



State Officials Respond to Destructive Storms and Power Outages

JEFFERSON CITY — The recent devastating snow and ice storms of Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 ravaged communities throughout Missouri, and state officials are responding to minimize the impact on the thousands of Missourians affected by the severe weather.

More than a foot of snow, sleet and freezing rain has brought much of Missouri to a standstill. Many parts of the state are experiencing poor road conditions due to the snow and ice, and downed power lines have left an estimated 250,000 Missourians without electricity. Blackouts have been especially prevalent in the St. Louis metropolitan area. In response to these severe storms, Gov. Blunt has been active in directing state resources to assist Missourians and working with federal officials to procure additional federal assistance.

On Friday, Dec. 1, Gov. Blunt activated the Missouri National Guard and offered state facilities as warming stations and shelters for communities that need them. Activated Missouri National Guard members are in alert status, which means they are ready to provide assistance as requested by local authorities. Guard members are available to go door to door, transport Missourians to warming stations, distribute food, and otherwise assist with the storm response.

If requested by local officials, state facilities also may be made available as an alternative site for warming stations or overnight shelters. State-provided generators are available to help communities facing sub-freezing temperatures without electricity.

State officials are also in contact with federal authorities to determine the need for federal disaster assistance. The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) is conducting damage assessments as a preliminary step for the state to request federal assistance. SEMA's regional assessment teams will review the damage to determine which Missouri counties qualify for federal assistance. Assistance may be in the form of disaster grants or low-interest loans to families, individuals, businesses and communities to help recover them from the impact of the storm. The assessments will take several days to complete.

In addition, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is granting waivers to help expedite local recovery efforts. DNR has the discretion to waive waste-disposal and open-burning ordinances to eliminate debris.

These statewide efforts are needed to help Missourians recover from the severe storms, but citizens should remember to help themselves by exercising extreme caution. Please drive slowly when facing icy road conditions, find local warming stations if you are without power, and keep an eye on senior and disabled citizens who might be having particular trouble.

My constituents should remember that I want to help as much as I can, so contact me if you need assistance. And be careful out there.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

#