

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS UNCLEAR

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Written By Gregory Wooten

What's left of Hurricane Kate is certain to cost Gadsden County property owners, insurance companies and governments millions of dollars. But just how the county plans to fix the storm's damage is uncertain.

Even though there is extensive property damage throughout Gadsden County, the likelihood of receiving any federal money to address the emergency situation is slim, said the county's Civil Defense Director Charles Betts.

Because much of the damage property was insured, Gadsden County may not meet the criteria for any federal aid, Betts said. After touring with a state team over the disaster area this past weekend he concluded that the possibility for any federal relief seemed a bit uncertain.

"This is the worst storm I've ever seen to hit Gadsden County." The Civil Defense Director said. "It's going to cost a lot of money to get things back to normal again."

Quincy Department of Public Safety Director Eddie Spooner said if it weren't for area volunteers, many of the fallen trees knocked down by the storm would still remain on city streets.

"Our policemen worked 12 hour shifts immediately following the storm to keep things moving as smoothly as possible," the police chief said. "The Hinson Oil Company of Quincy made sure every emergency vehicle had enough gas after the storm. Other businesses came to our rescue as well. In times like these, it's pulling together like this that made it all work out."

County Commissioner Lamar Massey was out-of-town over the past weekend. Massey said he hasn't had enough time to survey the extent of the damage countywide. Other county and city officials who were contacted responded likewise.

"We are still in the dark over how much damage was caused by the storm," said Quincy City Commissioner R L Massey.

Still in the dark, indeed, voiced a group of angry residents who live either on Circle Drive or nearby Oakwood Subdivision. Monday, over a dozen residents contacted the Gadsden County Times office to complain about not having any electricity due to the city's slow response to their neighborhood.

“The city’s public works and utility department are working as fast as they can,” said City Manager Buddy Johnson. “It may take some time before all of the electricity is turned back on.

“Everyone on our main electric circuit was totally without electricity. We almost reached a crisis with our water supply but we were fortunate that we got a hold of the situation before it got out of hand.”

Johnson said the best thing for city residents to do is wait until their power is restored.

“We really weren’t hurt half as bad as some other counties,” said Gadsden Planning and Zoning Director Don Lanham. “I think we are getting back into shape. Except for a few broken power lines and fallen trees, everything is pretty much back to normal.”

Public awareness is extremely important in critical emergency situations such as this, said State Senator Pat Thomas. Trying to get some people to remain patient after a severe storm is no easy task, he said.

Senator Thomas said the Florida Legislature appropriated up to \$1 million for Emergency Disaster Preparedness this year. Some of this money will be used to bring relief to many residents who were most affected by the storm last week, he said. Even though Gadsden County may not meet the criteria for emergency federal relief money, residents need to be aware that the Legislature is beefing up such programs, Senator Thomas said.

“I’m sure there will be a mood to increase the amount of money for this program next year,” he said.

With some roads out, power lines down and trees thrown alongside city streets and county roads, next year seems far away to some Gadsden County residents who have been without power since the storm.

“I need some lights now,” said three women who marched into the Quincy Police Department Monday. “Our food is spoiling and our children are hungry. We need some help now.