



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEWS
The Monthly Electronic Newsletter of
Homeland Security and Emergency Management
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A missile, fired from the USS Lake Erie in the Pacific Ocean on February 20th, destroyed a malfunctioning U.S. spy satellite in an effort to prevent it from causing damage when it fell to earth. U.S. Navy photo.

FALLING SATELLITE THREATENS EARTH – A 5,000-pound spy satellite the size of a bus was falling out of orbit and was expected to hit the earth sometime from the end of February to the beginning of March. While much of the satellite would have burned up in the atmosphere on re-entry, federal officials were concerned that the 1,000-pound fuel tank, loaded with toxic and corrosive hydrazine, could have survived the fall to earth intact. Rather than chance that, Defense Secretary Robert Gates ordered the satellite to be destroyed by a missile, which was fired from a Navy ship in the Pacific. The missile scored a direct hit, breaking up the fuel tank and scattering debris, most of which is expected to burn up in the atmosphere as it falls to earth. The Defense Department says the surviving pieces of the satellite are no larger than a football.

Before the satellite was destroyed, distributed information to first responders on how to deal with pieces that might land in their area. Any pieces of the satellite were to be treated as hazardous waste. The guidance was just a precaution. Even if the satellite had fallen mostly intact, the chances that it would have struck a populated area were small.

ICANHELP.NH.GOV TO BE KICKED OFF NEXT WEEK – New Hampshire’s version of a program to encourage health care professionals to register for volunteer service during disasters will be unveiled at a State House news conference next week. Dr. Susan Lynch, New Hampshire’s First Lady and a pediatrician, will be the first health care provider to sign up for the program. Governor Lynch will register as an honorary disaster volunteer. The publicity effort will encourage doctors, nurses, medical technicians and all other health care professionals to register on-line. The database collected from the website will be used to allocate health care resources during a public health emergency or other disaster. It will also address credentialing and other issues related to volunteering. iCanHelp.NH.gov is New Hampshire’s version of the national ESAR-VHP, or Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals program.

EXTENSION ON REAL ID SOUGHT – Governor Lynch has asked the federal government for an extension of the deadline for implementation of the Real ID Act in New Hampshire. The law requires that the state meet Real ID standards for New Hampshire driver’s licenses by May 11th or they will not be accepted as valid identification to board commercial aircraft or enter any federally-protected facilities, such as U.S. court houses. Without an extension, New Hampshire residents would be required to show passports or other federal identification that provides proof of citizenship. People who do not have such ID would be subject to additional searches or screening. New Hampshire is among 17 states that have refused to comply with Real ID in some fashion. A law passed last year and signed by Governor Lynch defines Real ID as a national identification program and prohibits the state from complying with it in any way.

Governor Lynch wrote to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff on February 25th to ask that New Hampshire driver’s licenses continue to be accepted as valid ID until 2010. He also noted that his letter was not an indication that the state intends to comply with Real ID.

SEVERE WINTER WEATHER STRIKES AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND... The 2007-2008 season is shaping up as the winter that won’t quit. Heavy snow that began falling at the beginning of December has continued with another storm every week or so. Ninety-nine inches of snow was recorded at Concord this season through February 27th, which is more than double the normal total. A storm on February 13th prompted HSEM to open the State Emergency Operations Center at a level III. After a night of heavy, wet snow the precipitation turned to sleet and freezing rain. With roads icing over, more than 600 schools around the state were closed. The EOC monitored potential flooding, power outages for more than 5,000 customers and seven collapsed buildings. No action was required at the state level and the EOC was closed the following afternoon.

HEAVY SNOW PUTS STRAIN ON ROOFS – The snow keeps accumulating on the roofs of buildings and heavier, wetter late snowfalls and freezing rain are making the problem worse. During the February 13th storm, buildings collapsed in Boscawen, Penacook, Conway, Holderness, New Hampton and Plymouth. In Boscawen, two buildings across the road from each other caved in. One was a warehouse storing vintage Corvettes. There were no injuries associated with any of the collapses.

John Stark High School in Weare and the Wal-mart store in Concord were evacuated for a time because of concerns that their roofs might collapse. Both were later determined to be structurally sound. State Fire Marshal Bill Degnan reminds building owners to remove snow from their roofs as soon as that can be safely accomplished. Structures that are most at risk are unoccupied buildings, buildings with accumulations of snow and ice and buildings with large open floor areas. Factors contributing to collapse are ice dams, frozen or clogged roof drains, damage to structural components and structural design issues.

FLOODING AHEAD FOR SPRING? – Spring may seem a long way off at this point, but someday all of that snow is going to melt, and that could mean flooding to come. According to Jim Gallagher of the Department of Environmental Services, this year's snow pack is the third deepest in the 50 years that DES has been keeping records. The water equivalent of the North Country snow pack is about 12 inches. In the Squam Lake area it's 10 inches. And in Laconia it's seven inches. A sudden thaw, heavy rains or a combination could produce flooding in the next few months.

STRATEGIC NATIONAL STOCKPILE PLAN EVALUATED – New Hampshire's Strategic National Stockpile plan received a favorable evaluation from the Centers for Disease Control and significantly improved its score from the previous year. A CDC team came to New Hampshire to review the state's plan, which was evaluated on criteria in 13 categories. Among the items considered were the state's procedures for receiving, storing, transporting and distributing supplies of pharmaceuticals from SNS supplies. The SNS plan is reviewed annually. It is scored on a 100-point scale. This year it received a score of 86, up from 69 last year.

PHONE SERVICE KNOCKED OUT IN LAKES REGION – Telephone service, including some 911 calling, was knocked out to about 14,000 Verizon customers in 25 central New Hampshire communities on February 14th in a freak mishap related to the previous day's storm. According to Verizon officials, telephone cables were burned in separate incidents in Canterbury and Wakefield when electric lines, weighed down by ice, shorted and caught fire. A single such incident would probably not have had much effect, but two occurring at about the same time was more than the system could handle. Service was out for more than five hours. HSEM and Emergency Services staff worked with Verizon senior management during the incident to provide public information to residents in the affected areas. The news media reported on how to contact 911 for an emergency during the outage. No incidents related to the lack of communications were reported.