

Last edited by Lisa Holifield June 7

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is responsible for maintaining a comprehensive statewide program of emergency management. During the 2002 Legislative session, Senate Bill 2428 was passed to make three revisions in various portions of the Emergency Management Act of 1995 (Section 33-15-et seq) as amended, that will allow MEMA to comply with recommendations in the PEER Report #403, dated January 2000. Attempts during the 2000 and 2001 Sessions failed to get this legislation out of committee.

Section 33-15-14(2)(i) implements training programs to improve the ability of state and local emergency management personnel to prepare and implement emergency management plans and programs, and requires all local civil defense directors and emergency management directors to complete such training as a condition of their authority to continue service in their emergency management positions. All training is conducted and paid for by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency at no cost to local government.

Section 33-15-14(2)(o) states that there is no existing requirement for local government applicants for state/federal disaster assistance funding to appoint or designate an authorized agent to administer disaster assistance programs. The second provision would require each political sub-division of the state to appoint the EM or CD director (or other local official having completed the required mandatory pre-disaster training) as their authorized Applicant's Agent for purposes of administering the Public Assistance program consistent with state and federal guidelines.

Section 33-15-25(c) states that there is currently no state authority for withholding or applying refunds on public assistance projects against outstanding obligations. The lack of this authority has caused delays in the state justifying project costs and closing out open disasters. For example, a county owes the state a \$10,000 refund on a project pending from the 1994 Ice Storm and has not taken the necessary action to reimburse the state for this overpayment. The county has since been included in the federal declaration following the 1998 Ice Storm and subsequently submits a project for \$15,000. Under the current statute, the State cannot apply this amount against the owed refund and must pay the county the federal and state share of the new project. In fact, the State is liable for repaying the \$10,000 refund to FEMA before the disaster can be closed. Under the new legislation, MEMA would be authorized to apply the \$10,000 owed from the 1994 Ice Storm to the new project for the 1998 Ice Storm. The State would then recover its funds and the reimbursable amount for the new county project would be reduced by \$10,000.

It appears that a new MEMA facility and State Emergency Operations Center will finally become a reality. The House and Senate have adopted Senate Bill 3197, which includes \$9 million for the "construction of a building and related facilities to house the

Mississippi Emergency Management Agency.” MEMA is very excited about the approval of this legislation. The proposed site for construction is on the State Fire Academy grounds. Currently, MEMA is co-located in the National Guard Headquarters Building and at the Woodland Hills Building. The new facility will allow all the staff members to be in one location and have ample space for additional staff during a disaster. The new State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will be state of the art with the latest in satellite communication equipment. The project will begin construction bids later this year.

MEMA continues to be involved in Homeland Security meetings with the Governor and other agencies. We have continued the Terrorism Task Force meetings to ensure open communication between the affected agencies and continue to find ways to disseminate critical information to the public as needed.

MEMA is also preparing for an active hurricane season for the Gulf Coast counties. The Governor and MEMA participated in the “Life Saver 2002,” a hurricane evacuation exercise that tested the capabilities of the state and the local governments. It was a very well organized event and had a positive impact on the parties that participated. The hurricane season is predicted to have **12** named storms, seven hurricanes, and three major hurricanes with winds of more than 110 mph. The average season contains **10** named storms, six hurricanes and two major hurricanes. MEMA reminds all citizens to have a disaster supply kit and a family emergency plan in place before the storm strikes. For further information on hurricane preparation, visit MEMA’s web site at www.memaorg.com.