

{youtube}722mAYNH2Uk{/youtube}



By ROBERT PIERCE
• Leader & Times

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of stories recapping Wednesday's joint meeting between the Liberal City Commission and Seward County Commission. Today's story deals with the recent flood damage. Another story will deal with the possibility of a new recreation

center in Liberal.

Thursday evening, according to the National Weather Service, Liberal received 1.21 inches of precipitation.

That moisture comes on top of last week's rainfall that left many parts of Seward County flooded.

Wednesday evening, Seward County Emergency Management Director Greg Standard, along with administrator April Warden and landfill supervisor Brock Theiner, assessed the situation left behind following last week's storm and some of the possible relief efforts to help locals recover.

Standard said he had reports from Liberal residents that as much as 9.5 inches of rain fell in some parts of town, a figure he said was likely accurate at the locations measured. He said because the rain fell in such a quick amount of time, it created a greater impact than had it been received a longer period of time.

"It's the perfect storm type of event, and it obviously created a lot of problems for a lot of people," he said.

Standard said early in the storm's progress, first responders were out helping stranded motorists get back to safety.

"As the event continued, the water's obviously moving away fairly rapidly, so by morning, it doesn't look the same as it did before," he said. "That created some issues for us. It was hard to tell the full extent of who might've had damage. There's not water standing there anymore, so you don't know how high it got during the event."

Standard said calls to the county to report flood damage began to pick up about Tuesday, and he said the amount of calls probably surpassed 100 as of Wednesday's meeting. He said enough damage has been reported to bring in Red Cross officials to begin taking local action.

Standard said representatives from faith-based groups should be on hand by Saturday to provide assistance to homeowners needing help with house repairs.

"I'm sure there are limits to that, and in some of the houses that have been extremely damaged, that may be a problem that stays with a little bit longer," he said.

Standard said county roads obviously had some damage, but the bulk of the damage was inside the city of Liberal or just outside of town. As a result, this is where relief efforts have primarily focused. He added, though, Seward County has yet to qualify for any support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"That situation could change," he said. "There's two ways of getting there. One way is locally, and the other way would be a statewide event."

Standard said if statewide damage surpassed \$3.8 million, Seward County then could qualify for help.

"That aide would go primarily to city and county governments," he said. "It doesn't really go to the individuals. If this came to pass, individuals would qualify for Small Business Administration loans. That would be the primary thing that FEMA would provide to us for our citizens."

Standard said everyone affected by the flood needs to be patient as recovery efforts continue.

"Flooding events, they always turn into being a long term event," he said. "We're not going to get everything fixed. We'll probably have people who discover they have mold in their house weeks or months from now that they didn't realize they had. I think we should all just recognize

there's going to be some problems as we continue to move along, new issues are discovered. That's going to last a while."

Standard said damage assessments are continuing at this time.

"For our purpose, we're mainly trying to find out how many homes are affected, how many people need help," he said.

Theiner and Warden then talked about the possibility of the landfill applying for a state waiver of its solid waste tonnage fee to allow those affected by the storm to dump waste at the landfill.

Warden said if the waiver, which county commissioners gave Theiner the approval to move ahead in applying for, is approved by the state, people who have called into county clerk Stacia Long's office to report damage or filling out a form available at www.sewardcountyks.org can receive a voucher to let the landfill know that person was actually affected by the storm and where the waste is coming from.

"The most important thing is everybody's going to waive their tonnage fees," Warden said. "They just want to make sure not everybody in town is just bringing out things to dump, but it actually is storm debris."

Warden said the tonnage fee waiver does not apply in some cases such as non-storm related waste.

"If it's chemicals, paint, any of that kind of stuff, we still have to follow that household hazardous waste," she said. "It's very important that we're able to know the stuff that's coming in to make sure that we get rid of things in the proper manner."