

Emergency Teams Assess Damage, Possibility Of Federal Aid

BY SUSAN USHER

State and federal emergency officials scoured Brunswick County beaches last Thursday and Friday, but they weren't looking for seashells.

They were eyeing undermined houses and eroded dune systems as they inspected damages caused by a New Year's Day storm and tried to determine if disaster assistance is warranted.

Each team included representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Small Business Administration and Dewberry & Davis of Fairfax, Va., beach consultants to FEMA. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers inspectors visited the beaches independently of the teams.

The teams started at relatively unscathed Sunset Beach and worked their way up the coast in beach-by-beach helicopter hops, concluding with the Oak Island beaches and Bald Head Island. Similar teams visited New Hanover County beaches and Topsail Beach in Onslow and Pender counties.

On Tuesday state and local officials were awaiting the prognosis from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Atlanta regional office. Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan reported, "So far no decision has been made in any way."

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials are to make recommendation to the state.

Long Beach sustained the most severe damage of any county beach and is the most likely area to qualify for a disaster declaration and assistance, he said.

Damage estimates countywide totaled \$5.5 million to \$6 million, or the majority of damage sustained by the

four-county area of Brunswick, New Hanover, Onslow and Pender counties.

Steve Foster, director of the Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce, said that given the importance of tourism to the coast, the damage estimates weren't a true indicator of the winter storms' impact.

Urging research to see if means can be found to abate such erosion, he added, "I don't think any coastal county can withstand that kind of economic loss."

Long Beach, which is landlocked and cannot expand its physical area, he said, watched a significant chunk of its tax base eroded away.

High tides, strong winds and flooding on Jan. 1 damaged homes and caused beach erosion.

While many individual property owners are concerned about recovering their losses, state emergency officials were most concerned about the loss of frontal dunes.

"The thing most frightening about the storm is not the structural damage, but the loss to the dune," State Director of Emergency Management Berry Williams told approximately 75 county, state and federal workers gathered in a courtroom at the Brunswick County Government Center for 2½ hours Thursday to review damages and discuss federal assistance programs. "Over 500 homes in the four counties (Brunswick, New Hanover, Pender and Onslow) now have less than 20 feet of dune to protect them."

It has not been determined which programs are available, if any. However, only residents who suffered losses to their primary homes will be eligible for disaster-

type assistance from FEMA.

Assessment teams noted that most of the damaged structures were secondary or vacation homes and most were insured.

Contacted Tuesday, Logan had not talked with Small Business Administration officials since the beach tours, but had talked with Williams.

"We did not have the 25 or better houses or businesses with 40 percent uninsured loss at the time," said Logan. There's a chance that could change, he added, if the agency includes in the count houses condemned as uninhabitable by the health department because their septic tanks can't be relocated on the lot or repaired.

If so, SBA representatives would recommend an agency declaration of disaster. In that case, anyone in the declared area who suffered uninsured losses could apply for an SBA disaster assistance loan, whether or not the loss equaled 40 per cent of the value of their home and structures. Maximum loans available are \$500,000 to a business, \$100,000 to a home and \$25,000 for personal property.

While secondary or vacation homes do not qualify for assistance, coastal houses that are operated as rental property may be eligible under the business program.

Williams said the first source and most likely source of assistance for most property owners is federal flood insurance. Coastal residents who suffered insured losses should contact their insurance carrier to submit claims for erosion losses and structural damage to the National Flood Insurance Program.

Speakers last Thursday stressed that claims for

cumulative damages would not be considered, only those from the most recent incident, the Jan. 1 storm.

After a similar storm in December, Williams said, only 57 claims were filed.

While little damage has turned up that would qualify for federal aid, FEMA officials said they would look at the possibility of assistance to repair public property, and in some limited cases, berm restoration.

Other than long-term U.S. Army Corps of Engineers beach renourishment programs such as those at Wrightsville and Carolina beaches, there are two kinds of beaches, according to Paul Hall, chief of FEMA's disaster assistance division.

The first is a manmade beach with a specific profile that is maintained at least every five years.

The second situation relates to natural beaches, which he said FEMA "does not repair or restore . . . at all, period."

But it can help with protective measures where dune erosion has left insufficient protection of property in "imminent danger" from another storm with severity that could be expected to occur only once every five years. Only the amount of protection available before the incident in question would be restored. This means that if five years' protection didn't exist before a storm damages the beach, it would not be provided afterward.

In any case, he said, "we have to see if it is economically feasible, if it is worth putting federal dollars in a temporary measure. In some areas it would be too little to do any good and would wash out, while others would require a Wrightsville Beach-type project."



Doing It One More Time

Pete Singletary (center), owner of Capt. Pete's Oceanfront Cottages and Apartments on Holden Beach, Jesse Hayes (left) and Jimmy Todd spent Saturday repairing the bulkhead in front of the oceanfront apartments for

STAFF PHOTO BY ETTA SMITH

the second time. High tides in early December washed away the sides of the bulkhead and the front of the bulkhead was damaged during the Jan. 1 storm.

Calabash Citizens Demand Water

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fronted Simmons for lack of action on the matter. "Doug, I'm going to level with you. If you'd spent as much time with this water thing as you do deer hunting, we'd have water now."

Simmons said nothing, but later responded to the criticism. "I'm just as interested as anyone in getting water," he said. "I've made trips with my personal income to see about it, and if I go hunting, that's my personal time I'm entitled to. I spend a lot of time on town business."

Much of the hour-long debate focused on whether the town would build and run its own system or would turn lines over to the county. Town Attorney Mike Ramos said he thought the law would allow the county to treat Calabash as an unincorporated area. "Then the county could come in and do it all," he explained.

According to Thomas, construction of a system with a loan of \$180,000 from FmHA would require a bond referendum and would take up to two years to complete.

Building without FmHA funds would mean upfront assessment of

property owners who would be served with water.

At present, only those residents and businesses along N.C. 179 through Calabash, are getting county water. Lewellyn said the town could assess them, also, by calling it an impact fee. "If I think an assessment by lot, rather than by linear foot, would be more equitable," she said.

Ramos, however, said a linear assessment was best. "You've just got to decide whether you want to be in the water business," he said. "There's money in it, and you have the authority to force people to hook up and pay."

The council agreed to have some answers on water plans at the February meeting.

Interested residents also included Phillip Ragsdale, John High, John Frink, Helen Bierwirth and Verda Lee Bennett.

When the visitors left, Mrs. Bierwirth remained to express a different complaint. "There's a pack of vicious dogs running around town," she said, "and they got a little dog of mine and tore it to pieces. The

animal control people pick some of them up, but owners get them out again. I hope you can do something, because they could kill a child. I talked to one of the dog owners and he just doesn't care."

Simmons said Calabash has a leash law. "We can put an ordinance out saying owners must keep animals chained up," he said.

Various council members recounted their experiences with these dogs over the past six months. They assured Bierwirth they would try to do something about the problem.

The council agreed to hold a workshop on the water system following an opening of bids for the town hall project at 4:30 p.m., Jan. 26.

Two Lose

Home In Fire

A woman and her son lost their mobile home in an early Tuesday blaze fought by three fire departments.

Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach and Calabash firemen responded to the 2:30 a.m. fire at the Sherry Floyd residence along N.C. 179 at Ocean Haven subdivision, according to Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan.

The two-bedroom home was destroyed. The American Red Cross was called to assist Mrs. Floyd and her son, the only occupants of the house. As of late Tuesday, the agency had not responded, he said.

He said the fire, apparently electrical in origin, appeared to have started in the rear bedroom.

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Payment Deadline Extended For Shallotte's Taxpayers

For the second consecutive year, Shallotte taxpayers are getting a reprieve of sorts: an extra month in which to pay 1986 property taxes without a late penalty.

Residents have until 5 p.m. on Feb. 2 to pay up, aldermen decided last Wednesday night on the recommendation of Town Clerk Cynthia Long. After that, the standard penalties will be assessed as indicated on the bills.

Why the extension?

According to Ms. Long and Mayor Jerry Jones, because of billing, listing or other errors, a number of taxpayers are obtaining changes in their county tax valuations, changes she said have affected "a lot" of the town's own tax notices which were mailed this month.

"They set a deadline I thought for appealing, but they're still going up (to the county tax office) and changing things," said the mayor.

By the Jan. 5 deadline for payment without a penalty, some individuals still had not gotten their bills straightened out, Ms. Long said, and it seemed unfair to charge them a penalty for something that she said "is not so much the property owner's fault."

Other Business

In other business, aldermen:

Met behind closed doors for about five minutes on an undisclosed legal situation Mayor Jerry Jones said "may arise." The town attorney was not present and may be consulted later.

Nominated Maynard Owens of Shallotte to the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission, if he will accept the nomination. Appointments will be made in late January.

Heard about two letters of appreciation praising the cooperation and good attitudes of police department officers and a letter from Sunset Beach Administrator and Shallotte resident Linda Fluegel praising Maintenance Superintendent Albert Hughes' response to a weekend service request.

Tabled discussion of state police retirement program until more information is available. Rep. David Redwine and a League of Municipalities spokesman may be asked to explain the program. Current information, said Police Chief Don Stovall and other town officials, is "very vague."

County Inspector Charged With Speeding, Marijuana Possession

BY ETTA SMITH

A Brunswick County building inspector was charged Monday by the N.C. Highway Patrol with speeding, misdemeanor possession of marijuana and operating a vehicle while subject to an impairing substance.

Brunswick County Building Inspector Julius "Buddy" Lewis was stopped around noon Tuesday allegedly driving 75 mph in a 55 mph zone, according to N.C. Highway Patrol Trooper B. D. Barnhardt's report.

The truck he was operating had a permanent tag registered to Brunswick County, the officer said.

According to Barnhardt's report, Lewis had less than an ounce of marijuana in the truck, an amount includable as a misdemeanor in Schedule IV of the N.C. Controlled Substance Act.

Lewis did not report to work Tuesday. Acting County Manager David Clegg refused to comment on whether he had been suspended, but said, "He's not on the job today, if that tells you anything."

However, Clegg said conviction of a misdemeanor that involved an impairing substance violates the county personnel policy and would be grounds for dismissal.

Lewis began work for the county in July 1985. The last date that any action was taken concerning his job was in Dec. 1985, said Clegg, when he became a permanent employee after a standard six-month probation period.

Lewis was released on a written pledge to appear in Brunswick County District Court on Feb. 24.

Commissioners Set Legislative Agenda

Brunswick County Commissioners are attending the N.C. Association of County Commissioners legislative goals conference in Fayetteville.

The session began Wednesday and concludes today (Thursday).

"We're going to plan our legislative program for the year," said Commissioner Chris Chappell. The estimated 350 commissioners in attendance will consider legislative goals they want approved by the 1987 General Assembly, which convenes next month.

The only staff member attending the conference is Litha Hahn, finance director.

Rep. E. David Redwine, 14th District-D, is to meet with commissioners at their Jan. 19 meeting to discuss the upcoming legislative session and any bills commissioners would like to see introduced.

Former Office Manager Charged With Embezzling

BY ETTA SMITH

Former office manager at Jones Ford in Shallotte has been arrested and charged with embezzlement of about \$18,000 from the dealership.

Terry R. Piner of Wilmington was arrested Jan. 2 by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and charged with embezzling the money over a period extending from Nov. 23, 1986, through Dec. 22, 1986.

According to the warrant signed by Det. Lindsey Walton, there is probable cause that Piner knowingly missappropriated and converted the funds to his own use.

He has posted \$25,000 bond and his first court appearance is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 26.

Restoring Dunes On Town Agenda

Dune restoration and a survey of an area being considered for annexation are on the agenda of a special meeting called for 9 a.m. Friday, Jan. 16, by Holden Beach Commissioners.

Telephone credit and business cards are also on the agenda.

The meeting will be held at the town hall on Rothschild Street.