



Weekend
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Chapter officials pitch in to help stranded residents

By Dalina Castellanos
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CHINLE — The central agency continued to be hard at work Thursday as volunteers and emergency crews distributed provisions to area chapter houses and residents.

A handful of volunteers unloaded 50-pound bags of rice, flour and bottles of green tea from a truck at a warehouse across the street from Basha's. A bright orange sign read, "No public sale," near the front of the warehouse's muddy lot to deter the public from attempting to buy the items, which also included hay, piles of food, wood and coal.

"Our main mission is life safety," said Gary Cordes, division supervisor for Arizona's all-risk incident management team. He said the main supply of food should go to those who are stranded and who have a legitimate need.

Representatives from each of the 16 chapters in the area were to show up and receive their allotted share to take back and distribute to needy and high-risk residents. Officials said the number of those cases could grow in the next week or so.

<http://www.gallupindependent.com/2010/01January/013010toll.html>, posted with permission

“Talk has been that this is just the beginning,” said Keith Tsosie, a senior police officer for the Navajo Nation. “We normally worry about high-risk rural areas like Black Mesa and Blue Gap, but this year we’re worried about everybody.”

Tsosie was overseeing operations at the warehouse, a drop-off point for the National Guard, the state of Arizona and charitable associations like the National Relief Charities group responsible for the rice, flour and other staples. Greta Nez, parent coordinator for Head Start in Chinle, applied for assistance from the National Relief Charities and was pleasantly surprised when they responded in one day.

Now, 20 percent of the shipment of goods will go to participating Head Start families and the rest will be distributed to the chapter houses, taking the most affected areas into consideration first.

Though the warehouse was filling with goods, officials wanted to stress that the efforts are not a free-for-all.

“If the chapter houses can’t satisfy their needs, that’s when they’re referred to us,” Nez said.

At the Many Farms Chapter House, Vice President Charlotte Jane Begaye said the staff was pulling their weight to take care of the community. Some of the chapter’s staff was at Basha’s Thursday evening buying enough food for about 100 families, spending about \$3,000 on the grocery bill.

The chapter had received more than 65 incident reports from residents asking for assistance and were expecting more in the coming week.

“We have people on standby seven days a week, and our refuge shelter is ready for whoever needs it,” said Justin Tso, a chapter house employee.

People with medical issues and those living 10 to 20 miles east of the chapter who have been hit hard by the mud are the most at risk, Tso said. In order to reach them, employees go out to provide aid in the early morning when the roads are still frozen, but that’s not enough.

On Thursday, chapter officials teamed up with Council Delegate Kee A. Begay Jr. to ask the Navajo Nation, Apache County and state governments for extra assistance. According to the memo, one of the biggest needs is a grader to assist with road service and aid delivery. Until then, Charlotte Jane Begaye strongly discourages anyone from using routes N8084 and Apache County route 505.

Round Rock chapter also sent a statement addressing their needs. In the memo, officials said there was no need for food, but many roads are impassable and residents need coal and hay.