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In addition to working with tribal officials, BIA personnel have been working with Federal and State emergency management agencies to provide assistance to non-Indian communities in the region.

While the Mississippi Choctaw Tribe administers the BIA's General Assistance Program for tribal members living on the reservation, the Bureau is working with the tribe to determine how much additional funding it may need to continue providing such assistance.

This is the seventh hurricane mobilization undertaken by the BIA's Eastern Regional Office, which serves the federally recognized tribes in the Gulf Coast states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as in the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island and North and South Carolina. While keeping an eye on the hurricane's progress, the regional office maintained communication with Mississippi Choctaw tribal officials. Once the tribe made its request for assistance, the BIA dispatched its MCV from Florida to Choctaw, Miss., where the tribe is headquartered, to become its Mobile Command Center. "BIA personnel were already underway when Katrina made landfall in Mississippi," said Keel.

Shortly after arriving on August 29 law enforcement personnel began going house-to-house to check on residents and provide aid. The BIA also has been working with businesses who are contributing to the relief effort, such as Tractor Supply Company of Nashville which donated much-needed dog food and cattle feed to the affected areas.

"I am extremely proud of how quickly BIA employees and tribal leaders moved to aid the victims of Hurricane Katrina," Ragsdale said. "The morale of our personnel on the ground is very high."

The BIA will continue to provide relief assistance until the tribe is able to move into its recovery phase when power is fully restored to its communities, road conditions improve, and damage assessments and home repairs can be made. The tribe's eight BIA-funded schools suffered minimal effects from the storm. The Bureau's Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP), which oversees the BIA school system, will replace spoiled food supplies. The schools are expected to reopen within the next few days.

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