



## State: Gas rule suspended

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The suspended regulations will also allow commercial carriers that serve only Nebraska to leave the state to help with relief efforts.

Heineman said the orders would be temporary, but he did not know when they would be lifted. He said officials would continue to monitor the situation.

Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy, also the state's director of Homeland Security, said he had been working to determine where people could be housed. Lincoln has already determined it could take in 200 people and care for them for seven days, he said.

He said a number of private airlines have offered to fly people to the area. The state is currently working the Red Cross, he said.

Sheehy said more information would be made available when officials know more. But evacuees could be received in the next few days, he said.

Today, eight members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Counter-drug Task Force will leave Lincoln to help with law enforcement in Louisiana. Two light armored vehicles will also go with the group.

Some 15 members of the Guard's 24th Medical Company will leave Saturday with two Black Hawk ambulance helicopters for New Orleans, where they will transport patients to surrounding hospitals. There are already about 45 Army National Guard members, primarily military police from the Omaha area, in Louisiana, Heineman said.

# Opening: Breezy opening to national tourney

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"I think this is always an exciting time, particularly for the city of Hastings," Sheehy said after the ceremony. "To have so many people from outside of our state gives us the ability to showcase the city of Hastings and also the area around it. I know the city always puts their best foot forward and provides great hospitality."

The Kool-Aid Man arrived in style, cruising in from the outfield grass in a classic red Cobra automobile with a Wilson Optic Yellow softball in hand.

State softball commissioner Joe Patterson of Hastings welcomed the crowd — many of them wives and children of players — and wished teams luck from the podium set in the middle of the softball diamond.

Tournament director Michael Krings made what may go down as the catch of the tournament, snagging a wind-blown American flag as it was about to hit the ground during the national anthem by singer Ginger tenBensel of Hastings.

"I'm ready to play now," Krings said. "The weather's good, the beer is cold and the burgers are hot, so we're ready to go."

As they strolled in for the pregame ceremony, most of the players — some wearing flip flops or sandals — appeared relaxed and ready to go. Most stood shoulder to shoulder chatting. A few reclined on the grass. Others sat in the bleachers with teammates.

Jerred Johnson, 30, of Armor Inc. of Kearney, Hastings and Grand Island, was among those standing along the first base line awaiting the first pitch.

"We're pretty excited," the outfielder said. "We've worked hard all year to get here, so we're ready to go."

As a Nebraska resident, Johnson said he did not think the wind would play much of a factor in what transpired between the lines.

"The wind's not too bad," he said. "It could be worse."

Delton Whittles, 63, of T-N-T/Master Plumbing in Cambridge, Minn., snickered when asked which position he would be playing.

"Left out on the bench," he said wryly. After driving 8½ hours to Hastings, Whittles said he hoped his third national appearance would be worthy of the effort it took to get here.

"It's nice to be here," he said. "We'll do the best we can."



RICK HOUGHIN/Tribune

**Opening ceremonies at the Men's Class C National Slow-Pitch Tournament featured the Kool-Aid Man as flagbearer, riding in George Anderson's red Cobra.**

First baseman Eric McMullin of Bat Place Da' Boars in Bloomington, Minn., said he hoped that after three consecutive sub-par performances at national events, his team would at least come out on the winning side of a few games this time out.

"We're happy to be here, and we're going to do the best we can," he said. "The fields look in good shape, and I've heard a lot of good things about this complex and the way they run nationals here in Nebraska."

Outfielder Todd VanEpps, 32, of Spikes/Dawees in Wanamingo, Minn., was equally impressed by the facilities.

"The complex looks top-notch," he said. "It really is quite nice compared to some of the others that we've been to and what we usually play on. So far, it's

pretty laid back (but) as you get later on, I'm sure it'll get real intense.

"Guys travel a lot of miles to play some good ball, so I'm sure you'll see some. We'd like to finish at least .500. We're a smaller team compared to what some of the other guys around here have, so that would be just fine for us."

"We like to have a good time — that's what we come around and play for — but when we step in between the lines, we like to play ball."

Shortstop Jason Spears, 28, of Bill's Well Drilling in Minnesota said he has been looking forward to the thrill of experiencing national competition for some time.

"This is what it's all about," he said. "We've been together for 14 years, and this is our first nationals as a team."

The atmosphere was everything he hoped for, he said.

"People are great here," he said. "We've had no trouble. The fields are fantastic. I mean, you ain't gonna find a better complex in the United States. It's pretty nice."

His team's goal was simply to "win the first game," then "take it one at a time," he said.

Southpaw pitcher James Maxie, 37, of Wigged Out from Las Vegas sounded confident as he contemplated his sixth trip to the mound in national competition.

"We're going to try to win it all and go to Oklahoma City," he said. "We have to play together and have a great attitude about the game. I think we could do this."

The championship game is scheduled for 6 p.m. Sunday. If needed, an additional game will be added at 7:15 p.m.