

MIDWEST DIGEST

Heineman Declares State Of Emergency

LINCOLN, Neb.— Gov. Dave Heineman has declared a state of emergency due to the potential for ice jam-related flooding along the lower Platte River and its tributaries.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will work with state and federal partners to address excessive ice on the Platte River. An emergency declaration allows state personnel and resources to help with preventative measures.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that intense winter weather, including heavy snow, ice and cold, freezing rain, have increased the risk for ice jams and flooding along the Platte, Elkhorn and Loup rivers.

The Corps has recommended ice dusting at up to nine sites along the Platte River from Sarpy County to North Bend. The greatest risk is the area where the Platte and Elkhorn rivers meet in western Sarpy County. Ice dusting is expected to begin the week of Feb. 15.

Ice dusting involves spreading ash to help ensure a controlled breakup of ice jams. Rapid thaws typically result in large chunks of ice breaking off and jamming along the river. Melted snow builds up behind the ice dams and eventually spills over river banks.

NEMA officials ask residents along the Loup, Elkhorn and Platte rivers who have been previously affected by spring flooding to be aware of river conditions and alert to the potential for evacuations if it becomes necessary.

Nebraskans Can Weigh In On Economic Plan

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraskans have a chance to give their opinions on changes being proposed for the statewide plan to fund economic development.

The state Department of Economic Development will accept public comments on the proposed changes from Feb. 19 to March 22.

Those changes include increasing the maximum award for any project in the economic-development category from \$500,000 to \$1 million, increasing the maximum awards for industrial-park projects from \$750,000 to \$1 million and increasing the amounts of loans that can be forgiven. Other proposals include increasing the amount of money to promote tourism.

The proposed plans can be viewed at www.neded.org/content/view/183/674 or can be requested by contacting Libby Elder at 800-426-6505 or 402-471-3762 or e-mailing libby.elder@nebraska.gov.

Icy Conditions Lead To 20-Car Pileup On I-80

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Icy conditions contributed to a pileup involving more than 20 vehicles on Interstate 80 in Lincoln.

Nebraska State Patrol spokeswoman Deb Collins says no serious injuries were reported from the chain-reaction crashes, which happened about 7 a.m. Saturday.

Collins says a vehicle lost control on the slick interstate, sparking the series of crashes that involved three semis and numerous other vehicles. The westbound lanes of I-80 were closed between the Waverly and 56th Street exits for a short time.

Martin Man Killed In Crash On Icy Road

ALLEN (AP) — One man has died after a two-vehicle collision on an icy road south of Allen.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol identified the victim as 67-year-old Charles Bettelyoun of Martin.

The patrol says Bettelyoun lost control of his SUV and traveled into the oncoming lane. The driver of an approaching pickup, 25-year-old Shane Mulloy of Martin, tried to avoid the SUV, but the vehicles collided in the ditch.

A passenger in Bettelyoun's vehicle, 25-year-old William Bettelyoun of Martin, suffered non-life-threatening injuries.

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USDA Nixes National Animal ID

SHANNON DININNY
 Associated Press Writer

YAKIMA, Wash. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced it has abandoned a program that was intended to trace the movement of farm animals around the country but garnered little support from farmers.

Instead, the department announced plans for a new, more flexible program to be administered by states and tribes to strengthen disease prevention and response. The program will only apply to animals moved in interstate commerce and will encourage the use of low-cost technology.

The decision came after Agriculture Department officials heard widespread opposition to the national animal identification

system at 15 meetings around the country last year.

"They finally came to their senses," said Mack Birkmaire, a cattleman in rural Joseph, Ore., laughing in a telephone interview.

Implemented in 2004, the voluntary program was intended to pinpoint an animal's location within 48 hours after a disease is discovered, to better prevent and respond to outbreaks.

Last year, just 36 percent of farmers and ranchers were participating.

Among the concerns: The cost is too high for small farmers; the regulations amount to bureaucratic suffocation; the program neither prevents nor controls disease; and what's in a farmer's pasture is nobody's business.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the federal govern-

ment remains committed to working collaboratively with states, tribes and the industry to build the new program.

"I've decided to revise the prior policy and offer a new approach to animal disease traceability with changes that respond directly to the feedback we heard," Vilsack said in a statement.

Paperwork follows all of his cattle to sale, Birkmaire said, leaving no reason why the government can't find out in a very few hours what ranch the cattle came from in the event of an emergency.

"It sounds a little better, if the states are to have a bigger role," he said. "We still have to keep an eye on government, whether it's the states or the fed, but it sounds like a step in the right direction."

Dave Scott, president of the

Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, said he was both surprised and pleased by the decision. The association has always backed a mandatory program, opposing a mandatory one because of the financial burden it places on ranchers, Scott said.

"Texas is the nation's leading cattle-producing state. Under the previous program, farmers were to have voluntarily registered their properties with their states by January 2008. Mandatory reporting of livestock movements was to begin one year later.

As of March 31, 2009, the USDA had obligated \$119.4 million toward the program, which it said would help ensure the safety of the food supply, particularly for export markets that may refuse to accept U.S. beef, pork or poultry

Shooting Without Death Threat Could Be OK In Neb.

BY NATE JENKINS
 Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — It's late at night and there's a loud popping noise, like a lock being busted. Then, the front door creaks open.

You grab a pistol from the nightstand drawer and slip out of bed. You find a masked, but apparently unarmed, man in your house.

Should you be able to shoot him without fear of being prosecuted?

Some lawmakers and the National Rifle Association think so, and they're pushing hard for

Nebraska to become the 25th state with a so-called castle-doctrine law that gives shooters significantly more legal protections.

Opponents see a slew of problems with the measure, including that it would allow deadly force in cases where it may not be clearly warranted: a burglary, for example, where the intruder doesn't threaten harm.

"It adds uncertainty and the ability for people to get away with killing people when it's not justified," said Howard County

Attorney Robert Sivick, speaking on behalf of the Nebraska County

Attorney Association. "It will make it more dangerous to be a police officer, a utility worker or the guy down the street with Alzheimer's who tends to wander around."

Those scenarios haven't played out in states where the law exists, and supporters say those arguments disguise the law's real-world benefits.

The Nebraska bill would allow people to use deadly force if they have reason to believe someone is going to commit felonies that include the use of force. The felonies are not clearly defined in the bill, but an NRA lobbyist push-

ing the proposal acknowledges they could include crimes such as burglary and stalking.

Currently, deadly force can be used only when there is a threat of death, bodily harm or rape.

"If you wait until someone has displayed a weapon ... or is physically attacking you, you may not have the opportunity to defend yourself," said Sen. Mark

Christensen of Imperial, who introduced the bill (LB889). "If someone's broken in, they've already committed a felony and I should be able to defend myself immediately."

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