



FEMA sets up shop in Forks as many sign up for flood aid

Recovery center info (The Northampton County disaster recovery center opens at noon today. After today, it will be open 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays. (To register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency by phone call 1-800-621-3362 between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. The hearing- or speech-impaired can call 1-800-462-7585. (More information on disaster relief is available from FEMA online at www.fema.gov, and from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency at www.pema.state.pa.us.

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By CHRIS POLLOCK
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FORKS TWP. – A disaster recovery center for Lehigh Valley victims of this month's flooding opens today at noon in the Sullivan Trail Shopping Center.

The 1700 Sullivan Trail center, which was once the site of a Laneco, is one of three opening at the same time along the Delaware River, said Federal Emergency Management Agency spokesman Dan Martinez. The others are in New Hope and Marshalls Creek.

Martinez said federal and state officials picked the locations to serve nine counties declared part of a federal disaster area on Friday by President Bush. The counties affected are Northampton, Bucks, Monroe, Bradford, Columbia, Luzerne, Pike, Wayne, and Wyoming.

Gil Butler, FEMA information officer for Northampton County, said 101 people have registered for disaster relief in the county since Friday. A total of 500 registered from the nine-county area by Tuesday morning. Butler expected the number to increase as the public grows more aware of what aid is available.

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency spokesman Justin Fleming said the latest damage estimates for Northampton County are 19 homes destroyed, 150 homes with major damage and 64 homes with minor damage. He said this was only a "snapshot" of the destruction and not meant to be a comprehensive list.

Fleming encouraged anyone with flood damage of any kind to call the FEMA toll-free number to see if they qualify for assistance.

Martinez said the centers are to serve as a one-stop location for a variety of problems related to flooding. Specialists from FEMA, PEMA, and the U.S. Small Business Administration will be available to give information on disaster recovery programs affecting agriculture, health assistance, well-water testing, psychological counseling, senior citizen services, and homeowners insurance.

FEMA has programs that can help homeowners with flooded basements. This is something not normally covered by the National Flood Insurance Program, Martinez said.

The National Flood Insurance Program is a federal insurance initiative sold through private agents and is the only form of flood insurance available nationwide. Martinez said property owners should report damage to their insurance agents before contacting FEMA.

Damage assessment teams are still analyzing the flood-affected areas for FEMA and PEMA. Butler said they are also checking for damage to public roads and bridges. He said it's too early to tell if the destruction is extensive enough to any local public works projects for them to qualify for federal assistance.

"There really is a large number, a lot of counties that are being checked for that," Butler said. "All I can say is we'll know when it happens."

Butler said public assistance to fix roads and bridges is awarded through a FEMA program that donates 75 percent of the cost. The money is only awarded if the state agrees to give the other 25 percent.

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