

REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

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4 NJ COUNTIES ADDED; KUDOs ROLL IN

Recovery efforts gained momentum in New Jersey on May 8th, when federal disaster assistance was made available to four additional New Jersey counties that suffered damages during the severe storms and flooding of March 12 through April 15.

The four counties – Burlington, Cumberland, Hunterdon and Ocean – joined the list of the original 12 counties – Atlantic, Bergen, Cape May, Essex, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset and Union – which were declared presidential disaster areas on April 2.

The four counties were added to the disaster declaration following new damage assessments tours requested by the state.

As of May 21, more than 10,400 New Jersey flood survivors have registered for assistance. Funds awarded to date total \$17,592,090, which includes:

- More than \$11.5 million in Housing Assistance to cover temporary housing, home repairs or replacement
- Nearly \$1 million in Other Needs Assistance (ONA) to cover essential personal property losses, subsistence items, medical, transportation or serious disaster-related expenses not covered by insurance.
- More than \$5.5 million in low interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

While the numbers above tell the story of a successful disaster response, a “softer,” but no less compelling, indicator is the widespread reaction to Region II’s Individual Assistance teams, which have been recently cited “for a job well done.” While this — in itself — isn’t remarkable, the fact that two separate government agencies — one state, one local -- sang the team’s praises simultaneously was sweet music to all concerned.



In a letter to Regional Administrator Lynn Canton, NJ State Police Sgt. Christopher Hartnett, DR-1897’s Deputy State Coordinating Officer, noted the outstanding work of the FEMA staff, citing their dedication and commitment, especially during the Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDA) tours. He was particularly impressed by the team’s knowledge and adaptability, as well as their endurance, working long hours and traveling endless miles to document the nor’easter’s affect on individual lives and local government infrastructure.

Likewise, William Vogel, FCO of DR-1897 received compliments for the hard work and professionalism of the PDA teams and Disaster Recovery Center staff deployed to Atlantic County. That county’s Public Safety Director, Vincent C. Jones, singled out the work of Emerita “Gigi” Perez (IA) and Joseph Bonaccorse (CR), noting they both “hit the ground running.” He also praised their constant communication with County staff, which ensured that both PDA and DRC operations ran seamlessly, thereby speeding assistance to affected residents.

In recognition of their efforts, Mr. Vogel (above right) presented Ms. Perez (above, center) and Mr. Bonaccorse with copies of the letter from Atlantic County, as well as with FCO medallions. IA’s Leah Lubin is at left.

THE CLAN MEETS



This week the CAD hosted DHS's monthly meeting, with the participation of top officials from DHS component agencies, including ATF, CBP, FPS, ICE, OIG, TSA, USBP, and USSS. This initiative was originated about a year ago by DHS officials in Puerto Rico to promote agencies' integration, partnership and camaraderie, as well as the sharing of program information, updates on current projects, and other operational information. This month's meeting focused on emergency preparedness and FEMA's upcoming COOP Training in July.

FACES OF THE REGION



Jose Serrano joined Region II as a local hire in the immediate aftermath of 9-11. The first plane had slammed into the offices of a childhood friend, incinerating him instantly. Other friends of his family also didn't make it home that night. "I'm a native New Yorker. I had to do something to help," he says. He began as a driver, ferrying HQ and local officials to and from Ground Zero, and delivering office supplies and water to the JFO and DRCs.

His determination to help was soon apparent to the Individual Assistance leads, who recruited him to explain the disaster assistance process to Spanish speaking New Yorkers. As a translator, he also supported the work of the Salvation Army and the Red Cross.

His supervisors all encouraged him to apply to the Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) program, but the Logistics cadre got him, and he was soon an Accountable Property Officer (APO), working out of the Region.

Jose's first disaster was a flood event in upstate New York, where he was mentored by Region II's peerless Jack Herbert and Ray Sivon, who is now working in Region IV. "I was fortunate to be trained by the best," Jose says.

Since 2003, Jose has been deployed on over 10 disasters. Katrina remains his most memorable experience in the field — literally. Jose recalls being flown into Baton Rouge and then being sent, via helicopter, to Purvis, MS, where he was set down in the middle of a large field with herd of long-horn cows and three port-o-potties. "We set up a staging area for the travel trailers the agency would later use for temporary housing," Jose says. "It was quite an experience."

When not working, Jose spends time with his three young children. He also has a collection of 10,000 vinyl records, acquired in an earlier life as a professional DJ. "I still listen to music," he says, "but it's helping people that really makes me feel good nowadays."

SHAREPOINT COMES TO R2



Last week, Region II launched Part I of its SharePoint integration process, designed to provide a virtual, common workspace for staff to collaborate on projects, documents and to share ideas.

A hands-on training will be scheduled soon, but if you are familiar with Sharepoint or just want to explore on your own, it's accessible via <https://esw.fema.net/esw/Regions/RegII/default.aspx>.

Some of you may only have visitors' rights, and may find you are unable to upload or edit. This issue is will be addressed in the coming weeks.

GET THEM WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG...

To change behavior, you need to start educating people when they are very young. That maxim has been embraced by the CAD, which recently sent its' External Affairs, Planning and Flood Management staffs to two separate public schools to teach children about preparedness.

Working with the PR Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, CAD staff joined forces efforts for an emergency readiness outreach activity at an elementary school for special needs children in Guaynabo. See photos at right.

Using the *FEMA for Kids-I Learn and Prevent* program, they set up four different stations, where students learned about emergencies, explored and played with PREMA's Interactive DVD, learned emergency readiness with the "*FEMA for Kids- I Learn and Prevent*" DVD, and participated in a live presentation on "*Caring for your Pets in Disasters.*"



At the Eugenio María de Hostos elementary school in San Juan, left, students participated in the Region's first "*I protect myself from flooding*" activity, which helps children understand flood risks in their community, while teaching them prevention tips for different flood risk situations.

The flood awareness project will be held in other public schools in the island, and as part of this activity, students make drawings showing how they will protect themselves in a flood event; 16 drawings will be selected among the participating schools for a PR Planning Board 2011 calendar.

