



March 2014 Issue

March 2, 2014 Winter Storm



Photo caption: Snow on Mississippi River Greenbelt Park



Ice-glazed roads on Covington Pike in Raleigh

Although it was supposed to be the meteorological end of winter, a special weather statement from the National Weather Service (NWS) on February 28 predicted winter would return March 2. Bob Nations, Jr., Director, activated the Shelby County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) calling in representatives from public works, law enforcement, fire, health, and other emergency services. Salt trucks were loaded and ready to re-treat roads and MLGW's extra utility crews were standing by. As the Arctic cold pushed in, the NWS issued a winter storm warning, a flash flood warning, and a wind advisory. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency activated at a Level 3 as Governor Haslam declared a state of emergency for Tennessee. Mark Luttrell, Jr., Shelby County Mayor, declared a state of emergency due to "icy conditions moving through the county."

As temperatures fell, an eerie evening of thunder, torrential freezing rain, and sleet left Shelby County encased in snow and ice by morning. Reports flowed into the EOC of flooded and closed roads, power lines and trees down, blocked intersections, trees falling on homes and vehicles, and signal lights out. A press conference was held March 3 by Shelby County Mayor Mark Luttrell, Director Nations, and Sheriff Bill Odom to address the storm issues. Nations said, "Temperatures remain cold and our roads are extremely hazardous and will refreeze overnight. The salt trucks are out now and fortunately law enforcement reports only a slight increase in accidents with no major injuries. We ask the public to be patient, remain vigilant, and if possible delay traveling for the next 12 – 18 hours. Remember to bring in your pets and please check on your neighbors during this time."

County government and schools, many businesses, and colleges closed March 3. Memphis International Airport was forced to cancel some flights. The MLGW's outage map showed 62,000 citizens were without electricity due to downed trees on power lines. Geographical information system (GIS) from the EOC mapped outages and damages countywide, with more occurring north of I-40 in the Frayser / Shelby Forrest area. The Hernando DeSoto Bridge in West Memphis gridlocked due to stalled trucks trapping motorists for up to 12 hours in their vehicles. As the ice melted, county schools were again open by Friday March 7. According to the NWS total ice accumulation was .2 inches and total snowfall was 1 inch.



Photo caption: motorists slide up Auction Bridge downtown



Photo caption: Fallen tree branches in Bartlett on Stage Road



Photo caption: Press conference at Shelby County EOC March 3, 2014.
Left to right: Sheriff Bill Odom, Director Bob Nations, Jr., Mayor Mark Luttrell, Jr.



Photo caption: Cars dodge fallen trees on North Parkway



Photo caption: Tree limbs rest on power lines in north Memphis

Storm Debris Removal Assistance



Photo caption: Shelby County post winter storm debris piled up in yards and streets

Piles of trees and broken limbs still litter yards, driveways and sidewalks throughout Shelby County after the snow and ice melted from the March 2 winter storm. Since the debris may pose traffic problems and attract rodents, residents in the county's unincorporated areas are asked to stack winter debris along roadsides to be picked up. The items need to be no longer than 6 feet and no wider than 2 feet. To request pick up please call the Shelby County Public Works Department at 901.222.7705 or the Shelby County Mayor's Action Center at 901.222.2300 until June 20, 2014.

Cell Phone - No Signal



When an emergency arises we are instructed to call 9 -1-1 for help. But what if your cell phone has no signal? If possible, try to move to an area where you can get better reception such as to the outside of the building if you are inside, an open field, and away from tall buildings. If you are driving, pull over and stop the vehicle. In some cases, text messages may transmit when a call may not. When texting emergency messages, give relevant information to include your location and any landmarks near you. Or dial 112 from your cell phone if you have no signal and cannot establish cell phone connection. This is an internationally recognized standard emergency number.

Spring Flood Forecast



Photo caption: left, Ben Schott, right, Bob Nations, Jr. March 12, at the “good news” briefing at the EOC



Riverside Drive was closed to traffic downtown Memphis during the 2011 major flooding event

Bob Nations, Jr., Shelby County Office of Preparedness Director, surprised the media by initiating a “good news” briefing at the Emergency Operations Center on March 12, 2014. The subject - spring flooding. Joining Nations was Ben Schott, National Weather Service (NWS) meteorologist.

Nations revealed that several agencies work together in a regional partnership to predict floods, called River Watch. It includes the Office of Preparedness, the NWS, the University of Memphis, the United States Geological Survey, and the Corps of Engineers. Utilizing the newest technology and information from gauges on the Mississippi River and its tributaries, as well as geographical information system mapping, real time water levels are now available 24/7. This predictive model was created after the 2011 floods. According to Nations, “with the click of a computer mouse we can have real time flood information right in front of us – a tangible tool to help us evacuate citizens quickly if need be. It gives us more lead time.” He added, “We’ve come light years in our ability to predict flooding events.”

Schott stated that the NWS does not predict major flooding for Shelby County this spring, even with a later than normal snowmelt from northern United States and spring rains in the Ohio / Tennessee Valley. April and May generally produce the greatest rainfall in the Midsouth. Schott differentiated between river flooding, which can take 30 days to crest versus flash flooding, which can happen in as little as 30 minutes during thunderstorms. Gene Rench, NWS hydrologist, also attending, said he would categorize this spring as a “minor flood risk” with a 34 to 35 foot crest at Memphis impacting mainly agricultural areas. There also may be backwater flooding at the Loosahatchie and Wolf Rivers.

Nations said that the Office of Preparedness and the NWS communicate daily predict inclement weather events and how weather impacts different disasters. “It’s not only an emergency management issue but also a Homeland Security issue,” he said. If we have major hazardous materials event, we need to know what the weather is doing as well as the wind speed and direction.

Nations reminded the public to continue to have their weather radio and ALERTFM on hand this spring and pay attention to the watches and warnings for high winds, severe thunderstorms, and tornadoes.

Flood Safety Tips



Photo Caption: Tom Lee Park, downtown Memphis, overlooking the Mississippi River on March 24, 2014. The statue is dedicated to Tom Lee.

In 2010 and 2011 Shelby County experienced historic flash flooding and major river flooding. Hundreds of citizens were evacuated to shelters and many in the northern part of the county were forced to relocate permanently due to the threat of flooding in the future.

The greatest disaster threat to property in the United States, according to the National Weather Service (NWS), flooding was responsible for 85 fatalities in 2013. Half of these were motorists driving into flash floods. The NWS also reports \$8.3 billion in damages recorded annually. The Shelby County Office of Preparedness, under the direction of Bob Nations, Jr., offers these tips to stay safe from flooding:

- 6 inches of flood water can knock a person off their feet and less than 12 inches of flood water can sweep away a vehicle. Flood waters are deceptively swift and fast flowing. Use caution!
- Learn the flood risks where you live. Remember, flooding can occur anywhere there is rainfall.
- Stay informed with a NOAA weather radio or an ALERTFM. Heed the watches and warnings!
- Learn alternative routes out of your neighborhood to and from work. Know where higher ground is located.
- Flood water can be toxic. Do not touch it. If you must wade through it to get to higher ground, make sure you shower immediately. Throw away any food flood water has touched.
- When you see flowing water on the roadway, remember to “Turn Around, Don’t Drown!” Flash flooding is especially hazardous at night. If your vehicle is caught in floods, exit your vehicle immediately.
- Find out about supplemental flood insurance from the National Flood Insurance Program at www.floodsmart.gov.

According to the National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service the Mississippi River at Memphis measured 11.5 feet on March 24, 2014. Flood stage is 34 feet.

For more information, please visit www.fema.gov, www.weather.com, www.weather.gov

Ready Kids (and parents)! Be a Hero!



Caption: FEMA's Ready Kids invite you to get prepared!

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) invites you and your kids to visit the game section of Ready Kids (www.readykids.gov). “**Be A Hero**” explores the world of disaster preparedness through online games such as “Disaster Master.” The more you know, the more points you accumulate until you reach the final test. Ride along with Gayle and her friends as they build a disaster kit, going room to room, gathering the essential items for survival. Test your knowledge of what to do before, during, and after common hazards and threats such as flooding, earthquake, wildfires, tornadoes, home fires, extreme heat, thunderstorms, lightning, blackouts, and extreme cold.



Where do we meet?

Ready Kids recommends calling a special family meeting to make a communications plan. First, create a fire escape plan for your home. Decide how to get out of each room, by window and by doorway. Decide where to meet if you and your kids get separated by designating a safe place right outside the home, perhaps at the mailbox, and one further out in the community. Everyone in the family should practice getting to the safe place from work and school.



Got the numbers?

Ready Kids suggests making a special wallet card for you and your kids with the same emergency contact information and phone numbers on it. Include an out-of-state contact. Tape this information to their book bag or program the numbers into their cell phones. Make sure everyone knows who to call in an emergency and how to check in with each other.

Harbor Town Prepares



Photo Caption: Left to right, Dawn Nelson, Elizabeth Glasgow from Harbor Town, and Eugene Jones, Preparedness Officer



2011 Mississippi River Greenbelt Park under flood waters threatening Harbor Town / Mud Island homes

Taking the proactive approach to safety, downtowners Dawn Nelson, District 1 Representative, and Elizabeth Glasgow, Harbor Town / South Bluffs Association Manager, invited the Shelby County Office of Preparedness to visit on February 28 to discuss preparedness strategies. Having graduated from Shelby County's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training in 2013, along with Craig Cardwell, Board President, they were personally prepared and wanted to help prepare their neighbors.

"Knowing your risks is the first step towards getting ready," said Officer Jones. After surviving Shelby County's 2011 "flood of the century," river flooding was their biggest concern, followed by earthquake, tornado, winter storms, fires, and hazardous materials incidents.

Jones noted that Harbor Town / Mud Island had implemented an important part of a good preparedness plan – communication from the Board of Trustees. They had compiled a group email of those living in the area and send out weekly updates about neighborhood events and concerns and post messages on Facebook regarding power outages or lost animals. They know the association presidents and block captains and have created a great web site, Harbortownmemphis.com.

After talking with the Officer Jones, Glasgow and Nelson were encouraged that they could create their own plan - a preparedness blueprint for their entire neighborhood. In the near future they will meet with their nearest police precincts, fire stations, and the Coast Guard to discuss potential evacuation and sheltering-in-place options and create an emergency contact list. They will find out where the nearest community centers are located, if those buildings could suffice as an emergency shelter, and decide the best places to store disaster supplies, such as bottled water and blankets in the neighborhood.

Officer Jones emphasized "get to know your neighbors" and find out what they do for a living. Using the street maps Glasgow and Nelson already have, he suggested plotting who lives where on the island, and the location of fire hydrants and wet stand pipes. Harbor Town hopes to have an outdoor preparedness fair in the near future!

Shelby County SKYWARN Training



Photo Caption: Jim Branda from the National Weather Service SKYWARN training at the EOC, Tennessee Severe Weather Awareness Week

The Shelby County Office of Preparedness, under the direction of Bob Nations, Jr., welcomed safety professionals and citizens to the Emergency Operations Center for SKYWARN training on February 19, 2014 during Tennessee's Severe Weather Awareness Week. Jim Branda, Meteorologist from the National Weather Service (NWS) presented, "Working Together to Save Lives."

SKYWARN, trained weather spotter volunteers called "spotters", relay information to the National Weather Service as they witness inclement weather effects. They typically report on downed trees and power lines, floods, hail, funnel clouds, wind damage, lightning, snow, and ice accumulation.

The course reviewed how to recognize the signs of severe weather and tips on how to differentiate between benign cloud formations versus those that can morph into severe thunderstorms. A dramatic power point and lecture was accompanied by terrifying videos of citizens caught inside vehicles during a tornado. Branda said that spotters can expect to encounter obstacles to reporting such as trees, hills, smoke, rain shafts, tall clouds, and buildings.

Noting that "weather prediction is not an exact science," Branda told the students that radar and satellites are their main tools, but technology cannot see what humans can. He complemented spotters as the "ground truth" when they assist meteorologists in accurate reporting of weather. Branda said that spotter reports have more of an impact with the public, especially in regards to funnel clouds. Addressing any potential shyness in reporting he said, "Don't hesitate to contact us with your information. You may be the only one who saw it." A timely report can be the key to a warning issued - ultimately saving lives.

Lastly, Branda emphasized the need for spotters to be safe when reporting weather effects.

For information about the next SKYWARN training, please visit www.weather.gov.

Preparedness Training

SKYWARN (Weather Spotters Training from the National Weather Service) Tuesday, March 25, 2014, 7:00 p.m., Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 6865 Poplar Pike, Memphis, TN. Free. To register contact Joe Lowenthal @ 901.628.4311 or wa4ovo@gmail.com

Advanced Critical Infrastructure Training: Texas A & M Engineering, Tuesday, April 1, 2014, 8:15 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., 1075 Mullins Station Road, Shelby County Emergency Operations Center, Memphis, TN 38134. Free. To register on line visit: www.staysafeshelby.us

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training: Saturdays, April 26 and May 3, 2014, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Fisherville Civic Club, 12037 Macon Road, Memphis, TN 38028. Free. Pre-registration required. To register email: Eugene.jones@shelbycountyttn.gov.

Hazardous Materials Awareness Training Course: Wednesday, May 21, 2014, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 a.m., 1075 Mullins Station Road, Memphis, TN 38134, Shelby County Emergency Operations Center. Free. To register contact Shannon.towery@shelbycountyttn.gov or 901.222.6714.



March do1thing: Sheltering. If the Shelby County Office of Preparedness alerts the public to shelter-in-place because of an impending disaster, do you know what do? Shelter-in-place means to stay where you are until the danger has passed.

First, chose your “safe place” in your home or business.

- For tornado or high winds it is the center room, on the lowest floor with the most walls around it, away from windows and skylights.
- For hazardous materials releases, it is an interior room, not a basement, which can be sealed off from the harmful substances. Go into the center room; turn off ceiling fans or any outside air coming in. Fill bathtub and sinks with clean water and be ready to use duct tape and plastic sheeting to seal doors and windows if needed.

If you are suddenly evacuated to a Shelby Cares shelter, be ready to leave at a moment’s notice. Always have a portable disaster kit ready to go. Make sure it has a flashlight, batteries, whistle, NOAA weather radio or ALERTFM, bottled water, nonperishable food, boots, change of clothes, cash, ID, cell phone, emergency contact list, important papers and photos, first-aid kit, poncho, hard hat, and work gloves.

For more information on monthly tips to get prepared, visit www.do1thing.com.

Preparedness / Safety Resources

Shelby County Office of Preparedness: www.staysafeshelby.us, 901.515.2525.  

Shelby County Citizen Corps: citizencorps@shelbycountyttn.gov,  www.facebook-shelby-county-citizen-corps

Shelby County, Tennessee: shelbycountyttn.gov

Shelby County Medical Reserve Corps: www.shelbycountymrc.org

Shelby County Office of Preparedness Storm Shelter Registry: Kimberlyn.bouler@shelbcountytn.gov

Shelby Cares - Faith-based Sheltering Initiative: Terry.donald@shelbycountyttn.gov

Shelby County CERT Program: Eugene.Jones@shelbycountyttn.gov

ALERTFM: www.alertfm.com

Center for Earthquake Research and Information (CERI): www.ceri.memphis.edu

Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC): www.cusec.org

Citizen Corps: www.citizencorps.gov

Department of Homeland Security: www.dhs.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): www.fema.gov

Memphis Light, Gas and Water (MLGW): www.mlkw.org, 901.544.6549, Outages: 901.544.6500

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP): www.floodsmart.gov

National Weather Service (NWS): www.weather.gov, NWS Memphis: 901.544.0399

Ready American, Business, Kids: www.ready.gov

Ready Tennessee: www.tn.gov/homelandsecurity/getready.shtml

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA): www.tema.gov

Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT): www.tdot.state.tn.us, 1.877.244.0065, call 511

United States Fire Administration (USFA): www.usfa.fema.gov

United States Geological Society (USGS): www.usgs.gov

Weather Channel: www.weather.com

EMERGENCY: 9-1-1