

not to say 'yes' or 'no' but to ensure that the applications conform to the guidelines," Vohs said.

FEMA has set up a field office in the federal building in Council Bluffs to begin working through aid applications with representatives of public bodies including the city council, county board of supervisors and school officials.

The group is working with the state Office of Disaster Services and the mayor's office in handling each individual claim.

FEMA is still collecting information on business, commercial and residential damage, and Branstad's request for assistance for uninsured damage to those properties is still being considered, McKinney said.

Local officials had estimated uninsured business and commercial damage at \$4.5 million, and the uninsured residential damage estimate was increased from \$10.7 million to about \$20 million recently.

Hanafan said he is confident the city will receive assistance for business and residential damage along with the public funds, since local officials were successful in getting the estimates raised.

If the money is approved, a local organization stands ready to help. The Council Bluffs



Gary Bertsch, left, and two of his children sift through the rubble where his garage used to be at the family's home at 2633 Ave. J. "We were fortunate," Bertsch said, "we still have a house." — Photo by Kevin McAndrews.

Tornado Task Force, begun one week after the storm, is helping to coordinate relief efforts for victims of the storm.

The task force is a group of private citizens offering a central clearinghouse for people and businesses in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area who want to donate food, clothing, money or manpower to the local relief effort.

Individual relief efforts have been varied and widespread. The Red Cross and Salvation Army provided meals, shelter and groceries, while other organizations offered monetary and clothing donations to help tornado victims.

The task force is designed to bring all the efforts together under one roof.

"We'll need every ounce of energy we can muster and timing is critical. The reality of the devastation is settling in now and we're dealing with the long-term effects. It's urgent that we get on this immediately to put our city back together. With the infrastructure that we have it could literally take years," said task force chairman Jon Narmi.

The task force will help cut that recovery time by pointing all relief efforts in the right direction and eliminating the duplication of efforts, he said.

"There are a lot of people who will slip through the cracks with no insurance, under insurance,

(Continued)



Verlin Black, 2239 Ave. H, sits on his porch overlooking the destruction to his neighborhood by the storm.—Photo by Dan Koenig.