis counseling, state insurance officials, community relations, legal assistance and mitigation. The FEMA Helpline **(1-800-525-0321)** offers the same kind of applicant assistance as the recovery centers, and the centers generally close when the number of visitors drops off.