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## VICE PRESIDENT NEZ PROVIDES UPDATE TO BLACK MESA REGION ON DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY



Vice President Jonathan Nez called a meeting last Thursday at the Pinon NDOT facility to get integral departments and programs on the same page in addressing the Declaration of Emergency regarding recent weather conditions on the Navajo Nation.

PIÑON-Vice President Jonathan Nez called a meeting on Thursday, Jan. 26, to update the Black Mesa Region on the recently issued Declaration of Emergency. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the emergency needs of the region while also standardizing information in regards to the declaration.

Thus far, 35 Navajo Chapters have issued Emergency Declarations.

The meeting was held at the Navajo Division of Transportation Piñon Maintenance Yard. Representatives from Navajo Division of Transportation, Division of Community Development, Division of Natural Resources, Division of Social Services, Department of Dine' Education, Department of Justice, Community Health Representatives, Commission on Emergency Management and Division of Public Safety were in attendance.

"In a situation like this where an emergency has been declared, information can sometimes get skewed," Vice President Nez said. "We wanted to get everyone on the same page. That's what we are here to do."

The meeting's agenda facilitated updates from regional chapters as well as departments and divisions that are integral in the emergency efforts.

From Navajo County Emergency Management and Preparedness, Catrina Jenkins and Donny Shurter requested that the chapters follow the established request process to ensure that reimbursement is directed back to the respective chapters.

Any requests made to the county will be granted directly to the chapter. Any reimbursements then will also be directed to the chapters.

"It's really critical that you understand how your particular process works," Shurter said. "In order for us to be aware, we ask that you courtesy copy us on requests being made."

Data regarding requests will be submitted to FEMA for potential reimbursement through the Stafford Act, which recently reduced the eligibility threshold from \$1 million to \$250,000.

Chairman of the Commission of Emergency Management (CEM) Herman Shorty said the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) needs chapter updates on requests for food, water, coal and wood. He said that requests for items that the chapters cannot purchase along with cost summaries should be tracked.

"We want to work in unison to be as effective as possible," Shorty said.

A representative from IHS said their main objective is attending to people who are on medication. IHS is currently implementing phone-in prescription fills and refills.

Director of the Division of Community Development (DCD) Carl Smith said his division has distributed memorandums to all chapters requesting they keep their doors open beyond work hours to provide shelter for those in need.

DCD is also requesting that chapters compile any available coal or wood they might have for redistribution to those in emergency need.

"We have three trucks that we can send to the chapters to pick up extra coal or wood to take out to those in need," Smith said.

Smith noted that DCD services 110 chapters that span 127,000 square miles encompassing a population of over 173,000.

"Imagine what we are facing right now. There is so much being discussed that it's hard to effectively address all requests," he said. "But we are doing everything we can. We need to step up and help our people right now."

Community members also voiced concerns over road conditions affecting bus routes and community health representative services. Many attendees stated that roads should be bladed before adverse weather conditions set in.

Program Supervisor for the Piñon NDOT, Calvin Tsosie said the highways are the number one priorities in these situations.

"Our region is large and our task is to go out early in the morning to plow the roads," he said. "Right off the bat we hit Navajo Route 41 that goes to Forest Lake and Navajo Route 4 that goes to Chinle. Once those have been completed, we switch our attention to the dirt roads for bus routes."

Tsosie said that blading a road can sometimes make it worse.

"It's better to blade after the road has been cleared," he said. "Otherwise you can create deep ruts in the roadway."

Vice President Nez thanked everyone in attendance for contributing their efforts in planning and executing responsibilities in addressing the emergency conditions.

"We have to continue to do what we can in assisting our communities during these times of crisis," said Vice President Nez

A follow up meeting for the Black Mesa Region is scheduled for Feb. 3 at 9 a.m. to ensure emergency needs were addressed. The meeting will be held at the NDOT Pinon Maintenance Yard.

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