

August 6, 2003

Mr. Robert Lee Long
Community Editor
DeSoto Times
P.O. Box 1170
Southaven, MS 38671

Dear Mr. Long:

In the August 5 edition of the DeSoto Times, it was said that DeSoto County would have had a better chance of receiving federal disaster assistance following the July 22 storms if the state had a “better working relationship” with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Washington, D.C.

As Director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and of Homeland Security for the State of Mississippi, I would like to clear up any misconceptions regarding the process of obtaining federal disaster assistance.

To receive federal individual assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), damage must include a minimum of 100 uninsured homes that have been destroyed or sustained major damage. While DeSoto County has been adversely affected by recent storms, damage from those storms did not meet the strict criteria for a FEMA declaration.

Let me assure you and the people of DeSoto County that we have a strong working relationship with all emergency officials, from the local level up to Washington. Over the past three years, Governor Musgrove has requested a total of ten presidential disaster declarations, eight of which have been granted. Assistance has been provided to 79 counties statewide. Certainly, the decisions regarding assistance for individuals and families affected by severe weather are based on strict criteria and not on the basis of a “working relationship.”

Even though federal assistance is not available in DeSoto County as a result of the storms of July 22, the Mississippi State Disaster Housing Program (DHP) is available to citizens that qualify for damages as a result of the severe weather. For more information, call 1-800-434-4243.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency is committed to providing disaster recovery assistance to the citizens of Mississippi. I can ensure you that MEMA will always explore all state and federal options available to help the impacted communities and citizens recover in their time of need.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Latham
Executive Director

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Enclosure