

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 6, 2005

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Board to hold special meeting to address hurricane relief

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors will hold a special meeting at 1 p.m. Thursday to take action to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus announced his intention to call the meeting during a conference this afternoon with various county departments and local representatives of the American Red Cross to develop a local action plan to assist hurricane victims.

"Our county has a lot to offer the victims of this horrible, ongoing disaster," Chairman Postmus said. "It's our responsibility to explore every avenue to make this assistance available to those who need it."

During today's meeting, the county and local representatives of the American Red Cross agreed that the county could provide immediate assistance to at least 300 disaster evacuees if state and federal agencies were to send them here. The Red Cross would be able to provide temporary housing for the evacuees, while various county social services and health agencies would provide support services. Additionally, the county will determine whether additional housing is available through other channels, such as the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino.

The Board of Supervisors on Thursday will consider a resolution declaring a local emergency to allow county departments to offer non-monetary assistance to Gulf Coast disaster victims. In the meantime, county departments have been directed to contact their counterparts in the affected areas to determine if there are opportunities to provide immediate aid.

The board will also consider a resolution formally authorizing county departments to provide regular salaries and benefits to county employees who travel to the disaster and recovery areas as relief agency volunteers. The county is working with the local Red Cross this week to help coordinate volunteer recruitment and training from among county departments. This effort, modeled after that of Los Angeles County, envisions volunteer disaster relief worker teams being sent on short-term assignments where needed.

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These two actions will be preceded by a report from county departments outlining the actions that have been taken so far by county agencies and what resources are still available to contribute to the relief and recovery effort.

These developments are the latest in a series of actions taken by the County of San Bernardino to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

County employees have banded together or acted on their own to gather money or supplies in an outpouring of compassion. Various relief agencies are advising that donating money is the best way for most people to lend support to hurricane victims. For that reason, the county has established a special Red Cross fund to funnel tax-deductible donations directly to recovery efforts. Employees and county residents alike are encouraged to donate through a link and instructions posted on the county's web site, www.sbcounty.gov.

According to the Red Cross, 100 percent of the money donated through this fund will be sent along to the national Red Cross organization and used exclusively to assist hurricane victims.

Meanwhile, rescue and recovery agencies have tapped into the county's pool of trained and talented experts to assist in the effort. A County Fire Battalion Chief has already been sent to the disaster zone to provide assistance with a mutual aid effort, and other County Fire personnel are expected to be called into action in the near future.

Teams of doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists and other health-care professionals from Arrowhead Regional Medical Center have been asked to be at the ready to staff mobile hospitals that are being established in communities near the Gulf Coast. Two ARMC nurses, a pharmacist, and an administrator have departed for the disaster zone.

The special Board of Supervisors meeting will be held at 1 p.m. Thursday on the first floor of the County Government Center, 385 N. Arrowhead Ave., San Bernardino.