Long Term Recovery Initiatives

ORLANDO – Recovery from the statewide damage occurring in the 2004 hurricane season takes resources from all aspects of the communities affected and from state and federal governments.

To better understand the recovery process here is a look at how groups and agencies are working to help Floridians.

Initially after a disaster, the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Florida’s State Emergency Response Team (SERT) and voluntary agencies seek to help victims with their immediate needs of housing, food and water. As homes are repaired, people return to work and cities continue with cleanup and rebuilding. Some individuals, families and areas that are especially hard hit may need more time to recover. Long-term recovery addresses these ongoing needs. Committees and groups have been formed to focus on different aspects of this phase of recovery.

For individuals and families, local community and faith-based groups have come together to form Long-Term Recovery Committees to help with unmet needs. The Long-Term Recovery Committees identify needs, funding sources and volunteer resources. Working as a committee, representatives from various agencies can distribute resources where needed and not duplicate efforts of government and other voluntary agencies.

Currently, more than 50 long-term recovery committees are responding to the needs of Florida residents who may have insufficient resources to recover from the storms. These committees are helping elderly, disabled and low-income families replace roofs, make minor repairs and replace homes destroyed by the hurricanes. By using FEMA funds, client financial resources and donations of money, manpower and materials, volunteers have been assisting several hundred families throughout the state.

For specific, severely damaged communities with economic needs, the Florida Department of Community Affairs and FEMA have brought together planning and economic development experts to work in partnership with communities. The goal of the long-term recovery planning groups is to provide a comprehensive plan to help communities transition from recovery to redevelopment.

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A long-term recovery group in southwest Florida unveiled Comprehensive Recovery Plans for Charlotte, DeSoto and Hardee counties in December. Long-term recovery groups currently are working with communities in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties to create a road map for rebuilding in the areas hard hit by Hurricane Ivan.

These plans are formulated based on the communities’ development and recovery goals, with help from technical support sponsored by FEMA, in areas such as urban planning, architecture and engineering. State and federal agencies are involved in the planning process so projects can be designed to take advantage of established funding sources for economic redevelopment and affordable housing.

The State Emergency Response Team (SERT) is a collaboration of Florida’s state agencies led by the state coordinating officer. SERT’s mission is to ensure that Florida is prepared to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate their impacts. Visit www.floridadisaster.org for the latest information on the hurricane relief efforts.

FEMA prepares the nation for all hazards and manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, trains first responders, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration. FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003.

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For information on SERT go to www.floridadisaster.org; For FEMA, go to www.fema.gov