

Waterbury Republican-American

State team, Red Cross volunteers ready to aid hurricane victims

By Randy James

A five-member emergency team from Connecticut is poised to provide medical assistance in areas hard-hit by Hurricane Katrina.

The volunteers, members of a federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team, arrived Sunday night at a staging area in Anniston, Ala. The team is awaiting deployment instructions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but is expected to travel to affected regions shortly.

The five -- a doctor, a nurse, two paramedics and a communications specialist -- are expected to provide care for two weeks. Additional disaster assistance teams from the state may also be sent to the area over the next several weeks, said Michael Purcaro, a spokesman for (CT1-DMAT) FEMA's national disaster medical system.

Approximately 150 people volunteer in the state's Hartford-based Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, which respond to natural disasters nationwide, Purcaro said.

"When we look at disasters of this magnitude, there really are no borders between states in offering assistance," he said.

The teams, sponsored by Connecticut's Department of Public Health, also provide medical services at large public gatherings, such as political conventions.

The Waterbury Area Chapter of the American Red Cross is working to recruit volunteers to send to the region hit by Katrina. Volunteers must first undergo Red Cross training Sept. 6 and 10, said Stephanie Carlson of the Red Cross.

A total of 1,900 Red Cross volunteers nationwide are expected to be sent to the area.

One previously trained volunteer from Harwinton is expected to travel to the area today, Carlson said.

The Red Cross and other groups are requesting cash donations to help assist victims of Hurricane Katrina. Donations of cash are preferred due to the expense and delay of storing, shipping and distributing donated goods.

Local Red Cross training sessions will be held at the chapter house at 64 Holmes Ave. from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Sept. 6 and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sept. 10. To make a donation, call (800) HELP-NOW.

Connecticut Light and Power and United Illuminating said they have received no requests to send utility crews to the storm-damaged area. CL&P sent 49 crews to Florida last month following Hurricane Dennis.

The president of Watertown-based Crystal Rock Spring Water said no requests have come in to donate bottled water to aid the hurricane recovery effort, but the company stands ready to make bottled water available.

Marc Silvestrini and David Krechevsky contributed to this report.