

## Contact the Press Office

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# Texas Granted Presidential Disaster Declaration

*Gov. Perry and Sen. Cornyn Tour Impacted Area, Meet with Local Officials*

AUSTIN – President George W. Bush today granted Gov. Perry's request for a Major Presidential Disaster Declaration, which will provide assistance to 15 Texas counties. This afternoon, the governor and U.S. Sen. John Cornyn toured the impacted areas and were briefed by local officials regarding ongoing emergency response efforts as Tropical Storm Dolly continues to move slowly through south Texas.

"Though some areas in south Texas have incurred significant damage, preparedness efforts on the part of our local, state and federal officials and private sector partners ensured that our number one priority – protecting lives– was successfully met," said Gov. Perry. "As damage assessments begin, the state stands ready to help south Texas residents rebuild and restore their homes, businesses and communities."

The Major Presidential Disaster Declaration covers Aransas, Bexar, Brooks, Calhoun, Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio, Starr, Victoria and Willacy counties. While decisions on individual federal assistance requests cannot be made until damage assessments are conducted, the declaration does include public assistance for emergency protective measures taken before, during and after the disaster, including:

- Warning devices such as barricades, signs and announcements
- Search and rescue efforts
- Security forces such as police and guards
- Construction of temporary levees
- Provision of shelters or emergency care
- Sandbagging
- Bracing/shoring damaged structures
- Provision of food, water, ice and other essential needs
- Emergency repairs
- Emergency demolition
- Removal of health and safety hazards
- Emergency communications, emergency access and emergency public transportation costs may also be eligible.

Expanded public assistance also must await joint state federal damage assessments.

To date, Texas has taken the following actions:

**Public Utility Commission:** The PUC is working to restore power (or establish generator power) for critical care facilities such as hospitals, nursing homes, shelters and public safety facilities. More than 200,000 homes and businesses are currently without

power. PUC has asked customers who still have power to conserve electricity while crews are restoring service to other customers.

**Texas Military Forces:** 700 of 1,200 activated national guardsmen are currently assisting with response and recovery efforts, in addition to an incident management team and six UH-60s.

**Texas Engineering and Extension Service:** Texas Task Force 1 currently has swift water teams located in several South Texas counties and performed numerous rescues overnight and continue to do so today, assisting local officials, as needed. Texas Task Force 2 has also been deployed.

**Texas Department of Agriculture:** With approval of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, TDA responded to requests for food in Laredo and Hidalgo County, including a request from Congressman Ruben Hinojosa. After determining the areas most in need, TDA sent a truckload of USDA-donated commodities for a shelter operating in Laredo and another truckload for shelters operating in Hidalgo County. TDA also has food available to feed a growing number of evacuees being sheltered in the Laredo Civic Center. TDA shipped another truckload of food from San Antonio to the Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley in McAllen where 2,179 people are being housed in 10 shelters.

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice:** Power has been restored to the Lopez and Segovia facilities, which had been operating on generators after electric outages.

**Texas Department of Transportation:** Widespread flooding continues to obstruct travel in the Rio Grande Valley. TxDOT crews are assessing roads and bridges and repairing damage to signal lights and signs. TxDOT has received reports of electrical transmission lines down, signal lights out, water and debris on roadways in the Rio Grande Valley. Many major and minor roadways are impassable. The Queen Isabella Memorial Bridge to South Padre Island in Cameron County has reopened. Cleanup and recovery operations have begun. TxDOT crews from the Yoakum, San Antonio and Corpus Christi Districts have been deployed to the Rio Grande Valley to assist with cleanup and recovery operations. The agency's road condition hotline will be staffed with live travel counselors until at least 9 p.m. CDT today. TxDOT personnel are monitoring road and bridge conditions across South Texas and the Coastal Bend to determine whether storm damage presents a threat to travel.

**Department of Information Resources:** Partners (Unisys, Maintech and PTG perspective) are on standby to assist any agencies impacted by the hurricane. The Data Center has successfully completed backups for all remote locations for all systems including DSHS, TxDOT and HHSC.

**Department of Insurance:** The Consumer Protection Division has scheduled daily calls with the insurance industry to discuss conditions and issues on the ground. A decision will be made later today about when and where to deploy TDI insurance specialists.

**Texas Animal Health Commission:** Texas Animal Health Commission livestock health inspectors and animal care personnel from the Houston SPCA will begin damage assessments for livestock and small animal issues Friday with the three incident management teams in the area.

**Texas Education Agency:** Schools in the lower Rio Grande Valley opened their doors to hundreds of evacuees, providing them with shelter and food. Schools in the Brownsville Independent School District, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Edinburg

Consolidated ISD and La Joya ISD are among those serving as shelters.

**Texas Department of Public Safety:** Highway Patrol day and night units are escorting food, water and assets throughout affected areas and assisting with other requests. Troopers are escorting supplies to the main staging area in Weslaco. Highway Patrol managers have been sent to DPS Communications offices to ensure DPS communication systems are working well throughout the Valley. DPS helicopters from McAllen, Houston and Austin are also working the area and assisting as needed.

**Texas Youth Commission:** The Tamayo Halfway House in Harlingen remains closed, and the 13 youth residents and necessary accompanying staff have been temporarily relocated to the York Halfway House in Corpus Christi. The Harlingen Parole Office also remains closed today. The Beto Halfway House in McAllen lost power and phone service, and staff are working with local authorities to reestablish the services. All youth are safe and the facility is secure without damage. There is no flooding in the area. The Evins Regional Juvenile Center in Edinburg and York Halfway House in Corpus Christi are secure and all youth are safe.

**Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services:** DARS is standing by to provide support, such as interpretation services in shelters, as needed.

**Texas Commission on Environmental Quality:** The TCEQ Emergency Response Strike Team, consisting of 16 trained individuals with a mobile command post, a Lab/GIS trailer, and a communications trailer, has deployed to the Valley. The Strike Team is will assess damage caused by Hurricane Dolly.

**Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs:** TDHCA staff will be assisting with preliminary damage assessments. TDHCA has advised community action agencies in the lower Rio Grande Valley that they may be called upon to serve additional persons and offered additional resources if needed at this time. TDHCA is reminding all affordable housing rental owners statewide to keep their apartment vacancy information current so that the agency has accurate information on available housing for storm victims who may not be able to return to their homes.. TDHCA also will provide any technical assistance necessary to help these communities apply for post-disaster housing funds.

**Health and Human Services Commission:** The state's 2-1-1 system activated 24-hour response operations in additional sites to handle more calls from the affected areas. More than 84,000 Texans have used 2-1-1 to register for transportation assistance, including a surge in registrations from the affected areas just before Dolly hit. HHSC is providing ice and water for evacuation shelters. The state's health and human services offices in the affected area will reopen at 8 a.m. Friday. HHSC is making arrangements to have staff available at Assistance Recovery Centers to help victims apply for state and federal benefits.

**Department of Aging and Disability Services:** DADS is maintaining contact with providers in the four-county affected area. The Twinbrook South Nursing facility in San Benito is in the process of evacuating 46 residents to a sister facility in McAllen due to flooding.

**Department of State Health Services:** DSHS is assessing the need for mosquito control and protection. Area hospitals and dialysis facilities are being surveyed to assess conditions and operations, and to determine assistance required. Baptist Children & Family Services is establishing a medical special needs shelter with a capacity for 250 people. Two eight-person medical strike teams and three sanitarians have been deployed to the impact area.

**Department of Family and Protective Services:** DFPS is reminding foster parents and caregivers that had to evacuate to notify the agency as soon as possible of their new location. Once a family reaches its evacuation destination, they may notify their local CPS office or call the DFPS Hotline (1-800-252-5400) to check in.

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:** Texas Parks and Wildlife is opening campsites and screen shelters to those who need a temporary place to stay at state parks not affected by storm. Mustang Island, Resaca de la Palma, Llano Grande and Bentsen state parks are closed due to flooding or other storm-related issues:

**Texas Workforce Commission:** TWC's McAllen Unemployment Insurance (UI) Tele-Center remains closed. UI calls that would normally go to the McAllen Tele-Center continue to be forwarded through TWC's toll-free UI phone network to tele-centers across the state. Preliminary visual reports show no damage to the McAllen Tele-Center. The following workforce centers were open today in the Coastal Bend region: Sunrise, Staples, Sinton, Beeville, as well as the workforce board's administrative offices. The following workforce centers remain closed: Alice, Kingsville, Falfurrias, Rockport and George West.

The State Operations Center is conducting daily conference calls with local officials, first responders, mass care providers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Weather Service to assess the latest weather projections and to coordinate state and local preparation and response.