Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the storm-stricken areas of Arizona, where snow depths, up to 79 inches are reported, said today everything humanly possible is being done for the affected Indians and their livestock.

Similarly, the Public Health Service's Division of Indian Health reported its staff in the storm area participating in rescue work and alert to possible heavy demands on personnel and facilities in the storm aftermath.

Dr. Ervin S. Rabeau, Assistant Surgeon General and director of the division, conferred by telephone with staff officials in the area.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is keeping all Federal agencies which may be of assistance fully informed of the developing situation.

Graham Holmes, BIA Navajo Area Director, said by telephone from Window Rock, Ariz., that all Navajo Indian schools apparently have sufficient supplies of food and fuel and the boarding schools will operate without any Christmas holidays to accommodate the some 22,000 children attending them.

W. Wade Head, Area Director at Phoenix, Ariz., said "things are under control."

Head said the latest reports put the snowfall since late last week at 79 inches north of Flagstaff and at five feet in upper elevations on the Fort Apache Reservation. He said some difficulties had developed in locations on the Hopi, Fort Apache, and some other reservations "but everything is being taken care of." Head said all schools in his area except for a few day schools closed because of muddy or snowy road conditions were reported all right. The Cibecue School on the Fort Apache Reservation, from which pupils were sent home yesterday because fuel was running low, was open again today after an oil delivery but with reduced attendance from the normal level. Holmes said arrangements had been made for movement today by truck from Phoenix of 60 tons of surplus commodities supplied by the Department of Agriculture. Head explained that additional surplus commodities also are available or en route, to be moved into the Navajo country as needed and when transportation is feasible.

The first three truckload carrying the 60 tons are designated for Tuba City, Window Rock, and Chinle. The foods will be distributed from those points by pickup trucks.

Focal points for supplies of both food and fuel are the schools and chapter houses on the vast Navajo Reservation, which is about the size of the State of West Virginia.

The schools and chapter houses usually become the places of refuge for the Navajos who run out of food or fuel, and concentration of supplies in them protects the students and benefits those Indians who make it to the schools for aid.

Air Force helicopters were out today on mercy missions and four planes were in readiness at Phoenix to start dropping hay again, five tons to the flight, as soon as visibility will permit.

The "choppers" in some instances carried staff members of the Division of Indian Health, and the division also was supplying emergency medical kits for dropping.

Hospitals and clinics in the storm-stricken areas were becoming crowded as patients ready to leave could not be discharged and other patients were continuing to come in. This was true even though the full impact of the effect of the storm and shortages of food and fuel is not expected to be felt until the storm conditions turn for the better, said Doctor Rabeau.