



# COLBY FREE PRESS

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## County hazard plan nearing completion

By Kevin Bottrell

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Thomas County is just about ready to finish its first hazard mitigation plan, which aims to improve planning, buildings and facilities to lessen the effects of any natural or man-made disaster.

Only a few steps remain, including a public meeting at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Thomas County Office Complex, a public comment period and a review by the state and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan, who served as the point person in getting the plan put together.

In 2004, she said, the federal government started requiring every county to have a plan, and Kansas drew up an umbrella plan

that covered the state. However, McMahan said, in 2008, the government decided the state's plan wasn't good enough.

McMahan applied for a \$32,250 grant from the Emergency Management Agency for hiring a consultant to develop a plan. The county hired E-Fm Consulting out of Lawrence, which provided experts on building construction, the environment, emergency planning and hazard analysis.

E-Fm surveyed in the county and its cities, gathering information on buildings, infrastructure, roads and other things that might be improved to help mitigate the effects of disasters.

The plan will help the county prepare for natural disasters in several ways, McMahan said. It should help reduce the impact on people and property, help the county qualify for disaster preven-

tion and relief grants and speed recovery after a disaster.

"It focuses on mitigating whatever our biggest risk is," she said.

The plan looks at possible hazards and classifies them as high, moderate, low and negligible risk based on frequency and severity. In the high-risk category, it lists hail and high winds from thunderstorms. In the moderate category, tornadoes, floods, wildfires winter storms, dam or levee breakages, bioterrorism and blackouts. The committee chose to focus the plan on these two categories, ignoring those thought to be less likely.

The plan includes several strategies to help mitigate hazards, McMahan said. Some are as simple as making sure there is easy access to emergency facilities and equipment. Others include organizing

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## Ambulance department wants to recruit loaders

By Vera Sloan

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Ambulance Director Ken Gatlin ask Thomas County Commissioners on Monday to let him recruit people to help emergency medical technicians lift and load larger patients into the ambulance.

"The city says they are going to charge for helping to lift a patient onto the cot and into the ambulance," Gatlin said, "and the sheriff's office is generally busy when we have a need. I would like to get some people signed up who we can call on when we need help to do some lifting."

He said his department had its annual inspection by the state last week, with only one minor problem to be fixed - a roll of bandage that was outdated.

Commissioner Paul Steele reported that the end of this week should see an end to the problem that has caused two breaks in a water line in two years at

the Thomas County Office Complex, to the tune of \$4,500 a pop.

"We thought we had someone in place two years ago to make a permanent fix, but they haven't shown up yet, so I guess that means they're not going to," said Steele. "I have a different plumber lined up who will go to work on it this week."

A four-inch pipe needs to be reduced to a two-inch line, Steele said. A small leak in the old line ends up freezing in the winter, causing the line to break. The four-inch line was needed when the building was a nursing home. A sprinkler system was required then, he said.

A letter from the City of Colby said that once a building is hooked up, you can't change the size of the service, he said, but they have given the go-ahead to change it since the use of the building has changed from nursing home to offices.

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## Patching up the street



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Fog and cold didn't deter city street crews on Tuesday as they put the final touches to repairs on Fifth Street after a break Jan. 9 in a water main in front of the Colby Free Press office. The break was discovered after it had flooded the basement of the office and poured out the side door. Despite an interruption in water and heat, the paper's crew has carried on business by bunching their desks together in one room.

## A lot of unhappy pigs



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

This semi rig carrying a load of pigs fell over on its side Monday afternoon while turning north at the intersection of U.S. 24 and U.S. 83. Sheriff's deputies and an ambulance

responded to the accident, but the driver was uninjured. The pigs escaped serious injury, deputies said.

## Area student back home after earthquake in Haiti

By Erica Bradley

The Norton Telegram  
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Americans visiting and working in Haiti when the earthquake hit last Tuesday are arriving home, including a Haiti Lifeline Ministries mission team that arrived in Miami Friday afternoon.

Naomi Streck, a native of Norton and a senior education major at Wichita State University, spent the weekend in Norton before heading back to school Monday.

Streck said she arrived in Haiti last week, a couple of days before the 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck last Tuesday afternoon. She said she was at the Centre for Children International Lifeline Haiti Orphanage with one of the children when it hit.

"It was like a normal day," she said. She said they knew it was an earthquake but at first weren't aware of how

bad the damage was. Everyone eventually made their way outside, but Streck said it took time to get out due to how badly everything was shaking.

"We were very fortunate," she said. "Everyone was safe."

The group, including orphanage staff, children and the mission team, lived outside after the quake for fear the structure would collapse.

"I wish I could be there with the kids," she said. "They are probably still sleeping outside."

Streck said the children dealt with the quake well.

"I was really impressed by how the kids handled everything," she said.

The orphanage's structure was undamaged, although the security wall was left with two holes. The orphanage, in the town of Croix-des-Bouquets, was 12

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## Briefly

### County van won't run Thursday

The Thomas County transportation van will not run Thursday because the driver has a meeting. For information, call Kristi Mann at the county clerk's office, 460-4500.

### Museum offers Food for Thought

The Prairie Museum of Art and History will offer a free talk by Dr. Isaias McCaffery at noon Thursday as part of the "Food for Thought" lecture series. McCaffery, professor of history at Independence Community College, will relate the traveling Smithsonian exhibit "Journey Stories" to Kansas. For information, call the museum at (785) 460-4590.

### Hearing set on emergency plan

Thomas County Emergency Management and E-Fm Consulting will hold the final public meeting for the Thomas County Hazard Mitigation Plan at 6

p.m. Thursday at the Thomas County Office Complex. A public comment period will run from Thursday to Feb. 4, after which the plan will be set. Drafts can be viewed at the emergency management office or the Pioneer Memorial Library. For information, call Director Susan McMahan at 460-4516.

### County to start testing sirens

Thomas County will test the tornado sirens at noon on the first Monday of each month beginning Feb. 1, said Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan. The tests will continue all year if weather permits. For information, call McMahan at 460-4516.

### Students offer Monday massages

Physical Therapist Assistant students at Colby Community College will hold a massage clinic from 4 to 7:30 p.m. on Mondays the next two weeks,

through Feb. 1, in the Pierre Henry Allied Health Building, room 804. Cost for a 30-minute massages is \$12. Make appointments by calling Trudy Wildeman at 460-4797. Walk-ins are OK. For information, call Wildeman at 460-4797.

### Meeting set for medical class

An enrollment meeting for the emergency medical technician class will be at 6 p.m. next Wednesday at the ambulance building on South Franklin Avenue. Anyone who wants to enroll must attend. The class will begin Thursday, Feb. 4, and run Wednesdays and Thursdays, plus two Saturdays each month, until May 15. State grants cover the cost. For information, call Dawnelle Umberger at 460-4585.

### Heartland to hold barbecue

Heartland Christian School will hold its annual barbecue from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 31, at

the school, 1995 W. Fourth St., with barbecue pork, corn, salad, baked potatoes and dessert. Donations will be accepted. For information, call the school at 460-6419.

### Rotary to serve soup at game

The Colby Rotary Club will hold its annual soup supper from 5 to 7:30 Tuesday, Feb. 16, at the Colby Community Building during the high school basketball games with Goodland. The cost will be \$4 for adults and \$2 for children 12 and under. For information, call Sara Bryan at (308) 530-8363.



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