


TEXAS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
ONLINE

2015 Vol. 62 No. 4

The Texas Division of Emergency Management is accepting article submissions for The Texas Emergency Management Online (TEMO) newsletter. If you have an idea for a topic or would like to submit an article, contact Mike Jones at 512-424-7050.

Chief's Message – April 2015

It's hard to think about wildfires in Texas without reliving images of the 2011 wildfire season. The drought conditions that helped spawn those wildfires then still exist in large areas of the state today. This should have everyone on alert and stepping up preparedness for the threat for potential wildfires. And, as always, awareness is the first step to preparedness.

As a firefighter, I can't stress enough how important wildfire awareness and safety is for all Texans, whether you live in rural communities or on the edge of town. According to the Texas A&M Forest Service, people start 95 percent of all wildfires in Texas, and over 80 percent of those wildfires occur within two miles of a community. When the conditions are right, it doesn't take much for a tossed cigarette, a hot exhaust, an unwatched campfire or a number of other things to ignite a major wildfire.

Wildfire Awareness Week in Texas is April 6 – 10, 2015. Take time now to make or update your Wildfire Action Plan and to make sure that you, your family and your community are ready to act in the event of a wildfire.

The Texas Division of Emergency Management coordinates with the Texas A&M Forest Service and with other local and state agencies to ensure that resources across the state are available and ready to respond quickly when wildfires break out.

But, with your help, awareness efforts can go far to prevent these incidents. Follow the links below and use the materials available at these websites to help you develop your own local public awareness campaigns and to help boost citizen involvement against the serious threat that wildfires pose to Texas' forests, grasslands, farms, ranches and communities.

Ready, Set, Go!
Be Ready! Be Firewise!
Texas A&M Forest Service - Wildfire Danger

TDEM Wldfire Awareness

Speaking of important events …

TEXAS★2015
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Don’t forget to register for the 2015 Texas Emergency Management Conference, which will be held **Tuesday**, May 12 through Friday, May 15, 2015, at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio.

Information about the conference can be found by visiting the 2015 Texas Emergency Management Conference webpage.

Take the time to invest in you and the future of your community. I look forward to seeing you in San Antonio.

2015 Texas Emergency Management Conference!

Chikungunya Virus

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) announced on July 7, 2014, that the first human case of chikungunya in the state of Texas had been confirmed in Williamson County. According to provisional data by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were a total of 2,492 laboratory-confirmed chikungunya cases reported in the United States in 2014, with 81 of those cases occurring in Texas. These numbers will most likely be higher when all the data are finalized.

Photo: James Gathany, CDC

Chikungunya is caused by the chikungunya virus, which is transmitted between humans primarily through the bite of two mosquito species: Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus. Aedes aegypti often inhabits urban areas and dwellings, while Aedes albopictus is commonly found in surrounding natural habitats. Aggressive daytime biters, these mosquitoes are most active in the early morning and late afternoon.

All of the chikungunya cases in Texas up to this point have been imported, which means that the individuals diagnosed in Texas were infected with the virus in another country. However, both Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus are found in Texas, which increases the likelihood of local person-to-person transmission. With the disease spreading throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, the number of chikungunya cases in Texas is expected to rise this summer.

While some individuals who become infected with the chikungunya virus are asymptomatic and remain undiagnosed, those who manifest symptoms usually do so between three to seven days after infection. The primary clinical symptoms of chikungunya are fever and severe polyarthralgia, or multiple joint pain. The individual may also exhibit additional symptoms, such as headache, muscle pain, conjunctivitis, nausea, vomiting, and/or a maculopapular rash. Symptoms typically abate within a week, although joint pain may persist for weeks, months or even years.

In the state of Texas, infection by an arbovirus (arthropod-borne virus), including chikungunya, is a reportable disease, and confirmed and suspected cases must be reported within one week. The *Texas Health and Safety Code*, Section 81.042 includes emergency medical services personnel, peace officers and firefighters in the list of persons required to report to the local health authority a suspected case of a reportable disease and all information known concerning the person who has or is suspected of having the disease. To access reporting forms and contact details for the local health authority, go to http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/investigation/conditions/contacts/ and click on the name of the appropriate county.

There are currently no specific antiviral drugs available to treat chikungunya, so the primary way to combat the disease is through prevention and education. The Texas Department of State Health Services recommends that citizens be encouraged to wear long-sleeved shirts and pants, use mosquito repellent on exposed skin during the times that the mosquitoes are most active, keep door and window screens in good repair and drain standing water from outdoor containers.

TDEM Recovery and Mitigation Field Staff

Did you know that TDEM had a satellite office in Houston? Most folks are familiar with the response field employees, but do not realize that Recovery, Mitigation and Standards have had staff located in the Houston area since 2001.

The southeast section of Texas along the upper Gulf Coast has the unique combination of being the most populated portion of the state and the one most prone to disaster declarations. This area has some of the busiest ports in the U.S. and is chock-full of a wide variety of industry and manufacturing, an assortment of colleges and universities and is home to iconic sites such as NASA and the Texas Medical Center.

It was the last of these, the Texas Medical Center, that was hardest hit by Tropical Storm (TS) Allison in the summer of 2001. It was apparent to TDEM management at the time that the recovery from TS Allison would be a long process and brought up the question of whether it was a good idea to establish a permanent office for staff in this section of the state. They decided that it was.

Flooding from Tropical Storm Allison in Houston Texas, June 9, 2001 Buffalo Bayou, White Oak Bayou Confluence and Main St. - 06/09/01. NOAA Photo Library.

As with most disasters at the time, a joint field office (JFO) with TDEM and FEMA staff was setup in Houston in the aftermath of TS Allison and was located in the Greenspoint Mall. TDEM assigned staff and began hiring temporary staff to help with the disaster recovery and mitigation grant programs. Additional space for FEMA and TDEM JFO staff working TS Allison was also secured in the Mickey Leland Office building near downtown.

Eventually, there were 23 TDEM staff assigned as part of the TS Allison recovery and mitigation teams in Houston and, after another move or two, the staff settled in to the current location in the Elias Ramirez State Office Building on Polk Street south of downtown. A satellite office was also established in 2004 in Galveston County for program audit staff.

The Elias Ramirez State Office Building on Polk Street in Houston, Texas was originally built in 1942 to house the Hughes Tool Co. and is great example of the Art Deco style. It is currently used as a state office building and house the staff from TDEM

Many of the original temporary positions eventually became permanent TDEM staff. Two of those original temporary staff are still working in the Houston office, Doug Rowell and Shirley Mayes.

There have been many changes over the years. The program audit staff were merged into the recovery and mitigation teams in 2012. The Galveston County office subsequently moved to the DPS facility in Webster.

The number of positions in the Houston area has ebbed and flowed as needs have changed. Currently, there are two five-person teams in the Polk Street office; one recovery and one mitigation team. There is also one five-person recovery team in the Webster office. The staff is supervised by a Recovery Grant Administrator and a Houston Section Administrator.

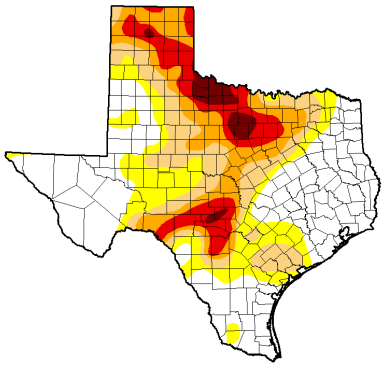
Images of the path of destruction in Sabine Pass, Texas, left in the wake of Hurricane Rita in 2005. NOAA Photo Library

The Houston office may have started with TS Allison, but the staff have also worked on many subsequent disasters such as the 2002 San Antonio floods, the 2003 Space Shuttle Columbia Recovery, 2005 Hurricane Katrina Evacuations, 2005 Hurricane Rita, 2008 Hurricane Ike and many others. Recovery staff is currently focused on completing projects for Hurricane Ike and mitigation staff are working projects across several open disasters.

Winnie, Texas, September 18, 2008. Workers clearing debris from a shopping center that lost its roof during Hurricane Ike. High winds and rain left countless numbers of buildings damaged or destroyed along the South Texas coast. Mike Moore/FEMA.

Drought Update: Current Conditions and El Niño

For the past few months, drought conditions around Texas have been a mixed bag. East Texas has seen tremendous recovery, while North Central and Central Texas keep slipping back into severe and exceptional drought conditions. Most reservoirs west of I-35 are still at historic lows. Overall, the state's current reservoirs are at 68.4 percent full, up four percent from last year.



Population Affected by Drought: 9,359,146

C'mon, El Niño! Currently, the Climate Prediction Center has issued an El Niño advisory due to conditions in the tropical Pacific. Traditionally, El Nino brings increased moisture to Texas—a welcome relief to much of the state. The National Weather Service is predicting that there is a 50-60 percent chance for El Niño conditions to continue in the Northern Hemisphere until summer 2015. The expected presence of El Niño is causing predictions for above normal rainfall over the next three months for most of Western Texas and some of the central region, where drought is predicted to intensify or persist.

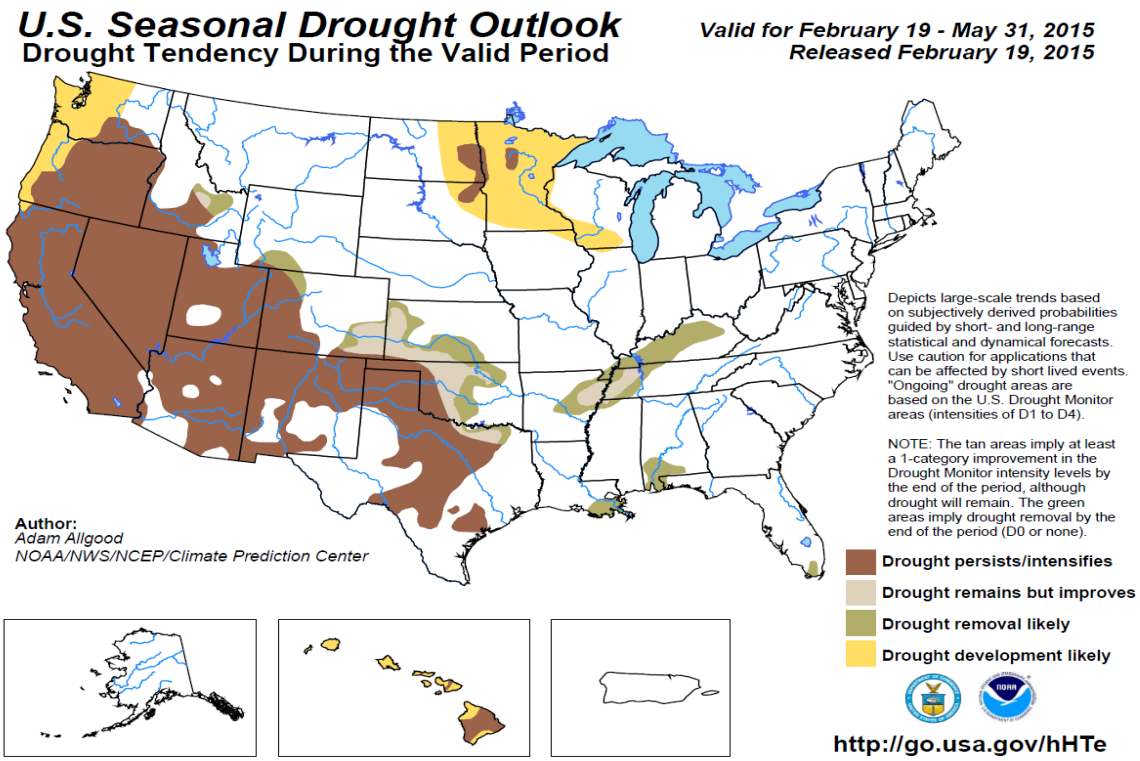
Highland Lakes

The Highland Lakes area of Central Texas is experiencing the most severe drought conditions ever—lower than the record making drought of the 1950s. According to the Lower Colorado River Authority the Highland Lakes are in a "new critical period." Lakes Travis and Buchanan stand at 36 and 32 percent full, respectively.

Week	Date	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	2015-03-10	42.15	57.85	41.05	25.89	12.76	2.97
Last Week	2015-03-03	38.78	61.22	43.02	26.89	13.29	3.37
3 Months Ago	2014-12-09	33.63	66.37	43.39	23.32	10.05	2.57
Start of Calendar	2014-12-30	34.37	65.63	44.68	25.73	11.70	3.17
Start of Water Year	2014-09-30	28.92	71.08	48.95	29.54	11.26	2.69
One Year Ago	2014-03-11	15.44	84.56	62.80	34.39	11.46	1.49

Forecast

The state is forecasted to have drought conditions intensify or persist in the same troubled areas, the Panhandle, North Central and Central Texas. The state's Drought Preparedness Council meets every month and the Emergency Drinking Water Task Force meets weekly to report on drought information and coordinate creative solutions in support of local entities still struggling in the grips of the state's fifth consecutive year of drought.


U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook
Drought Tendency During the Valid Period
Valid for February 19 - May 31, 2015
Released February 19, 2015
Author:
Adam Allgood
NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Climate Prediction Center
Depicts large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Use caution for applications that can be affected by short lived events. "Ongoing" drought areas are based on the U.S. Drought Monitor areas (intensities of D1 to D4).
NOTE: The tan areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels by the end of the period, although drought will remain. The green areas imply drought removal by the end of the period (D0 or none).
Drought persists/intensifies
Drought remains but improves
Drought removal likely
Drought development likely
http://go.usa.gov/hHTe

Firewise Toolkit

The Firewise Communities Program provides a number of proven tools and resources for homeowners and other community residents who work tirelessly to help prepare for and reduce the risk of wildfire damage and loss in their neighborhoods.

Below, please find our new Firewise Toolkit, a collection of these helpful resources in one easy-to-find place. The entire toolkit or its pieces can be downloaded and printed for meetings, presentations and for individual use. The pieces of the toolkit include:

Facts about NFPA's Firewise Communities Program (PDF, 99 KB)

A Guide to Firewise Principles (PDF, 142 KB)

Firewise Tips Checklist for Homeowners (PDF, 105 KB)

Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program Checklist (PDF, 132 KB)

Guidelines for Spelling/Usage of Firewise (PDF, 101 KB)

Guidelines for Using the Firewise/NFPA Logo (PDF, 99 KB)
- Download the Firewise/NFPA logo

You can also download the full toolkit. (PDF, 379 KB)

Contact the Wildland Fire Operations Division at 617-984-7486 for more information about the Firewise Communications Program. Or, visit our "contact us" page.

Texas Wildfire Risk Assessment Project

Overview

In response to increasing demand for more accurate and up-to-date wildfire risk information across the state, Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) established the Texas Wildfire Risk Assessment Project (TWRA). The goal of the project is to provide a consistent, comparable set of scientific results to be used as a foundation for wildfire mitigation and prevention planning in Texas. Needing a way to deliver the information quickly and seamlessly to stakeholders, TFS developed the Texas Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (TxWRAP). TxWRAP is the primary mechanism by which TFS is creating awareness among the public and arming state and local government planners with information to support mitigation and prevention efforts.

Results of the assessment can be used to help prioritize areas in the state where tactical analyses, community interaction and education, or mitigation treatments might be necessary to reduce risk from wildfires. In addition, the information provided in the assessment can be used to support the following key priorities:

- Identify areas that are most prone to wildfire
- Identify areas that may require additional tactical planning, specifically related to mitigation projects and Community Wildfire Protection Planning
- Provide the information necessary to justify resource, budget and funding requests
- Allow agencies to work together to better define priorities and improve emergency response, particularly across jurisdictional boundaries
- Increase communication with local residents and the public to address community priorities and needs
- Plan for response and suppression resource needs

- Plan and prioritize hazardous fuel treatment programs

With the successful completion of the TWRA Project, TFS continues to be a national leader in wildfire protection planning. This latest assessment builds upon and significantly improves the previous successful efforts of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA), which is recognized as the first successful regional wildfire risk assessment in the nation (www.southernwildfirerisk.com). The SWRA project began in 2003 and was successfully completed in 2006 for the 13 Southern states and continues to be the baseline for fire protection planning in the South. It was sponsored by the Southern Group of State Foresters and managed by Texas A&M Forest Service.

Project Participants

TFS would like to thank the following agencies for participating and helping to make the TWRA Project a success.

- Texas A&M University System
- Southern Group of State Foresters
- US Forest Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- LANDFIRE
- Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Missouri Resource Assessment Partnership

Chikungunya Hits Mainland

Centers for Disease Control

CDC is currently working with the Florida Department of Health to assess whether there are additional locally acquired cases and is providing consultation on ways to prevent further spread of the virus by controlling mosquitoes and educating people about personal and household protection measures to avoid mosquito bites. Learn more about Chikungunya in the United States.

April 2015: Credits

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/CHIEF

W. Nim Kidd

DEPUTY ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

Paula Logan

Tom Polonis

Sandra Fulenwider

EDITORS

Suzannah Jones

Mike Jones

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Mike Jones

WEBSITE

DPS Web Team

CONTRIBUTORS

Laura Phipps, MPH, CPH, RS
Doctor of Public Health Student
University of North Texas Health Science Center

Paula Logan, TDEM

Gabriella Stermolle, TDEM

DIGITAL IMAGES CONTRIBUTED BY:

Texas Division of Emergency Management and as noted.