

Backgrounder

The December Storms of 2007: The Response from State and Local Agencies

- Overview:
 - Governor's declaration of emergency. On December 3, 2007, the Governor issued an executive order that declared a state of emergency due to severe winter storms. Flooding, high winds and erosion had caused power outages and loss of communications in large areas throughout northwest Oregon.

The storms inflicted substantial damage on homes, businesses, farms, ranches and public infrastructure. In his directive, Governor Ted Kulongoski ordered Oregon Emergency Management to activate the state's emergency plan. He also ordered all state agencies to mobilize and offer all possible help to local agencies and affected communities.

The affected counties were Columbia, Clatsop, Coos, Curry, Polk, Tillamook, Washington, Yamhill and Lincoln. Affected tribes were the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde.

- Governor's request for federal assistance. Over the next several days, the Governor asked the federal government to help public agencies and individuals repair damage and clean up in the aftermath of the storms. On December 8, he received word from the President and from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that Oregon was eligible for federal assistance through FEMA.

This declaration meant that qualified families could get housing assistance and other grants under the individual assistance program. Under the public assistance program the federal government would reimburse the state for 75 percent of the cost of repairing storm damage to infrastructure and cleanup. Under the formula, the state must provide a 25 percent match.

- Costs:
 - Impacts on state agencies. The attached sheet (December 2008 Flood Adjustments) shows the actual impacts that the December storms imposed on the individual budgets of state agencies. The total impact on the state General Fund (\$1.9 million) represents the unreimbursed 25-percent match toward eligibility for FEMA assistance. The combined totals under "Other Funds" and "Federal Funds" represent storm-related obligations

that agencies' budgets do not account for. All three categories—a total of \$21.2 million—require legislative approval through the Emergency Board.

[Note: Some agencies have chosen not to ask for budget adjustments, because their expenditures were so small. Also, these totals do not reflect damage to State Forests, owing to the downturn in the timber market.]

- Agencies' storm-related activities:

Go to http://governor.oregon.gov/gov/docs/gov_recoverycab_exitconf_slides.pdf to view detailed slide presentations (in .pdf format, with notes) that describe state agencies' responses to actual challenges and crises in the affected communities. The presentations address the agencies' respective missions with respect to the December storms, their accomplishments, costs and lessons learned.

- Governor's Recovery Cabinet:
 - Recovery planning cell. Following Hurricane Katrina, Governor Kulongoski placed new and stronger emphasis on emergency preparedness, both in his staff and in state agencies. Taking into account successes and failures in the wake of Katrina, the Governor formed a "recovery planning cell" during TOPOFF-4 (last year's joint federal-state-local emergency exercise). The purpose of the cell was to coordinate state efforts to help speed recovery after a major disaster. The cell reconvened on the afternoon of December 3, as the December storm raged.
 - New emphasis on recovery. On December 21, 2007, the Governor's office announced formation of the Governor's Recovery Cabinet, a group that replaced the recovery planning cell. The Cabinet includes key members of the Governor's staff, the heads of front-line state agencies, as well as local officials, tribal leaders and representatives of nongovernmental agencies and the private sector.
 - Mission. The Mission of the Recovery Cabinet is to serve as the Governor's principal advisory board in helping communities, businesses and families recover from disasters. Operating on the assumption that recovery is a state function, the Cabinet enables officials at all levels to meet regularly and coordinate their efforts proactively. Thus, they can avoid costly duplication and prevent working at cross purposes. The effect has been to shorten response times by bringing together agency heads, local leaders and decision-makers, resulting in timely decisions and more effective action. The Cabinet has also focused state and local efforts to strengthen the state's partnership with federal agencies in speeding the healing process in the aftermath of a disaster.

- The Exit Conference. The conference gives participants an opportunity to share thoughts about the outcomes of efforts to heal communities after the storms, and to relate those outcomes to their respective agencies' accomplishments and expenditures. The goal is to assess progress and make note of lessons learned, and to strengthen preparedness for the next public emergency, whatever it may be.
- Ongoing work.
 - Vernonia Schools. The Vernonia Schools have received state designation as a Community Solutions project.
 - Tillamook Rail. Damage assessments are under way by an interagency workgroup led by ODOT.