FEMA SUPPORTS FLORIDA STATE OFFICIALS IN URGING PREPAREDNESS AS RITA INTENSIFIES

ORLANDO, Fla. – As Tropical Storm Rita intensifies and heads for the Florida Keys, Florida’s State Emergency Response Team has activated its Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee, where they are monitoring the storm and beginning to put response measures into place. State and local officials are working to implement mandatory evacuation orders issued for the Florida Keys. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency supports state and local officials in their efforts, and stands ready to provide federal assistance should it be required.

“After working together on response and recovery through six storms, the State of Florida, local officials, and our federal partners have developed a strong relationship that will serve us well as we prepare for Rita,” said Governor Jeb Bush. “We in Florida know that even a strong tropical storm or category one hurricane poses serious danger. I appreciate the hard work of our National Guard and first responders, and the cooperation all Floridians as our families get ready to face this latest storm.”

First and foremost, individuals are urged to pay attention to the latest storm information and follow all advisories issued by local emergency management officials.

“We encourage families to listen to state and local officials and take the necessary precautionary measures for Rita’s arrival,” said FEMA’s Long Term Recovery Director Scott R. Morris. “Even as FEMA continues to help those affected by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf, and work on recovery from the six storms that have impacted Florida over the past year, we stand ready to step up once again and assist our partners at the state and local levels.”

FEMA is preparing for Tropical Storm Rita by pre-positioning supplies and commodities in the surrounding areas of potential landfall of the storm. Commodities of ice, water and Meals-Ready-to-Eat, Disaster Medical Assistance Teams and Urban Search & Rescue Task Forces are in the final stages of positioning at federal facilities in the State of Florida.

Following is a list of actions that individuals should undertake and supplies to gather before Rita’s anticipated landfall.

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Before a Hurricane Strikes:
Plan a safe evacuation route and identify safe shelter space within your area. Those in storm surge zones, in flood zones, or in less than standard housing should be especially vigilant in preparing disaster plans.

Have disaster supplies on hand, including:
- Flashlight, portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Emergency food and water (including a non-electric can opener)
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes and a change of clothing
- Copies of important papers (bank statements, insurance records, deeds, etc.)

When a Hurricane Watch or Warning is Issued:
- Listen to hurricane progress reports. Follow instructions if ordered to evacuate.
- Check your emergency supplies. Store drinking water in clean bathtubs, jugs, bottles and available cooking pots.
- Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys and garden tools; anchor objects that cannot be brought inside but that could be wind-tossed.
- Secure your home by installing hurricane shutters or precut plywood.
- Trim dead branches from trees.
- Turn the refrigerator and freezer to the coldest settings if not instructed by officials to turn off utilities.
- Fuel your car. Review evacuation routes and gather your disaster supply kit.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container.
- Review your family disaster plan.

If You Are Told To Evacuate:
- If officials order evacuation, leave as soon as possible. Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.
- Secure your home. Unplug appliances and turn off electricity and the main water valve. If time permits, elevate furniture to protect it from flooding or move it to a higher floor.
- Take your pre-assembled emergency supplies and warm, protective clothing.

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.

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