



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Gov. Whitman Extends State of Emergency to Cover Flood Damage in Atlantic, Burlington, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean Counties**

Gov. Christie Whitman today extended the State of Emergency to cover flood victims not only in Atlantic County, but also in four contiguous counties in the wake of Wednesday's torrential rain storms and flooding. The Governor also sent a team of experts from the Departments of Insurance and Banking, Community Affairs and Transportation and Human Services to answer victims' questions and provide information on available programs.

"Residents in the affected areas can be assured that we are making every effort to provide them with the information and assistance that they need to help them recover and rebuild in the wake of the storm," said Gov. Whitman. "Once preliminary damage assessments are complete, I plan to apply for the maximum amount of federal assistance available."

"The Office of Emergency Management, state agency officials and county and local governments have made a tremendous coordinated effort to ensure the safety and security of the residents in affected areas. I commend them for their teamwork," the Governor said.

State agencies and State Emergency Management personnel are already working to assist county and local officials to assess damages resulting from Wednesday night's storm. Emergency personnel met with local and county officials at 8 a.m. this morning. They have dispatched four assessment teams out in the field. Teams will be working throughout the weekend to complete this preliminary assessment.

The establishment of a State of Emergency in all five counties will enable state officials to request a joint damage assessment with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for those areas. This joint assessment will allow the state to better determine eligibility for federal aid. The Governor hopes to have preliminary assessments completed and to make a decision about the application for federal assistance by early next week.

Teams from FEMA are expected in New Jersey on Monday to begin the joint preliminary damage assessments. Following the completion of those assessments, the state will determine its eligibility for federal assistance. If damage estimates are significant enough to meet FEMA criteria, the state could receive a Presidential Disaster Declaration. This type of declaration would enable residents and business owners without flood insurance to access Small Business Administration grants and loans. The declaration would also enable state, county and local governments to recoup part of their clean up costs for flood damaged roads, bridges and infrastructure.

The Department of Community Affairs sent a team to the Atlantic County area today to assist in damage assessments and provide victims with information on available programs. Staff from the Division of Codes and Standards is assisting the State Police in assessing damages. Representatives from the Homelessness Prevention Program are on site to help arrange housing assistance for persons displaced by the flooding. The program will help locate affordable housing options and provide temporary financial assistance to low and moderate income tenants in need of housing.

Transportation personnel are in the affected communities assisting local officials with damage assessments or road and infrastructure. They are also working with county officials and State Police to construct detours to reroute traffic away damaged roadways.

The Department of Banking and Insurance will have staff with expertise in homeowners' insurance to answer flood victims' questions about what their policies cover. The staff will be in the Atlantic County area beginning Monday. Additionally, consumers may call 609-292-5317 to obtain information from staff at the department. Consumers who have flood insurance can get information about how to file a claim by calling the National Flood Insurance Program at 1-800-427-4661.

The Department of Human Services has also made mental health, family counseling and any other emergency welfare type services available to residents of the affected areas.