



Inspectors gauging flood costs

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By RUSS FLANAGAN
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Inspectors from local, state and federal agencies took a tour Thursday of flood-ravaged parts of Northampton County but will need more time before deciding if the area qualifies for federal aid, a Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency spokesman said.

PEMA spokesman Justin Fleming said inspectors are scheduled to tour parts of Monroe County today and may return to Northampton County later in the day.

Downtown Easton, Portland and parts of Upper and Lower Mount Bethel townships were among the most devastated areas during last weekend's flooding. Inspectors spent their day Thursday visiting these areas, he said.

Once the inspectors assess the amount of damage, the information will be forwarded to federal officials to determine how much aid will be given, if any.

"They're going out basically to see if there is enough damage to warrant a request from the governor to the president to ask for federal aid," Fleming said.

Fleming said the threshold to qualify for federal aid is not necessarily measured in dollars but by the number of homes damaged by the flood. He said the only data available Thursday detailing the number of damaged homes was several days old and no longer accurate.

Further downstream from Easton, Riegelsville residents and parishioners of St. John's United Church of Christ continued their joint effort to help people affected by the flood.

As rain poured down on the borough Sunday, the Rev. Jeffrey Wargo and other members of the church started helping members of the congregation move their belongings from basements and lower floors to higher ground.

From there, the volunteer effort grew to include non-parishioners, who pitched in to help anyone in the tiny borough who needed it.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Wargo's wife, the Rev. Stephanie Thompson, chaplain for the Doylestown Hospital Hospice. "I've lived here seven years and folks that have been here since the '55 flood have never seen it."

Earlier in the week, volunteers helped move valuables to dry ground. Now they're helping others clean the muddy messes from their homes. St. John's also opened its doors to those displaced by the flood and at one time housed 12 families, Thompson said.

The other night, volunteers whipped up enough food for 200 people affected by the flood.

"We're just doing what you do when you care for people," Thompson said. "It wasn't planned; it just sort of progressed."

While the community was banding together to help flood victims, others were helping themselves to property that was left on lawns and sidewalks to dry.

State police at Dublin, which patrols the borough, said it received one complaint from a resident who said items left on a front lawn following the flood were stolen.

Riegelsville resident Kim Birgfeld said her great-aunt's antique lamps were stolen from outside her home after she placed the lamps and other items outside to dry.

Police said the incidents will not be classified as looting. Police chalked up the thefts to passers-by who may have mistakenly thought the items were being placed curbside as refuse.

Birgfeld said people should ask the homeowners about the property before helping themselves.

"When you're not looking, people take what they want and leave. It's disgusting," she said. "If it's not your property, ask."

Residents in all the areas affected by last weekend's floods could be in for another dose of the same Thursday night into Friday, when up to 2 inches of rain is forecast to fall across the area.

The National Weather Service said the flooding won't be as widespread but could cause swelling along creeks and other smaller waterways that were unaffected by last week's storm.

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