



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly signs emergency declaration to address snowstorms



President Shelly encourages tribal members to be patient and allow time for muddy conditions to dry to prevent these type of scenarios. (Courtesy photo)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed CEM-15-03-04 early this evening and declared a disaster for the Nation from recent heavy winter storms.

“We take this action to bring relief to rural areas where storms have caused severe mud conditions left by melting snow that have caused hardship to many,” President Shelly said. “Our Department of Emergency Management is working overtime to ensure everything is documented properly.

“The Navajo Nation Emergency Operations Center is open and is providing assistance,” he added.

Resolution No. CE-15-03-04 passed by a vote of 3-0 by the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management earlier today.

The commission declared a state of emergency after heavy snow, high winds, excessive rains, flooding, power outages and muddy conditions were reported to have severely impacted tribal members living in remote locations.

The declaration stated, “The emergencies of the Navajo Nation are to be addressed in a manner to provide the

necessary resources required to the declared State of Emergency. This includes, but not limited to, resources of personnel, equipment, supplies, other funding and other resources as may be required to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the Navajo Nation.”

Ten chapters got the ball rolling.

Chilchinbeto, Coalmine Canyon, Cove, Crystal, Hard Rock, LeChee, Oljato, Pinon, Sanostee, Sheep Springs, declared emergencies and passed resolutions for their respective communities.

Emergency declarations begin at the chapter level, as members pass a resolution to declare an emergency. The resolutions are forwarded to the NNCEM, which will take action on whether or not to declare an emergency. Finally, President Shelly signs the emergency declaration into action.

The NNCEM convened on March 4, but could not declare an emergency because confirmation from Speaker LoRenzo Bates and the 23rd Navajo Nation Council was needed for the commission to continue its function and responsibilities.

The functions of NNCEM membership can be found under Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code, under Article 4, Section 882 (B).

The section states, “All members of the Commission shall be appointed by the Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council and confirmed by the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the Navajo Nation Council and shall serve a term concurrent to that of the President of the Navajo Nation, or until replaced, whichever is longer.”

Because of the prolonged election season, NNCEM Chairman Herman Shorty said confirmation from the Council was necessary to ensure the commission was still a recognized entity.

Beyond the procedural considerations, one tribal department continued to answer calls and provide assistance.

NNDEM has received incident reports from 42 chapters that were affected by the storm. Many cited excessive mud and snow as issues that needed to be addressed. Others cited the need for food, water, firewood and accessibility through muddy roads for diabetic patients requiring dialysis treatment.

“The Emergency Operations Center is operational at the Navajo Transportation Complex,” said Rose Whitehair, director of NNDEM.

She encouraged chapters to provide names, locations and contact phone numbers for stranded individuals in need of assistance. Other members from her department were out at the chapters conducting assessments.

“CHR’s have been doing a great job out there on safety checks. Chapters have been delivering food, water, wood and hay in some cases,” Whitehair said.

She thanked the Office of the President and Vice President, Behavioral Health Services, Department of Health, Division of Public Safety, Division of Transportation and Special Diabetes Program for stepping forward and providing assistance.

Sanostee Chapter is providing shelter for those displaced by the weather. They are the only overnight shelter. Other resources can be accessed at Cove Chapter and Red Valley Chapter. NNDEM is coordinating with the Red Cross to provide supplies.

She said her team has been tracking events ranging from excessive mud, freezing conditions, power outages and safety checks on diabetic patients unable to navigate impassable roads.

Tribal members requesting mud removal for residential roads are encouraged to wait for the weather to dry up the muddy conditions. It is unsafe for heavy equipment to clear the roads, as they will only get stuck in the mud.

The weather is expected to clear and warm up for the next 10 days.

Information: 505-371-8415 or 8416. Forms can be downloaded at www.nndcd.org.

