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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:

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***Governor Declares May
Flood Awareness Month***

OKLAHOMA CITY -- Because spring marks the unofficial beginning of the state's flood season and to make citizens aware of flooding problems and solutions, Governor Brad Henry has designated May 2003 as "Flood Awareness Month" in Oklahoma.

"We remind citizens that heavy rains and severe storms typically occur in the early spring months, making this one of the most dangerous times of the year," says Duane Smith, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB).

"This proclamation will be of tremendous help to the Water Board in educating the public on flood safety procedures and floodplain management techniques," Smith adds. Earlier, Governor Henry proclaimed March as "Flood Insurance Month," part of a state campaign to spread the word about the availability of affordable flood insurance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Oklahoma currently boasts 371 NFIP member communities, which consist of municipalities, counties, and tribes.

"Severe flooding episodes occur in Oklahoma virtually every year, most frequently in the spring and fall," says Ken Morris, State Floodplain Manager. "Implementation of sound floodplain management and building strategies, particularly through the NFIP, is the most effective way for communities to avert potential flood damages." However, he encourages communities to go "above and beyond" minimum NFIP standards, consistent with the national Association of State Floodplain Manager's ongoing 'No Adverse Impact' initiative. Morris points out that only about 12 percent of homes in Oklahoma's designated floodplains are covered by flood insurance.

On an individual basis, Morris reminds Oklahomans of the dangers of driving into floodwaters. "Almost one-half of all flood-related fatalities occur in vehicles, primarily when people drive into flooded highway dips or low drainage areas at night. As little as six inches of water can cause drivers to lose control of their vehicles. Two feet of water will sweep most cars off the road," he says.

As an integral part of Oklahoma's spring flood awareness campaign, the OWRB, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management are sponsoring five one-day workshops throughout the state to update city and county floodplain administrators on NFIP compliance requirements and provide assistance in the development, administration and enforcement of local flood damage prevention ordinances that guide floodplain development. The certified floodplain manager (CFM) exam will be offered to pre-approved candidates at the close of each training day. There is no registration fee for the workshops.

"Training is the key," Morris adds. "I want to impress upon city and county officials the importance of regular training, at least annually. These educational opportunities not only help floodplain administrators better enforce local ordinances, they build confidence."

Sessions are scheduled for:

May 6

Midwest City

Community Center
NE Corner of Midwest & Reno
Titan Room

May 8

Bartlesville

Tri County Technology Center (Cherokee-Delaware Room)
6101 SE Nowata Road

May 20

Woodward

High Plains Technology Center
3921 34th Street

May 22

Lawton

Public Library
110 SW 4th

May 28

McAlester

Eastern Oklahoma College

The OWRB also works closely with the Oklahoma Insurance Department (OID) to educate state property/casualty agents and adjusters on NFIP rules and procedures. Because the Water Board's workshops are accredited by the OID, agents and adjusters can earn up to six continuing education credits for attending at least one workshop every two years.

For more information on Flood Awareness Month, the spring workshops or the National Flood Insurance Program, call Ken Morris, of the OWRB's Planning and Management Division, at 405/530-8800.

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