



## TEXAS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ONLINE

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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.

### Message from the Chief – September 2015

#### MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF September

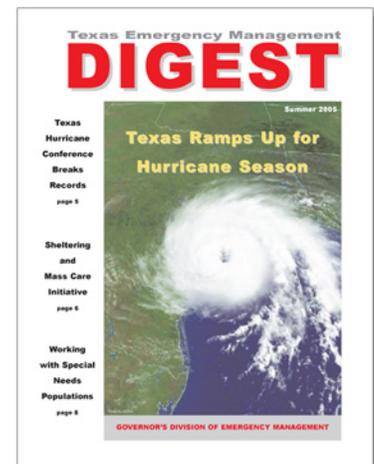
There's an adage that surfaces around the emergency community from time to time, "Know what you don't know." On the surface, the adage may have little meaning. But its intended meaning is a little more insightful: be prepared for anything, especially for what you can't predict.

Every incident and disaster presents its own unique and often unexpected elements and consequences. And that incident or disaster that had been the worst yet, just may be another record waiting to be broken.

Ten years ago this month, the then-Governor's Division of Emergency Management had been ramping up for hurricane season. Because early predictions called for above-average activity for 2005, and the 2004 hurricane season had been severe, resolve and vigilance were high. Spawning 15 named storms, including six major hurricanes, 2004 had been the costliest hurricane season on record in the United States. Florida had been hit particularly hard, so Texas along with other states sent personnel to Florida to help with recovery efforts there.

There is little doubt that emergency responders and planners in Texas in 2005 were prepared for the hurricane season. But few of them, if any, probably would have predicted what was about to occur beginning that September.

Preparedness isn't just about large-scale, record disasters. It includes being prepared for potential hazards—large and small, obvious and unexpected—in your home, in your neighborhood and community. According to FEMA, 60 percent of American adults have not developed an emergency plan or practiced what to do during a disaster, even though most of us live in areas that have experienced severe weather-related disasters.



[Texas Emergency Management Digest cover page, Summer Edition 2005.](#)

## September is National Preparedness Month.



We set aside this month to remember the challenges we have overcome and to reinforce the need for all of us to be prepared for disasters and emergencies.

I encourage all Texans to commit to doing at least one of the following simple tasks:

- Learn about emergencies or hazards in your community and the proper response.
  - Sign up for local text alerts and warnings for your smartphone.
- **Build an emergency kit.**
  - Make an emergency communications plan.
  - Get involved in preparedness in your community.

Remember, preparedness is not a destination, it is a journey, and we are all on it together.  
#TEXASPREP

Additional links:

[MAKE AN EMERGENCY PLAN](#)

[2015 National Preparedness Month](#)

[America's PrepareAthon!](#)

[Community Emergency Response Teams](#)

[Volunteer in Texas](#)

[Texas Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster](#)

[National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster](#)

## Texas Seasonal Wildfire and Weather Outlook Part 1: Fall & Winter Wildfire Potential

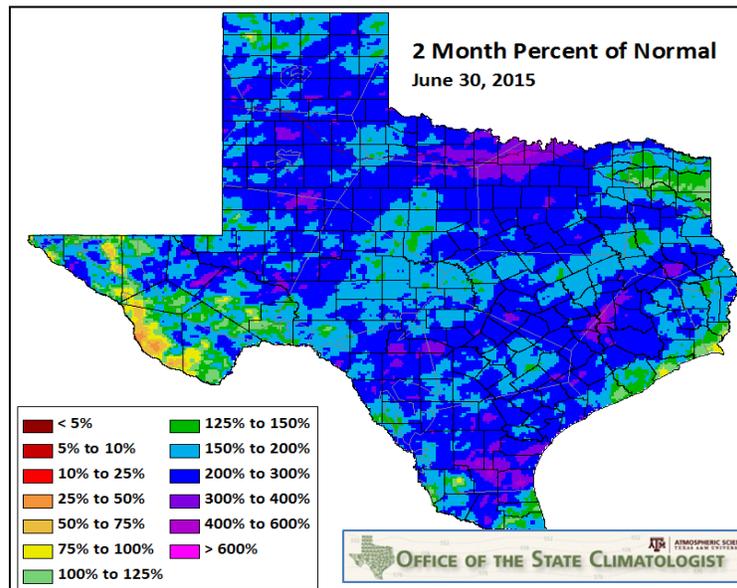


Looking ahead to fall 2015 and winter 2016, there are a couple of concerns that could promote increased wildfire activity.

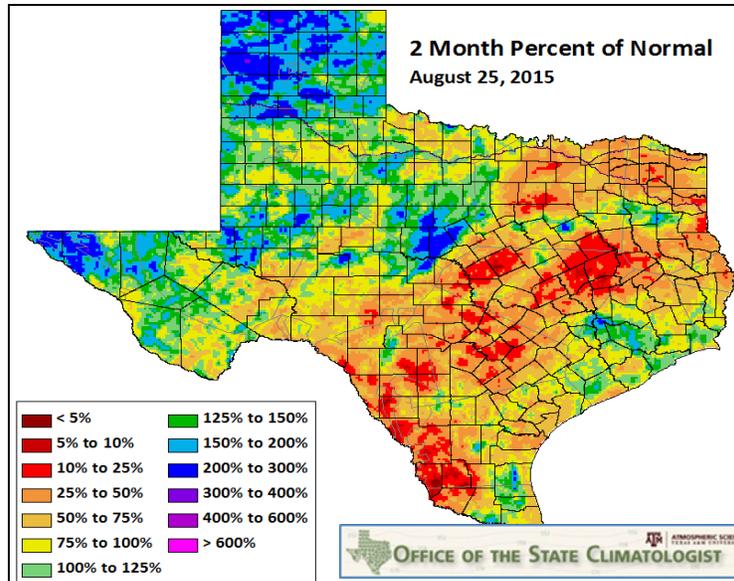
**The threats for increased wildfire potential this fall and winter include:**

- 1. Increased grass fuel loading across the state, especially in the plains regions**
- 2. The presence of dead brush and trees left over from the drought of 2011**

First is the effect of the above normal precipitation levels of late spring and early summer (see graphic below). Record amounts were seen in many regions of the state during the month of May.



On top of this, above normal precipitation continued across the western plains regions of the state through the later parts of summer (see graphic below).



The rains of spring and early summer resulted in a bumper growth of grasses similar to the image below in Taylor County near Abilene. The concern is that these grasses could become fuel for a wildfire.



With the onset of a “flash drought” during the second half of the summer over the central and eastern regions of the state, this increase in grass loading did promote a corresponding increase in wildfire activity. With this grass loading in place going into the fall and winter there is a concern that it could also promote an increase in wildfire activity for these seasons as well. This is particularly the case for the plains regions where the late summer rains have continued to help support grass growth. When these grasses cure in the winter, they will represent a threat for increased wildfire potential.

The second concern for increased wildfire potential is the presence of dead brush and trees left over from the severe drought of 2011. These dead trees increased difficulty of control for fires this summer, particularly in the Hill Country. An example of the complexity these fuels add to the fire environment can be seen in the image below. This was taken in Hays

County during the latter part of summer. The grasses can carry fire into areas where dead trees are still present, allowing them to ignite and burn.

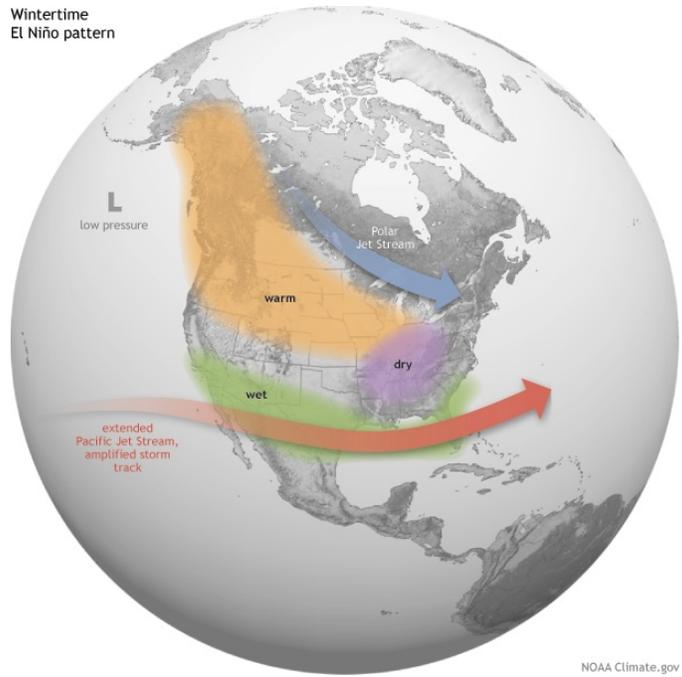


On the positive side, El Niño conditions are expected to continue into the winter months (see the accompanying fall and winter weather outlook). El Niños typically provide the state with an increased chance for precipitation during fall, winter, and early spring. Under normal fuel loading conditions, wildfire activity is generally suppressed by the presence of El Niño. But this year there is the added threat of increased grass loading. This added loading will provide an extra dimension to the wildfire potential compared to what we normally see during El Niño years. With the grass loading present, especially in the plains regions, it is likely that the state could see periods of increased wildfire activity this winter. While conditions in the fall are generally unfavorable to increased wildfire activity, the loading could also have an impact depending on how the grasses respond to precipitation, when it occurs.

## **Part 2: Fall and Winter Weather**

The state of Texas received a large and substantial amount of rainfall—with many records broken—as we entered into the summer season, all courtesy of El Niño making a return for the first time in about five years. It is not unusual for El Niño to have a limited impact on the amount of rainfall in Texas during the summer months. We have clearly seen this occur over much of July and August as some parts of the state have witnessed a “flash drought.” A flash drought is typically an onset of unusually high temperatures and little to no rain leading to a rapid decrease of soil moisture. In turn, parts of East Texas have gone from too much rain to a moderate/severe drought in a short amount of time.

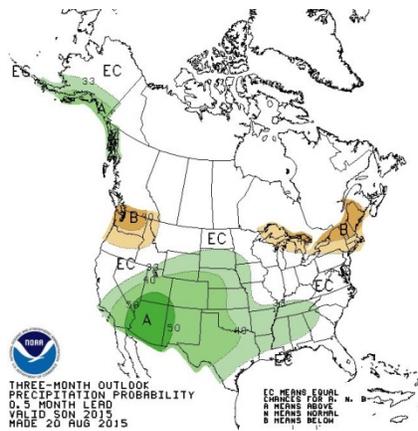
El Niño refers to the large-scale warming of ocean temperatures over the east-central Equatorial Pacific Ocean. Going into the winter season, El Niño typically means above normal rain and below normal temperatures for Texas and much of the southeastern half of the United States. Figure 1 below shows how the Pacific Jet Stream dips further south and brings more moisture and rainfall into parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Conversely, when La Niña is present, the jet stream shifts further north, resulting in below normal rainfall and above normal temperature forecasts for Texas.



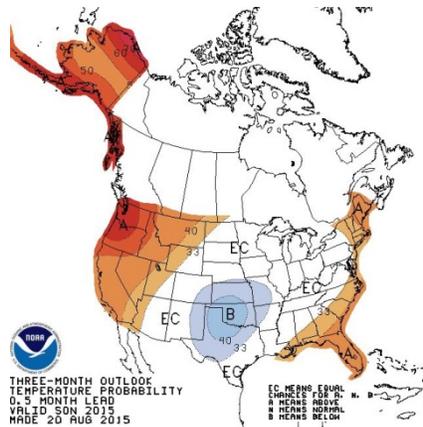
**Figure 1: NOAA Wintertime El Niño Pattern (NOAA)**

Forecasters with the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) currently have an El Niño Advisory issued based on the ENSO Alert System. They are predicting a greater than 90 percent chance that El Niño will continue through the Northern Hemisphere winter 2015-16, and around an 85 percent chance it will last into early spring 2016. With a few weeks left before the official end of summer on September 22, much of the state should continue to expect above normal temperatures and below normal rainfall. As previously mentioned, El Niño impacts typically wane during the summer and are at their strongest during the winter period.

This can be seen on the CPC’s three-month outlook for September, October and November (Figures 2A and 2B). The opportunity for above normal rainfall begins to return mainly in north and west Texas along with below normal temperatures in the fall. An “equal chance” of above normal, below normal or normal rainfall and temperatures exists in east and southeast Texas.

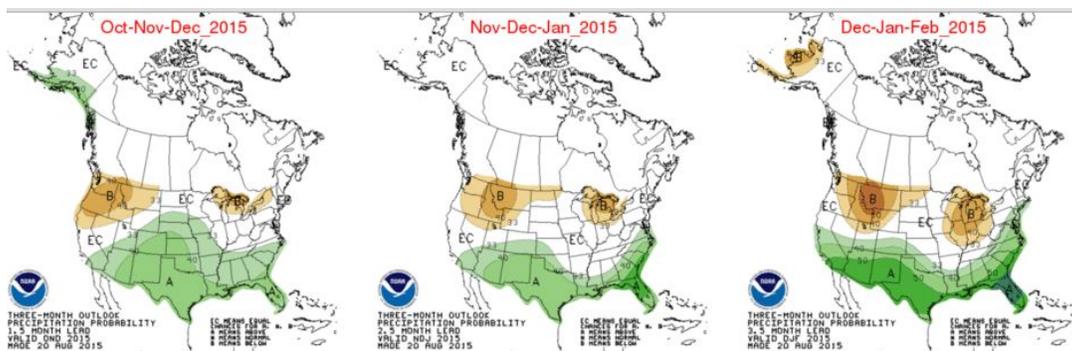


**Figure 2A: CPC Three-Month Outlook Precipitation for SON**

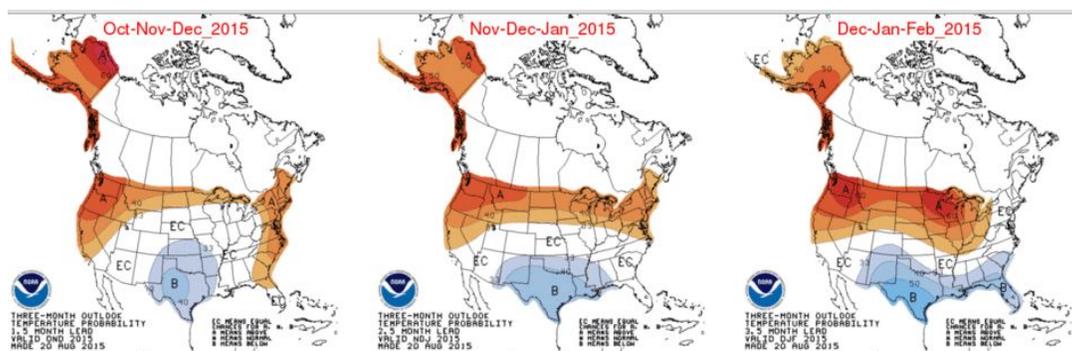


**Figure 2B: CPC Three-Month Outlook Temperature for SON**

As we move further into fall and go into the winter season, the opportunity for above-normal rainfall begins to spread statewide, along with below normal temperatures. The images below (Figures 3A and 3B) are three-month outlooks provided by the CPC for October, November and December; November, December and January; and December, January and February.



**Figure 3A: CPC Three-Month Outlooks for OND/NDJ/DJF**



**Figure 3B: CPC Three-Month Temperature Outlooks for OND/NDJ/DJF**

To sum up, there are strong indications that Texas will encounter more rainfall and cooler temperatures as we head to the end of the year. El Niño is expected to peak in the late fall and early winter before beginning to taper off to a neutral phase.

## Texas State Guard: Helping Individuals in a Time of Need

Brooks County has had a tragic history over the last several years recovering over 350 human remains. Usually the Brooks County Sheriff's Department learns about human remains from undocumented persons who have entered the United States across the Texas/Mexico border. They either make anonymous phone calls or pass on the information in person if they are being detained. At times, maps are drawn to disclose the locations of the human remains. Unfortunately, the maps are drawn from memory, so they are not always accurate.



Photo by Warrant Officer Ricky Thomas

The Texas State Guard, working in conjunction with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), Brooks County and US Border Patrol, was assigned the mission of locating human remains and assisting with locating lost individuals in Brooks County. These missions originated when Brooks County Sheriff's Department contacted DPS for assistance. Meetings

were held in September 2014 with federal, state and local agencies along with ranch owners and managers to establish a starting point for the first mission including the mission perimeters. Since then, the State Guard has been conducting ground search, rescue and recovery missions in Brooks County. Personnel are trained to the Rescue Training International (RTI) standards and on Man-tracking. They also receive additional training from the Texas State University Forensic Anthropology Research Facility commonly known as the "body farm."

Each State Guard Search team contains a sixteen-person strike team and adheres to the Incident Management System of Command and Control. There are two seven-person search teams within the strike team, which has an overall unit leader plus a logistical/communication asset. For areas of the state that lack reliable communications, the search team is augmented by a four-man communication team using the Texas Interoperable Communications Package (TIC-



Photo by Warrant Officer Ricky Thomas

P). Strike team members include a chaplain who is a qualified Critical Incident Stress Management Counselor. Chaplains were added to the teams with a twofold mission: to provide last rites to any remains that are located and to provide counseling to search personnel during and after the mission as needed.

Since the inception of the mission, the teams have located nine sets of remains and provided medical assistance to over 16 individuals, including one near death. The teams have identified numerous trails and "layups" (fox holes), which showed signs of recent use. Personal items found include numerous cell phones, cameras, clothing, food (buried caches), money (pesos and US Dollars) as well as identification cards, all of which were turned over to law enforcement.

During past missions the State Guard has also assisted with 9-1-1 distress calls. Brooks County Sheriff's Department through their 9-1-1 system receives phone calls from

individuals who are either lost or becoming concerned for their own or other's safety. An approximate location is determined using GPS coordinates, and the caller is requested to stay at their location to wait for help. The Sheriff's Office notifies the deployed State Guard unit, who in turn sends a team and search the area. Although callers are not always located, property or human remains may be discovered.

## When Disaster Strikes: Is your Family Prepared?

Have you ever thought about what would happen if you and your family were affected by a natural disaster? Have you made a disaster plan? Do you have a ready kit for your family if needed? These areas are often overlooked by most people and can create further chaos to an already hectic situation. Here in Texas, we face many types of natural disasters:

- Hurricanes
- Flooding
- Tornados
- Snow and ice storms
- Wildland fires
- Earthquakes

Any of these events can vary in size and impact to our communities from minimal to catastrophic damage. Major challenges are presented when we have to balance our preparedness and planning for a predicted threat like a hurricane or tornado versus a sudden disaster like an earthquake or wildland fire. Throughout the year we can predict what possible natural disasters we may face and receive advanced warning notifications for planning purposes.

The real question is what do you do with that information to prepare your family? Being prepared as a family is one of the most important processes you can do to minimize the potential impact of a disaster. Focus on the following areas:

- *Family Communication and Notification Plan:*
  - Contact cards: write down contact names, numbers and addresses for all family members, nearest relatives and neighbors.
  - Have a notification plan of how and who to contact to avoid confusion and missed family members for accountability.
  - Keep in mind that cell and Wi-Fi services may be interrupted, so have back up means to communicate (such as Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, home or work phone lines).
- *Family Emergency/Disaster Plan:*
  - Make plans geared towards what types of disasters you are most likely to face for the region of the state where you live. Different disasters and severe weather bring different types of challenges.
  - Designate meeting points in your house for sheltering along with an evacuation routes if needed to leave your house.
  - Designate meeting points if you are away from home or split from your family.
  - Know where your emergency kit is located and have it with you when you have enough warning of a possible disaster or severe weather.
  - Know how to shut off the gas, water and electricity to your house if needed.
- *Emergency Kit:* A good rule of thumb is to have three full days' worth of supplies. Kits can vary depending on family size and needs but should focus on the listed items below:
  - Food and water. (Canned or dry foods that are easy to make and won't spoil are best. It is recommended to have one gallon of water for each day for each family member if possible.)
  - Safe cooking and eating utensils.
  - Light sources and batteries.
  - First aid kits.
  - Trash bags.
  - Personal hygiene and toiletry items.

- Seven day supply of medications. (Also write down your medications—including dose amounts and how often each is to be taken—along with existing medical conditions and physicians' names.)
- Multipurpose tools.
- Cash.
- Copies of important documents such as home insurance, immunization records and passport numbers.
- Extra sets of car and house keys.
- Games for activities.
- Medical supplies.
- Baby supplies.
- Pet supplies.
- *Preparing:*
  - Practice your communication and notification plans with family members.
  - Practice your emergency disaster plan at home and ensure the younger children understand what to do and where to go.
  - Check you emergency kit quarterly and replace needed items like batteries, food and water.
  - Take a CPR and First Aid class.
  - Involve your neighbors and friends to spread the education.
  - Involve your children, so they don't fear these processes in case they're home alone when a disaster occurs and your family is separated.
  - Know the school release process for your kids if they are being released early due to a disaster or severe weather and you cannot get to them quickly. Have a backup plan for where they are to go and or who can get them.

Another area commonly overlooked is what to do when there is a major power outage or water main break and you are still at home. You may go several days without electricity or municipal water. You may be able relocate with family, friends or in hotel for a few days and not be affected as much. But, if you are unable to leave your home when a severe snow or ice storm occurs knocking out power and water, have a backup plan for cooking, maintaining enough food and water, and safely staying warm. Having battery backup or small generator is always a good idea.

Stay connected to the news or social media updates from your local emergency services and emergency management entities. When you have no means to recharge your phones during power outages, consider conserving the battery life by only communicating with family members to provide updates or call for emergency services.

The key to success when faced with a natural disaster is being prepared and proactive for the safety of you and your family. Stay engaged, educated, updated and maintain good situational awareness for what to do when a disaster or major weather event occurs. You can find great preparedness information online at several websites:

[www.emergency.cdc.gov](http://www.emergency.cdc.gov)  
[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)  
[www.homedisasterpreparedness.com](http://www.homedisasterpreparedness.com)  
[www.fema.gov/plan-prepare](http://www.fema.gov/plan-prepare)  
[www.redcross.org/prepare](http://www.redcross.org/prepare)

Below I demonstrate how make a home emergency kit for a family of four by placing enough supplies to last three full days in two sealed five gallon buckets.

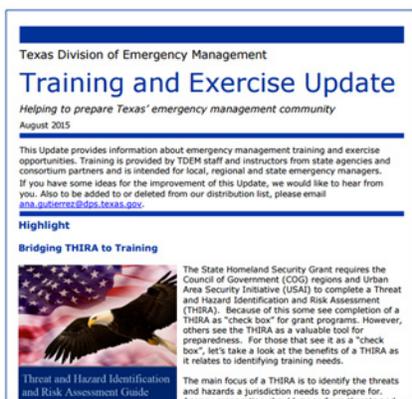


## 2016 Texas Emergency Management Conference Call for Presentations Open!

The Texas Division of Emergency Management is accepting proposals for the 2016 Texas Emergency Management Conference. Presentations that focus on current issues, lessons learned, creative best practices and participant interaction are strongly encouraged and will be given preference. Multiple submissions are welcome.

Speaker Submissions. The [Conference Speaker Application](#) must be filled out completely to be considered. The deadline to submit a proposal is Friday, October 30, 2015.

Speaker Contact Information. Please direct any speaker-related questions to Susan Vessell, Workshop Coordinator, via e-mail: [TDEM.CONFERENCE@dps.texas.gov](mailto:TDEM.CONFERENCE@dps.texas.gov). Thank you for your interest in presenting at the 2016 Texas Emergency Management Conference. We look forward to seeing you in San Antonio!



### Training and Exercise Update

The Preparedness Section of the Texas Division of Emergency Management posts a Training and Exercise Update publication each month on the TDEM website. The update provides information about emergency management training and exercise opportunities plus tips and suggestions for your preparedness planning. To view the update, follow this link:

[Training and Exercise Update](#)

### May 2015 Severe Weather in Texas How Do I Request Assistance?

Governor Greg Abbott requested a Presidential Disaster Declaration for areas of Texas affected by the ongoing severe weather across the state. On Saturday, May 30, the president granted this request for funds to assist in recovery.

#### Available Assistance

Two types of assistance are available, individual and public.

Individual assistance provides affected residents and businesses with access to disaster housing, disaster grants, low-interest disaster loans, and other disaster aid programs including crisis counseling, disaster-related unemployment assistance, legal aid and assistance with income tax, Social Security and veteran's benefits.

For more information, follow this link: [FEMA Assistance](#).

**Save the Date:**

**2015 ALERRT Conference**

November 1-4, 2015  
Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center  
1001 E. McCarty Lane, San Marcos, Texas 78666

[Conference Information](#)

**Texas EMS Conference**

November 22-25, 2015  
Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center  
Dallas, Texas  
650 S. Griffin Street, Dallas, Texas 75202

[Conference Website](#)

[Online Registration](#)

**Ninth Annual EMAT Leadership Symposium**

February 7-10, 2016  
Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center  
1001 E. McCarty Lane, San Marcos, Texas 78666

[Emergency Management Association of Texas](#)

**September 2015: Credits**

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