

Charleston/Berkeley/Dorchester County News Release

Release Number: 2783

Release Time: 11:30 a.m.

Date: March 1, 2007

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NOTE TO MEDIA:

Charleston County Emergency Preparedness Director Cathy Haynes will be available for interviews at 1:00 p.m. today (Thursday, March 1). Location will be in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at the Lonnie Hamilton, III Public Services Building, 4045 Bridge View Drive, off Leeds Avenue in North Charleston.

Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester Counties Move to Operating Condition 4 at 12 p.m. to Monitor Severe Weather Conditions

Operating Condition 4 means there is a possibility of an emergency or disaster situation.

Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester Counties participated in a conference call today regarding severe weather that is expected to hit the area late this afternoon and throughout the night.

The call was initiated by the Charleston Weather Service and included County Government representatives from South Carolina and Georgia.

During the conference call, officials learned that the Tri-County area may experience winds in excess of 70 miles per hour and possible tornadoes. Winds will be gaining strength around 8 or 9 p.m. tonight, and high winds could continue through the night. The storm should move off the coast by Friday morning.

The Storm Prediction Center in Oklahoma sets the risk factors for such storms. They have set the risk factor for South Carolina at "moderate" and the risk factor for Georgia at "high."

"The reason we are on alert is because this level of severity is unusual for this area of the country," said Cathy Haynes, Charleston County's Emergency Preparedness Director. "The severity has been compared to what Florida recently experienced, so we want residents to stay on high alert."

Charleston Weather Service will be monitoring the storm throughout the night.

Citizens who live in the Tri-county area should monitor their local media outlets for the latest storm conditions and any instructions.

As a result of the information learned during today's conference call, and as a precautionary measure, **Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester Counties are moving into Operating Condition (OPCON) 4 at 12 p.m. today** and County officials are monitoring the weather closely.

At OPCON 4, the Counties' Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) personnel are on alert to monitor the storm conditions.

Phrases like "OPCON 4" are unfamiliar to the public, so the counties' emergency officials want to explain exactly what these mean to citizens.

"The OPCON 4 level means that there is a possibility of an emergency or disaster situation, and it notifies our employees who may be called into our EOC to stay on alert and be ready to react if needed," Haynes said.

The purpose of the EOC is for county decision-makers to coordinate information and to implement the County's Emergency Operations Plan during any type of disaster. This plan is reviewed and updated every January to ensure proper readiness and response procedures.

Officials from the Tri-county area will stay in close communication with the National Weather Service and other counties and organizations.

The Operating Condition (OPCON) levels of readiness run from five to one in level of severity, with one being the most severe. The following is an explanation of each OPCON level, and Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester Counties will be at OPCON 4 as of 12 p.m. today:

5: Day-to-day operations to include normal training and exercises.

4: Possibility of an emergency or disaster situation that may require a limited or full activation of the County's Emergency Operations Center.

3: Disaster or emergency situation likely or imminent. Full or partial activation of the County's Emergency Operations Center; activate County Emergency Operations Plan.

2: Disaster or emergency situation in effect; maximum preparedness level; full activation of the County's Emergency Operations Center.

1: Disaster or emergency situation in effect; full-fledged emergency response operations ongoing; highest state of emergency operations.