May/June 2010

FEMA

On Call

Disaster Reserve Workforce News

Hurricane Season 2010

The 2010 Hurricane Season begins June 1st and ends November 30th.

This is a critical period for FEMA. While the 2009 season was relatively quiet, in 2008 a record number of consecutive storms struck the United States – making it one of the more active seasons in the 65 years since the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began compiling comprehensive records. According to NOAA's National Hurricane Center, a total of 16 names storms formed in 2008, while only nine occurred in 2009.

For the 2010 season, the Colorado State University forecast team predicts an above-average 2010 Atlantic basin hurricane season. The team predicts 15 named storms this year, with eight expected to be hurricanes and four developing into major hurricanes.

An average season has 11 named storms, six hurricanes and two major hurricanes, according to NOAA.

In 2008, the FEMA Administrator placed all employees on alert for possible disaster response assignments. For Reservists, the Conditions of Employment (COE) "extraordinary circumstances" clause was activated. Under that clause, all Reservists must make themselves available in the Automated Deployment Database (ADD) or provide a valid reason why they aren't, with appropriate documentation. A call-out was conducted to more than 2700 Reservists, resulting in 900 being deployed.

For FEMA hurricane info: http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/index.shtm

More info on hurricane awareness is available at http://www.weather.gov/om/hurricane/index.shtml

BEST Friend at Work?

Why would FEMA's Building Engagement, Strengths, and Talent (BEST) Workforce Initiative survey ask employees if they have a "best" friend at work?

The answer: Research by Gallup, Inc., which conducts the survey, indicates that employees at organizations with higher levels of close relationships between co-workers are more comfortable, collaborative and engaged. As a result, they stay with the organization longer, are absent less and have fewer accidents at work.

But why "best" friend? It turns out that wording is important. People know the subtle difference between a best friend and someone who is simply a good friend. Only having high levels of employees who agree they have a best friend predicts the positive outcomes described above.

Our mission at FEMA is made easier when working with a best friend.

Many Reservists develop close friendships with co-workers while working in the field and cite these bonds as one of the reasons they enjoy working for FEMA. They like the camaraderie when they're away from home for long periods of time – and they credit these friendships with helping them stay connected to FEMA when they're not deployed.

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Produced by the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division
Blair Gately, Editor

FEMA PIV Cards Introduced; IDs Will be Phased In

Currently, the Office of Chief Security Officer (OCSO) is transitioning all FEMA badges from the old (legacy) badge to the new Personal Identification Verification (PIV) Smartcard.

The change is mandated for all employees, including Reservists and contractors, in an effort to be compliant with Homeland Presidential Security Directive 12 (HSPD-12).

Issuance of the cards is a scheduled process that will occur over a sustained time period. The old badges are still valid until they expire or new cards are distributed.

Reservists will be issued cards at disaster sites. Reservists should not go to regional offices to get new cards unless prompted by the Region.

The badge expires three years from the date of issuance. OCSO recognizes that this is not in concert with the appointment period for Stafford Act employees, but the decision was made by the Department of Homeland Security, which has the lead for employing the HSPD-12 credentialing actions at all DHS component agencies.

The PIV Card, unlike the old badge, electronically verifies the cardholder's identity to provide a higher level of security when used for physical access to facilities or access to information systems.

The cards support technical interoperability among different Federal agencies that use HSPD-12-compliant PIV Cards.

Letter from Philip A. Nowak, Acting DRWD Director

May 15, 2010 is the start of the Pacific Hurricane season, and the Atlantic Hurricane season begins June 1st. The forecasts for the 2010 hurricane season predict a significant increase in disaster activity over 2009. As I write this, employees throughout the Agency are working to "prepare for, plan against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards."

Within the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division (DRWD), we are focused on strengthening the readiness of the disaster workforce by strengthening our support of Regions and operating programs, and by continuing to serve the members of the Disaster Reserve.

Earlier this week, the acting Chief Human Capital Officer (DRWD's new boss) issued an all-employee memo outlining the responsibilities which all Agency employees have in participating in the Agency-wide deployment process. In essence it reminds every one of us that the field relies on the ADD process to pull required workforce resources into the field. The deployment process begins when you update your availability status every 30 days by calling the toll-free Availability Reporting System (1-888-853-9648). It continues when you receive a call from a Deployment Specialist at Mount Weather identifying a deployment need, and it ends when you call the same toll-free line and check into the disaster.

We are also working with the Office of Response and Recovery and the National Cadre Managers to more systematically monitor the readiness of each cadre. At the same time, we are working closely with the National Preparedness Directorate's National Integration Center ("NIC"), the Office of Response and Recovery and other leading stakeholders in the Agency to strengthen the credentialing process.

Expect to hear more about your credentialing plan and training opportunities based on your plan over the coming days and weeks. In short, credentialing is alive and well!

At the time of publication, over 850 FEMA employees supported disaster operations in the states of Tennessee and Kentucky, and over 700 of those are Disaster Reservists. We continue to do whatever we possibly can do to support you, as well as the field offices and Regions who depend on you. You are essential to FEMA's ability to assist survivors and communities in need. Thanks for what each of you will do in what looks to be a busy summer 2010!

Reservists on DRWD's Personal E-mail Distribution List receive information when they are not deployed. If you want to be added to the list, send your personal e-mail address with full name, region and cadre to FEMA-DRWD-Program@dhs.gov Please put "E-mail Participation" in the subject line.

Program Management Branch

Layne Smith, Branch Chief

Progress on Directives

The Program Management Branch continues to make progress in the introduction of Disaster Reservist administrative directives.

Since the last newsletter, we have published the Disaster Reservist Holiday Pay and Administrative Leave directive and manual. Additionally, the Disaster Reservist Sick Leave directive and manual, and The Disaster Reservist Compensation directive and manual are moving through the Agency's vetting process. While these processes require some time to complete, they provide the Agency an opportunity to comment on the topics and ensure the signing and publishing of authoritative, consistent directives and manuals. Next in line for induction is the Disaster Reservist Conditions of Employment directive and manual.

On another note, this issue of "On Call" marks Blair Gately's last newsletter as editor. Blair is leaving Headquarters and returning to Boston to serve FEMA as a Reservist in Region I. We will sorely miss her on the staff here. Blair's energy, superb writing and editing ability, and her determination to "publish on time" ensured the best possible newsletter; timely and topical. Because we will be shuffling responsibilities in the wake of Blair's departure, staffing availability may force a hiatus of one edition of "On Call." However, we will begin the bi-monthly publication again as soon as possible. Regardless, our loss is Region I's gain and we wish Blair the best in all her future endeavors.

Reservist Bill Kirk Collects, Sells Toy Tractors

In Bill Kirk's case – to paraphrase an old saying – you can't tell the difference between the man and the boy, except by the size of his toy tractor collectibles.

Kirk is a Region VII Public Assistance Program group supervisor. He currently is working in the Topeka, KS, Joint Field Office on snow declarations DR-1868 and DR-1885.

Topeka is his hometown. Topeka also is home base for him and his wife's collectibles trading endeavors. "First, we got into buying and selling dishes and glass collectibles," Kirk said. "But I spent 30 years in production agriculture (farming and livestock operations) in northwestern Kansas and I soon started picking up toy tractors at the shows we attended. I knew more about that," he said.

While the some 250 pieces Kirk now has among his collectibles may give him comfort and joy as remembrances of things past, Kirk is quick to assure you "everything is for sale." After all, he infers, he is not collecting toy tractors; he is buying and selling collectible toy tractors.

Toy farm equipment has been produced for years and years, Kirk said. A piece's value is determined by age, condition, rarity and other factors.

Kirk remembers the first toy tractor he got. "My sister gave me one for my 12th birthday" he said. He may remember it, but he does not know what happened to it, he said with a wistful smile on his face. His current collectibles endeavor started about five to six years ago.

He and his wife travel hundreds of miles to toy shows for new purchases when he is not deployed on a disaster. "Of course, we have to stop at all the antique stops on the way for her," says Bill. His wife still prefers glass and dishes. After all, this is a story about man and boy and the ….

Deployment Snapshot -- 5/13/10
Total Reservists Deployed -- 3,665

Largest JFOs (# of Reservists):
Tennessee 467
New Jersey 264
Massachusetts 246
Mississippi 239
Rhode Island 168

Deployment Branch

Tracy Haynes, Branch Chief

DAE Availability

To gauge DAE availability, DRWD references the "Daily DAE Availability Report," provided to Agency leadership. It not only lists the total number of Reservists by Cadre, Region and Program Area, it also states the total number of Reservists either deployed, available for deployment, not available for deployment, on hold or pending.

Agency leadership wants to ensure that DAEs are available to support new Presidential declarations. FEMA currently has 20-plus Joint Field Offices open -- and the daily report indicates almost 40 percent of Reservists are not available for deployment. Additional recruitment may be required in the near future as a result.

Remember to call ADD, 888-853-9648 and select Option 2 to update your availability status at least once every 30 days when you are not deployed.

DRWD is reaching out to National DAE Cadre Managers to discuss Cadre readiness and their capability to support current and future disasters.

In a May 7 memo, Deputy Administrator Richard Serino said, "Our operational tempo is not expected to subside anytime soon, and the agency needs to be fully engaged in our ongoing response and recovery efforts."

Associate Administrator for Mission Support (MS) David Garratt sent a similar message to MS personnel.

Thank you for your support.

Life in the Reservist Lane

Alexandra Hesbrook, Region IX Reservist

FEMA and "The X-Files"

My first notion of FEMA began back in 1998, when I was 13 years old, in a rather unlikely place: "The X-Files." Special Agent Mulder, a renegade FBI agent, talks to his conspiracy informant Kurtzweil, who believes FEMA allows the White House to suspend constitutional government upon declaration of a national emergency.

Fast forward 12 years. I am currently working for FEMA in ESF 15 as a CAS. If you understand what I just said then you clearly work for the "secret government."

However, much to my 13-year-old self's disappointment, FEMA is not a part of the government-takeover-conspiracy I once imagined. We don't handle alien encounters. And instead of shadowy figures, FEMA employees are good-hearted, hard-working individuals.

I first applied to FEMA in the fall of 2008. When I was accepted, my hiring was contingent on a background check. I filled out a small autobiography and the process included fingerprints, passport photos, and a complete seven-year history.

In December 2009, I attended "Policy, Procedure, and Practice for External Affairs," a four-week intensive study providing a brief explanation of Emergency Support Function 15 (External Affairs). The class, which began at the Emergency Management Institute, started with a week-long overview of everything FEMA: timesheets, travel vouchers, the National Response Plan, the chain of command, life at a Joint Field Office, the different components of ESF 15, and info on ESFs 1-14. Then, I spent time at Headquarters, meeting with staff in various departments and sitting in on conference calls with all the regions and open disasters. During my last week, I learned about Congressional Affairs. My mentors taught me the basic duties of my job, and, as a group, we practiced public speaking, our role in a JFO, and how to interact with Representatives, Senators and their staff members.

When I worked recently in Arizona, DR-1888-AZ, I realized the class gave me an advantage over other trainees because I had a foundation. I also learned small items, like booking a one way ticket and using your government credit card. Fun Fact: Since I have arrived at the JFO I have been told 56 times by 47 different individuals that you should only put airfare, rental car, and hotel on your card.

The caliber of individuals I have been working with is amazing. I learned that one of my co-workers braved a storm, lack of funds, and a South American president -- with no fear of death -- to get an interview with Che Guevara's sidekick, Regis Debray. Another one had a private conversation with Nelson Mandela while being the only cameraman allowed at his daughter's wedding.

FEMA might be a disappointment to my 13-year-old, conspiracy-loving self, but working as a Reservist has exceeded my expectations. I am happy to be a part of the organization and it's an incredible learning experience.

What is the 50-week Rule?

FEMA's policy is that Reservists will not be assigned to a single temporary work location away from their respective homes for a time period greater than 50 consecutive weeks.

Performing temporary duty in a single location for a period exceeding one year may cause travel reimbursement payments to be included in an employee's income for tax purposes.

For more information, read FEMA Policy No. 1-05.