

FEMA meets v

Process could lead to financial assistance fo

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency on Tuesday toured storm-damaged neighborhoods in Sunset Hills, St. Louis and Crestwood, and met with many residents hoping for help.

The first stop was in the 4500 block of Lewis Place in north St. Louis, where a tornado tore a hole in the roof of Marvell Burse's tiny brick home on Friday. The storm also damaged the facade and toppled bricks into the gangway.

"I'm not insured at all," said Burse, 68.

FEMA officials walked along Lewis Place and busily took notes. They aren't making promises, but their visit could eventually signal some kind of financial assistance for uninsured homeowners if the president makes a disaster declaration.

The group of state and federal officials was one of four teams that began surveying the damage Tuesday in eight Missouri counties and the City of St. Louis.

Josh deBerge, a spokesman for FEMA, said officials are doing a preliminary damage assessment for individual assistance.

That assessment is supposed to give a big picture of the extent and scope of damage so that state officials can determine what resources are needed to help in the recovery.

Once the teams finish their damage assessments, their report goes to the state.

If the state decides that it needs more help, the governor would ask for federal help. But that decision would be made by the president. If the president declares a disaster and authorizes providing individual assistance, homeowners and renters affected by the disas-

ter can get help with temporary housing and some repairs.

Jeff Rainford, chief of staff for St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, said 33 homes in St. Louis were affected by the storm Friday. Twelve of those homes were severely damaged. Rainford said city officials asked FEMA to make St. Louis the first stop on the tour because some city residents were feeling neglected in news coverage that focused so heavily on damage in Sunset Hills.

Officials told Burse she needs to document the damage to her house and keep receipts for any repairs she makes. Burse lives elsewhere and wasn't at the house on Lewis Place when the storm hit. No one can live in the house until it's repaired, she says. Yellow tape is draped across the porch so no one can enter.

Burse said the house is important to her, particularly because it was the former home of her brother, Lemuel Steeples, who was a boxer and considered the top U.S. amateur in his weight class at the time of his death in 1980. Steeples, 23, died in a plane crash near Warsaw, Poland, that took the lives of 22 members of the U.S. boxing team.

The FEMA team visited Sunset Hills late Tuesday afternoon.

Harlan Gast owns three properties on West Watson Road that were heavily damaged. Two of them were insured, but one was not. He asked deBerge if he would be eligible for federal assistance for the uninsured home.

"It's too soon to say," deBerge told him.

Paul Hampel of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

Historic Lewis Place recovering from tornado

By Rebecca S. Rivas Jan 20, 2011 0



Photo by Wiley Price

Residents who live in the historic neighborhood of Lewis Place are asking the city for assistance in repairs to their homes damaged by the New years eve tornado. The city has promised to help find them assistance.



The New Year's Eve tornado that hit the St. Louis area destroyed more than just Sunset Hills homes, which received most of the media's attention, said Ward 19 Alderman Terry Kennedy.

It displaced families in the Lewis Place neighborhood - a historical landmark in St. Louis for its role in the fight for fair housing - and surrounding communities in North St. Louis City as well.

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