



CONGRESSIONAL & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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OEP DIRECTOR INSPECTS DISASTER AREA IN SOUTH DAKOTA

George A. Lincoln, Director of the President's Office of Emergency Preparedness, arrived this morning on the scene of the recent tragic flooding in South Dakota for a personal inspection of the extent and severity of the disaster. In a statement to the press, Lincoln said:

"The President has already expressed his deep sympathy for those lost in the disaster, for their families and friends, and for the many others who have been affected. I join him in his expression of sympathy.

"I was directed by the President to come to South Dakota to monitor the situation personally and to insure that all appropriate federal relief is made available as quickly as possible. After touring the disaster area with Governor Kneip, I have promised the closest cooperation with him and his staff in order to deal with the devastation caused by the flooding.

"I have designated Don Eddy, director of the OEP region headquartered in Denver, as the Federal Coordinating Officer for disaster assistance. A federal-state field office has already been established at the Surbeck Center at the South Dakota School of Mines.

"In order to provide individual assistance to disaster victims, a one-stop individual assistance center is being opened in Rapid City. This center will be manned by representatives of all federal agencies offering assistance programs to aid individuals affected by the disaster. Additional one-stop centers will be opened as necessary.

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"A first priority, after the initial physical needs of the affected people are met, will be to provide temporary housing for those who need it. To the maximum extent possible, victims will be housed in vacant homes in the area. If required, trailer homes will also be provided by the federal government to be placed on sites selected and provided by the state and local governments.

"Debris clearance already has begun. The federal government is providing help through the Army Corps of Engineers, which is working in association with private contractors, some of whom have volunteered their men and equipment. State and local authorities already have begun to mobilize their resources for the task. However, debris clearance will be slowed by the search for bodies of the victims.

"Roads, bridges and other public facilities will be restored and rebuilt as soon as possible."

Lincoln said after touring the disaster area that the severity of destruction and the loss of life equaled any flood damage he had seen in his 3½ years as OEP Director. "The loss of life," he said, is the tragic element, since the property can be replaced."

Lincoln noted that the damage is highly localized, with by far the greatest destruction in Rapid City itself. Many of the tourist areas in the surrounding Black Hills are virtually unaffected by the flooding and are open to tourists.

Lincoln praised the magnificent spontaneous response of federal, state and local officials, and particularly the private citizens who have rallied to help those affected by the disaster. He said he is certain the communities will snap back quickly.

Lincoln will report personally to President Nixon on the extent and severity of the disaster, and the steps being taken by the federal government to assist Governor Kneip and state and local relief efforts.