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Gov. Gregoire, federal delegation tour areas with severe storm damage

Sens. Murray and Cantwell, U.S. transportation secretary visit Orting, Chehalis

OLYMPIA – Gov. Chris Gregoire today toured hard-hit areas in Pierce and Lewis counties with U.S. Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 10 Acting Director Dennis Hinsinger and state officials to assess conditions following this week's severe weather.

Following a mid-day briefing by state officials, Peters announced the immediate release of \$2 million in emergency relief funds to help the state recover from extreme weather damage. In addition to the funds, FEMA today approved the governor's request for an extension of time to file for federal reimbursement of extraordinary snow removal costs.

"I thank Secretary Peters for the release of these funds to help our citizens in the recovery process," Gregoire said. "I also spoke with President-elect Obama this morning and he pledged his support to our communities."

"Today we have seen what strong partnerships and coordinated efforts can do to help our communities battered by the weather. I am deeply impressed with the genuine neighbor-to-neighbor spirit of Washingtonians," said Gregoire. "As we learned barely a year ago, it takes the cooperation of federal, state and local governments, and working with our neighbors, to quickly begin the recovery process. Thank you to the emergency responders and everyone who has been working around the clock to ensure the safety of our residents."

In many communities, neighbors were told yesterday that floodwaters had lowered to a safe-enough level to allow them to return home. Many homeowners are now assessing property damage and beginning the cleanup process.

Following a briefing on the flooding and the status of the state's extensive transportation system, the governor and the federal delegation visited Orting and Chehalis, where they observed the situation along Interstate 5, which was re-opened this morning after experiencing extensive flooding on Wednesday.

Today the governor also called on fellow residents to continue to help each other in the recovery process.

"Washington citizens have always generously responded to the plight of fellow residents who suffer disaster losses. Cash donations to voluntary and faith-based organizations for the purchase of supplies help victims while also supporting the recovery of local businesses," Gregoire said.

Washingtonians wanting to assist their neighbors in recovering from recent severe weather damage are encouraged to make cash donations to a charity of their choice. Cash donations allow for the purchase of specific supplies in the quantities most needed along each step of the response and recovery process.

For more information about road conditions, visit <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/>.

For more emergency information, visit www.wadisasternews.com.

For more information on charitable organizations, visit: <http://www.emd.wa.gov>.