

# NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino  
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## **County, city team learns much during mission to Gulfport *Mississippi city receives \$41,642 and much-needed supplies from County***

Emergency responders, disaster planners and other officials from the County of San Bernardino and several cities spent five hours touring hurricane-ravaged Gulfport, Miss., Monday and learning from their Gulf-Coast counterparts what to expect if and when San Bernardino County is struck by a large-scale natural disaster.

In response, the Board of Supervisors today called for the formation of a San Bernardino County task force to review the county's disaster preparedness plan in light of the lessons learned during Monday's trip to Gulfport.

"We learned a lot on Monday, specifically that San Bernardino County will likely be entirely on its own for at least the first few days following a major disaster – maybe longer," said Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Paul Biane. "The county's emergency plans must prepare for this contingency."

Denise Benson, director of the county's Office of Emergency Services, said any changes to the county's plan will likely stress the importance of community and individual preparedness. "What we're talking about is taking the Neighborhood Watch program one step further," Benson said.

Monday's trip, funded entirely by private donations, also gave members of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors the chance to personally deliver \$41,642 in gift cards donated during the past week by county employees to the people of Gulfport. The cards are redeemable at major retailers such as Home Depot, Wal-Mart and Lowe's and were requested by Gulfport Mayor Brent Warr to help his community get back on its feet.

"There are no words to describe the pride you have for an organization when they do something like this," County Administrative Officer Mark Uffer said today.

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"I'm proud of my colleagues Paul Biane, Gary Ovitt and Josie Gonzales for their efforts to make this delivery of aid possible. I also want to commend Mark Uffer for his leadership in this effort," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus, who was not able to participate in the trip.

While in Mississippi on Monday, the county team also witnessed the unloading of supplies and equipment donated to Gulfport by the County of San Bernardino and the cities of Chino Hills, Ontario, Upland, San Bernardino, and Big Bear Lake. The items – which filled four tractor-trailer rigs and a flat-bed truck – included brand-new generators and power tools as well as surplus office furniture, computers, and photocopiers. The items were trucked to Gulfport by county firefighters in a convoy that departed from San Bernardino on Friday afternoon.

"Thank God you got here. You arrived just in time," said Mayor Warr, who has struggled to hold together a city that in many parts was completely flattened by the winds and storm surge created August 29 by Hurricane Katrina. City employees have been working double shifts since the hurricane struck to restore basic municipal services to the people of Gulfport.

"People like yourselves are going around the bureaucracy, and that's what's working," Mayor Warr said. "The government agencies have yet to really deliver." Hurricane Katrina killed at least 130 of Gulfport's approximately 80,000 residents and left 6,500 homes uninhabitable. The mayor estimates the city safely evacuated 15,000 to 20,000 residents.

"The people we represent feel terribly about what happened here," Supervisor Josie Gonzales told a group of Gulfport city employees and residents. "Our hopes and dreams for you are here also. We look forward to a lasting relationship with your city from this point forward."

"Mayor Warr was very appreciative of the help his city is receiving from strangers more than a thousand miles away," Mr. Uffer said. "We were appreciative that Mayor Warr took a little time to show the county team what the situation is in Gulfport so we can help spread the word back home that more help is needed."

As an illustration of how long it might take Gulfport to recover, one city employee pointed out some sectors of the community were still rebuilding from 1969's Hurricane Camille when Katrina struck three weeks ago. "The worst devastation near the shoreline and in the port area goes beyond comprehension," said Supervisor Gary Ovitt. "There is a lot of work to do and much help is needed. But the residents of Gulfport are obviously resilient and they're going to get through it."

The San Bernardino County team said Monday's trip provided some valuable lessons that could only be learned first-hand. For instance, emergency planners and responders from the county and the cities of Chino Hills, Ontario, Apple Valley, Victorville, Rancho Cucamonga, and San Bernardino toured Gulfport's Emergency Operations Center and had the opportunity to interview many of the Mississippi city's emergency-response personnel.

"This was a mission of goodwill," Chairman Postmus said. "We have a moral obligation to do what we can for fellow Americans who are in trouble. The people of San Bernardino County want to help, and they have a right to expect action from their government leaders. That's what the cities and County of San Bernardino are providing, and this delivery of aid is an example of that."

The Board of Supervisors today also heard a report about the county's Arrowhead Regional Medical Center's relief efforts in Houston.

ARMC Medical Director Dr. Dev Gnanadev was one of 10 physicians, four behavioral health professionals, and two radiology technicians who spent four 10- to-16-hour days treating patients in a makeshift clinic established at a sports arena in Houston.

The ARMC team treated adults and children suffering from a wide variety of ailments.