

**TAFT ADDS FOURTEEN COUNTIES TO EMERGENCY DECLARATION***Forty-Nine Ohio Counties Now Eligible for State Assistance*

COLUMBUS (January 7, 2005) – A pattern of continuing severe winter prompted Governor Bob Taft to add fourteen counties to his emergency declaration. The 14 additional counties include: Belmont, Brown, Clermont, Guernsey, Henry, Huron, Jefferson, Monroe, Muskingum, Richland, Ross, Tuscarawas, Wayne and Wyandot. The Governor's Declaration allows state resources to be used to assist local governments.

"The highly-coordinated local, state and volunteer response to the ongoing weather situation is encouraging, and we will continue to help people 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. 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, 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. Eleven 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 has had as many as 600 road crews throughout the state working various issues including aerial surveys of impacted areas;
- The Ohio Department of Natural Resources fast water rescue teams rescued 41 people in ten missions;
- With multiple evacuations across the state, the American Red Cross and other local organizations are operating 41 shelters; and,
- During the night Thursday, Ohio EMA provided 28,000 sandbags to Athens County. Field liaisons are supporting county EMAs in Auglaize, Coshocton, Richland and Ross counties with meetings in various counties to integrate debris management issues.

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In addition to the fourteen counties declared today, thirty-five counties were previously declared including: Allen, Ashland, Athens, Auglaize, Butler, Champaign, Clark, Coshocton, Crawford, Darke, Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Hardin, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Mercer, Miami, Montgomery, Morgan, Perry, Preble, Seneca, Shelby, Union, Warren, and Washington. This brings the total number of counties under a gubernatorial emergency to 49.

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