

# Gas leak forces evacuation of some residents on Riderwood Drive

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** — A truck that accidentally ran over a natural gas meter in Butler last Thursday afternoon caused a rupture in the line that shut down a section of Riderwood Drive as emergency personnel worked to repair the leak.  
The leak, at the North Choctaw Co.

Head Start Center, was reported to the Choctaw E-911 Dispatch Center at 3:50 p.m. on May 10th.

Butler Chief of Police Chuck Breland said that someone with a tree-cutting service had parked a truck near the meter and apparently forgot it was there.

"He jumped in his truck, started to drive off and hit the meter," Breland said. Members of the Butler Volunteer Fire Department, Butler Police Department,

Choctaw Co. Sheriff's Department and others responded to the scene near the entrance to Choctaw Co. Elementary, Choctaw Co. High School, the Board of Education's Central Office, and the Choctaw Co. Senior Citizens Center and White Oak Senior Apartments.

Butler Fire Chief Max Edwards said that firefighters immediately began evacuating residences in the area until the Utilities Department could take care of

the leak.  
"At no time were the students and faculty at either of the schools in immediate danger," Edwards said.  
Edwards said that some parents and residents became upset when they were not allowed into the area to pick up children or get to their homes, and some even tried to break through police barricades to

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# Slots available for 10 local people to attend hurricane workshop

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** — Bill Gibson, Director of the county's Emergency Management Agency, told the Co. Commission on Monday that up to 10 emergency responders from Choctaw County may attend a day-long hurricane preparedness workshop on May 30th in Baldwin County.

Gibson said that officials or emergency personnel who would like to attend the workshop may contact him at the EMA office in Butler.

In an matter related to the EMA, Engineer Garry Grantham said that certain county personnel need to be trained and certified in NIMS — National Incident Management System — which seeks to standardize certain, basic techniques and procedures in regard to major emergency situations.

"Some of our workers in the field have got to be certified," Grantham said. "They can sit down at the computer or we could get Bill (Gibson) to teach a class."

Grantham said that each of the basic courses would take "a couple of hours" to complete.

"This has to be done, or else we stand to lose a lot of the federal grants we are getting from FEMA and other agencies."

Gibson, who is a certified NIMS instructor to the "level 400" courses, said that all work could be done here and there is no cost for the training.

"Essentially, anybody who gets involved in disaster response have to have this certification," he said. "If we had a cataclysmic disaster here, people who came to help us would talk this NIMS lingo and they would expect our responders to know what they know."

Gibson said that more than 300 people in Choctaw County have been trained so far in the NIMS courses, but about 40% of all emergency responders and public officials have yet to take the short courses.

In an unrelated matter, the board went into a brief executive session with Engineering Dept. employee John P. Diamond to discuss "good name and character" issues as allowed by the state's Open Meetings Act.

No action was taken following the 15-minute closed-door session with Diamond.

# Repairs underway at Airport

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** — Last week, Engineer Garry Grantham and Commissioner Dandy Brown got a first-hand look at work that must be done at the Choctaw Co. Airport to get the facility re-opened for daytime traffic.

The Airport was closed last fall after a state inspection revealed several safety concerns.

Several trees at both ends of the runway protrude into the flight-path of incoming and departing aircraft and must be cut; the shoulders of the runway have to be built up to eliminate an unsafe drop-off; runway lights must be repaired; and a new windsock installed, among other things that will be required by the state before the Ala. Dept. of Transportation's Aeronautics Division will

issue a new license for the facility. Grantham said there are only a few trees on the east side that must be removed.

"On the west end is where we will run into a problem," he said. Property on that side is owned by an estate and a previous agreement the county had with the owners to keep offending trees in the approach zone cut is believed to have long since expired.

Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin said that both he and Commissioner Brown had men and equipment at the airport on Monday working on building up the shoulders of the runway.

Until the facility is re-permitted to accept air traffic, Grantham said, the Federal Aviation Administration requires that the runways be marked with large, eight-foot wide, bright-

yellow "X's" to warn unsuspecting pilots that the facility is closed.

He said material has been ordered for that purpose.

"It would be good if we could get the other two commissioners and Mr. Grantham to go out there with us and see what progress has been made," Ruffin said. "Maybe tomorrow or the next day, they could send some men and equipment to help."

Ruffin said that once the shoulders are repaired and the trees cut, the facility should be able to pass inspection and re-open, at least for daytime-only traffic.

"We should be in good shape if we can find and cut that one problem tree on west end," Grantham said. "But its going to be ongoing problem if we don't acquire that property for the future."



Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell

## Caboose getting new paint job

**GILBERTOWN** — Gilbertown's historic railroad caboose has a new paint job, thanks to the Town of Gilbertown and a generous financial donation from the Gilbertown Woman's Club which paid for the paint. Mayor Bobby Graham said that future plans include a major interior renovation of the car to spotlight the area's colorful railroad heritage. Persons who would like to make a tax deductible donation to the project may come by Town Hall or send checks or money orders to: Gilbertown Town Hall, Attn: Caboose Renovation Project, P.O. Box 152, Gilbertown, AL 36908. Also, persons who have pictures of trains in the Gilbertown area, newspaper clippings or other railroad artifacts they would like to donate are asked to come by or call Town Hall at (251) 843-2766. (ED. NOTE: Persons who do not wish to give up their original photos may bring them by The Choctaw Sun office in Gilbertown and we will be glad to electronically scan and print them for the town at no cost. — Tommy.)



# Jail Log

**Assault** — Lucious Alstin, 27, 1901 Deas Field Road, Ward, arrested on 5/12/07 by Cottrell. Released on bond.

**DUI** — Larry Brian Adams, 29, P.O. Box 22, Needham, arrested on 5/12/07 by Randall. Released on bond.

**Theft of property (2nd degree)** — Jimmy Capers, Sherwood Manor Apartments, Butler, arrested on 5/7/07 by Lafferty. Released on bond.

**Public intoxication** — Tony Curtis, 44, 38 Marsh Road, Lisman, arrested on 5/9/07 by J. Lovette and Gates. Released on bond.

**Probation revocation** — James Henry Flowers, 53, 1012 Mosley Bridge Road, Gilbertown, arrested on 5/10/07 by Dunn.

**DUI** — Jeremy Wayne James, 22, 12710 Quitman-Meridian Road, Meridian, MS, arrested on 5/12/07 by Jackson. Released on bond.

**Failure to pay traffic fine in Thomasville** — Anthony L. Kennedy, 38, 1035 Clayhill Road, Thomasville, arrested on 5/11/07 by Huckeba. Released to Thomasville P.D.

**Burglary (3rd degree)** — Joseph Dillon Mazingo, age and address not listed, arrested on 5/13/07 by Hill.

**Possession of marijuana (1st degree)**, possession of drug paraphernalia — Amos T. Newson, 27, 55 John

Newson Lane, Columbia, MS, arrested on 5/9/07 by Hunt. Released on bond.

**Fraudulent use of credit/debit card, possession of forged instrument (3rd degree)** — Marcia J. Osborne, 29, 2472 CR 6, Silas, arrested on 5/10/07 by Randall, Dunn and Gates.

**Rape** — Encarnacion Perez, 21, Saltwell Road, Butler, arrested on 5/8/07 by Lovette. Released on bond.

**Possession of marijuana (2nd degree)** — Graylin Pickens, 20, P.O. Box 144, Toxey, arrested on 5/8/07 by Drug Task Force. Released on bond.

**Rape (2 counts)** — Dennis Rutledge, 38, 2469 Bailey Road, Butler, arrested on 5/8/07 by Lovette. Released on bond.

**Probation violation** — Jan Frank Randolph, 45, 2635 Clark Road, Gilbertown, arrested on 5/10/07 by Estes and Randall. Released by probation officer.

**Harassment** — Larry Rackley, 50, Minor Road Apartments, Butler, arrested on 5/11/07, officer not listed. Released on bond.

**Possession of marijuana (1st degree)** — Andy M. Sumrall, 5074 Newberry Road, Lizella, GA, arrested on 5/9/07 by Drug Task Force. Released on bond.

**DUI** — Lance Coby Smith, 20, 177 Lou Drive, Gilbertown, arrested on 5/12/07 by Jackson. Released on bond.

# Some roads will remain closed to "through" trucks until feasibility study is complete

By Tommy Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

**BUTLER** — Last week, two local loggers complained that the County Commission's decision to ban commercial "through" trucks on several county is costing them money as well as setting up a potentially dangerous traffic hazard in downtown Butler.

On Monday, a resident of the Linder Road, one of the roads affected by the commercial truck ban, said he is in favor of keeping it that way.

"When this road was built, it was built for light traffic, it's just gravel and tar," Robert Taylor said. "Then, heavyweight trucks started using it, 70-80 a day, and they were tearing it up."

Taylor said he truly has sympathy for the truck drivers, but added that the county needs to look for alternative solutions.

"I realize there are problems with turning in Butler, maybe you could work with the state on a bypass road somewhere," he said. Taylor suggested that a bypass route from north of Butler on Ala. 17 to the town's Industrial Park Road on the east side of town on Ala. 10 might be an option.

"You already have a turn lane there," he said.

Logger Curtis Bonner, Jr., said his family operates a small business and that it is very dangerous for a loaded log truck to attempt to make a turn onto Ala. 10 from Ala. 17 in the center of town.

"If I cross that (center) line and get hit, who would you suspect would be in the wrong?" he asked. "I can tell you who would be Me."

Bonner said that it is physically impossible to turn a tractor-trailer loaded with long logs without

crossing the center line.

"I can understand why the resident wouldn't want trucks on his road," he said, pointing to Mr. Taylor, "but I would like to meet and try to work this out."

Commissioner Dandy Brown, in whose district two of the roads are located — Linder Road and Sawmill Road — said the county erected the signs after numerous citizens complained about large numbers of commercial trucks driving at high rates of speed and tearing up the roads.

"I have had less maintenance to do since the signs went up," Brown said. "I respect the drivers but I also respect my citizens, too."

Brown said there are alternate state routes, even though they may be a little out of the way.

Commissioner C.D. "Budd" Ruffin said the intersection in Butler was built for another era.

"It's not designed for the length of trucks we have now," he said. "A couple of months ago, a truck turned over in that same intersection."

Ruffin said that, in other towns in the region, the state has come in, purchased property, and built bypasses around the downtown area to eliminate just such problems.

The towns of Camden and Grove Hill have such bypasses, he said.

"We've got to work with the truckers and the residents, but not everyone is going to be satisfied with what we do," he said.

Commissioner Henry Lovette suggested letting Engineer Garry Grantham invite state officials to come and look at the situation and talk about what can and cannot be done.

Last week, Probate Judge D'Wayne May asked attorney Lee McPhearson to research the law as to what rights the commission has to regulate traffic on county roads.

"There are numerous statutes on the books, and the Commission does, in fact, have the authority to set weight restrictions and ban commercial traffic," he said. But you also have a real dilemma here. As a practical matter, if you close the Linder Road and Sawmill Road to commercial traffic, it forces the trucks to come into town and make that sharp 90-degree turn."

The alternative to that would be having trucks use certain city streets.

"But you may find resistance to that notion from the City of Butler," he said.

May agreed that Grantham and an engineer from the Ala. Dept. of Transportation need to look at the problem and come up with a feasibility study.

"Until that can be done, I would ask the Commission to maintain the same status on these roads until we can do this study, rather than just give a knee-jerk reaction to complaints. We do not want to get into a situation where we make a decision at one meeting then come back next meeting and change it."

All four commissioners agreed. Grantham said the main problem is that the 1940's and 1950's-era roads were never built to withstand the heavy truck traffic and the sheer volume that is common today.

May said the county has a number of roads that are "getting beat to death by people who are in the logging business." But logging is also one of the county's major industries, "and we certainly cannot close every road."

Until a study can be done, commercial "through" trucks will continue to be banned on certain, posted county roads, officials said.