NEWS RELEASE   **Governor Bob Taft**

TAFT ADDS THREE COUNTIES TO EMERGENCY DECLARATION
Fifty-nine Ohio counties eligible for state assistance

COLUMBUS (January 12, 2005) – Governor Bob Taft today added three counties to an emergency declaration due to flooding in the area. The three additional counties include Columbiana, Hancock and Stark. The Governor's Declaration allows state resources to be used to assist local governments.

"The coordinated local, state and volunteer response to the ongoing weather situation is encouraging, and we will continue to help Ohioans cope with this emergency," Taft said.

As a result of the Governor's emergency declaration, disaster assistance is also available for residents of the affected counties through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). Families in these counties may qualify for up to $1,500 in disaster assistance, and certain elderly and disabled individuals may qualify for up to $750 in disaster assistance. Individuals and families may apply for this assistance at their local county department of job and family services.

In order to be eligible for up to $1,500 in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) disaster assistance, families must include a child or pregnant woman and have evidence of economic need. Elderly and disabled individuals in these counties who are not eligible for TANF assistance may be eligible for disaster assistance of up to $750. To be eligible for this type of assistance, a person must be at least 55 years old and childless, or receiving certain disability benefits, impacted by the severe weather and provide evidence of an economic need to the county department of job and family services.

Each year, ODJFS reserves at least $5 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding for disaster victims in counties declared in a state of emergency. Since the current state fiscal year began in July more than $10 million in TANF funds have been allocated for disaster relief.

On Thursday, January 6, Taft activated the State of Ohio Emergency Operations Center to enable state and volunteer agencies to coordinate efforts in responding to and assessing damage from the statewide severe winter weather and flooding. Ten state agencies and the American Red Cross are working to respond to the emergency along with the Ohio EMA, including the Department of Public Safety, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Ohio Department of Transportation, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Agriculture, ODOT-Aviation, Ohio Department of Administrative Services, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

In response to the severe weather:
- The Ohio Department of Transportation reports an increase in flood-related road closures with 99 US and State Routes currently closed;
- The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has rescued 51 people in 11 missions;
- During the weather event 40 shelters were opened with 554 people. During this time, 2,449 meals were served; and,
- Ohio EMA will provide Allen County with 5,000 sandbags and Auglaize with 15,000 sandbags. Field liaisons are assisting county EMAs.

- more -

In addition to the three counties declared today, 56 counties were previously declared including: Allen, Ashland, Athens, Auglaize, Belmont, Brown, Butler, Champaign, Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Coshocton, Crawford, Darke, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Greene, Guernsey, Hamilton, Hardin, Henry, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Huron, Jefferson, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Meigs, Mercer, Miami, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Morrow, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Preble, Richland, Ross, Seneca, Shelby, Tuscarawas, Union, Warren, Washington, Wayne and Wyandot. This brings the total number of counties under a gubernatorial emergency to 59.

# # #

Media Contacts: Orest Holubec, Governor's Office, (614) 644-0957; Rob Glenn, EMA, (614) 799-3695.