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"Eight federally recognized Indian tribes and approximately 56,000 Indian people have been adversely affected by the recent disastrous weather in South Dakota," Ms. Deer said.

The Dakotas have been hit by freezing temperatures and record snowfall. Snow has drifted to as high as 15 feet in some areas closing all roads and stranding people in remote areas. "Mercifully, there has been only one reported Indian death as a result of this bad weather." Mr. Delbert Brewer, Area Director for the Aberdeen Area Office said.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has been working around the clock to respond to this emergency. The Aberdeen Area Director has established a Disaster Team to respond to this crisis which is operating 24 hours a day to coordinate and direct BIA's efforts to assist tribes within their jurisdiction. In addition, a field coordinator has been dispatched to Pierre, South Dakota to directly assist in the coordination of the efforts of the State, National Guard and FEMA.

"Our crews are working 24 hours a day in two shifts in an attempt to open roads on the reservations to get food and water in," Mr. Brewer said. "At this juncture the main objective is to ensure that the basic needs of the people are met." In order to respond to this crisis, snow blowers were shipped in from the Billings Area Office. However, the Aberdeen Area is now experiencing difficulty getting adequate fuel for equipment, and keeping them maintained. "Extra costs for supplies and labor are being incurred by the Aberdeen Area which were not budgeted for," Deborah Maddox, Director of Tribal Services said. "But we will continue to support Aberdeen for as long as it takes to get the tribes out of this terrible situation."

"The BIA is diligently working on options which may provide additional assistance to meet increased costs caused by this storm," Ms. Deer said, "and we are committed to continue the cooperative and coordinated effort initiated by Aberdeen." Wind chill factors of -70 degree below zero have not helped the ground efforts. Snow blowers were directed to free those in need of medical attention first, but in some cases the critically ill had to be air lifted by National Guard helicopters to local hospitals. The BIA has established shelters close to emergency care units for those that require ongoing medical attention.