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News Release

Public Safety a Priority in Hurricane Cleanup, Restoration

(ATLANTA) – The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency is coordinating efforts to assess Georgia’s coastal damage from Hurricane Matthew. A mandatory evacuation remains in effect for areas east of I-95 in Georgia’s six coastal counties: Bryan, Chatham, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn and Camden. A voluntary evacuation order remains in effect west of I-95 in the same counties. Residents in the affected areas should delay re-entry into affected areas until officials ensure the area is safe. Entry to all evacuated areas by nonessential persons is prohibited.

“I urge evacuees and coastal residents to stay calm, stay put and allow teams to do the work necessary for your safety,” said GEMHSA Director Jim Butterworth. “Hurricane Matthew may be out of Georgia but the area remains extremely dangerous.”

Response operations are underway to assist those residents who remained in the mandatory evacuation areas. Crews are also working to repair critical infrastructure and clear roads so that emergency and medical services can safely respond. Georgia State Police, local law enforcement, and Georgia National Guard forces are on duty and staffing security checkpoints.

Re-entry of evacuees is dependent on restoration of public safety and medical services. Local officials will determine when a county or parts of it are relatively safe to access by the general public.

Re-entry will be phased.

Phase 1 - Render Safe Task Force Team Entry

Phase 1 is the initial phase of re-entry. During Phase 1, teams from state and local response agencies as well as pre-designated private sector utility providers will gain access to impacted areas.

The primary objective of personnel operating during this phase is to render the area safe for the first responders who will follow to conduct life safety operations.

Phase 1 begins after tropical storm force winds (34 knots / 39 mph) subside and when conditions from the passing hurricane are deemed safe by on-site re-Entry Task Force leaders. Re-Entry Task Forces will deploy from Staging Areas in Tifton and Sandersville along pre-designated re-entry routes and conduct debris clearing into coastal areas to allow ground-based response resources access into affected areas. Phase 1 is conducted under the authority of GEMHSA.

Phase 2 - Emergency Response and Life Safety Critical Workforce Re-Entry

Phase 2A - Critical Workforce Conducting Life Safety Operations

Phase 2A consists of personnel conducting life safety operations in impacted areas. These operations include, but are not limited to, search and rescue, emergency medical services, fire suppression, hazardous materials control and containment, preliminary damage assessment, essential relief staff to critical medical facilities and immediate utility restoration to critical incident facilities. Phase 2A is conducted under the authority of GEMHSA, in coordination with the county emergency management directors in the affected areas.

Phase 2B - Essential Infrastructure Emergency Support Personnel

Phase 2B consists primarily of individuals in the public and private sector restoring critical infrastructure operations in support of re-entry by the general public. These critical infrastructure systems and networks include, but are not limited to, petroleum distributors, food distributors, non-emergency medical facilities (such as dialysis centers), pharmaceutical providers, members of the media, medical facility support staff, and local government essential workers. Re-entry during this phase requires close coordination among local emergency management and local public safety officials to ensure that the appropriate individuals are being allowed to access damaged areas.

Phase 3 - Local Residents, Property Owners, and Business Owners

Phase 3 consists of local residents and those who own property or businesses in the affected areas. This phase may be initiated one or more weeks after initial re-entry; the timeframe is dependent on the extent of the storm damage and the status of recovery and restoration operations in the preceding phases. Residents and individuals attempting to gain access during this phase will be expected to present valid state-issued photo identification that includes an address in the impacted area; or, valid state-issued photo identification along with a property deed, recent utility bill verifying an address, current voter registration card, recent property tax statement, business credential, or paystub from a local business. During Phase 3 of re-entry, access may be limited to certain portions of impacted counties, and restrictions may be in place only allowing access during daylight hours.

Phase 4 - Open to Public with Limited Access

In Phase 4, local officials will determine that a county or portions of the county are relatively safe for entrance by the general public. Restrictions may remain in place for a period of time limiting access to daylight hours.

As part of the Office of the Governor, GEMHSA works with local, state and federal governments, in partnership with the private sector and faith-based community, to protect life and property against man-made and natural emergencies. In addition, GEMHSA employees are on 24-hour call statewide to assist local authorities when disaster strikes. GEMHSA's Ready Georgia campaign helps Georgians prepare for disasters. Go to www.ready.ga.gov or download the free Ready Georgia app for information on developing a custom emergency plan and Ready kit.

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