

For Immediate Release
June 16, 2006

For More Information:
Muriel Mosher
321-939-4000

**Florida MEP Receives \$750,000 Financial Assistance Award for
Gulf Coast Hurricane Relief**

Federal Aid Comes Just as the South Braces for Another Hurricane Season

CELEBRATION, FL – The Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Florida MEP) has received a \$750,000 Financial Assistance Award from the National Institute of Standards and Technology Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST MEP) to help small-to-midsized manufacturers (SMEs) recover from the hurricanes of 2005.

In March, the Florida MEP submitted a proposal for relief funds, as they were one of five eligible MEP centers in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas who were impacted by last year's major hurricanes. Among the five states, Florida has the majority of SMEs in FEMA-designated counties, with 54 percent of businesses impacted.

“The very core of Florida’s economy, its manufacturers, was dramatically impacted by high winds that ripped roofs off their facilities, heavy rains that saturated their equipment and inventories, and loss of electricity that brought business to an abrupt stop,” said Gene Lussier, Chair of the Florida MEP Board of Directors. “This grant money will be used to help those manufacturers with the greatest needs as well as help workforce restructuring.”

The funding comes at an appropriate time, as the region braces for what may be another tough and intense hurricane season.

“Manufacturing jobs are critical to the state’s economy, and its time we get those businesses back on track,” said Congressman Allen Boyd, D-Florida. “In the aftermath of the devastating 2005 hurricane season, this funding is great news for Florida’s manufacturers and will help sustain and strengthen the MEP Centers to help our manufacturers who were impacted by these hurricanes.”

Florida MEP has developed a program to assist the manufacturers impacted by last year's storms. They will deliver core MEP services, such as helping SMEs increase revenue levels and enabling them to participate in defense and commercial supply chain opportunities.

"Florida is vulnerable to hurricanes and hurricanes can cause major disruptions to business operations," said Representative Corrine Brown, D-Florida. "Through assessment and training, Florida's manufacturers will be able to bring their business productivity back to normal. This grant will help them do this in the least amount of time."

The grant will also be used to educate manufacturers and help them prepare business continuity plans for the upcoming hurricane season.

"I am pleased to learn that Florida MEP is receiving this critical funding. This assistance to hurricane-devastated areas is extremely valuable and will have a long-lasting effect," added Representative Michael Bilirakis, R-Florida. "Florida MEP will now be able to train workers and put a self-sustaining model in place to prepare manufacturers for future disasters."

The Florida MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business "coaches" whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Florida MEP program call 321-939-4000.

-END-