Envelop glitch gives peek at data

Social Security numbers shown.

By Janese Heavin

Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Rex Cone is always concerned about identity theft. So he was especially worried when he received a tax form from the University of Missouri last week that allowed his Social Security number to be displayed through the envelope’s window.

"With all of the public service announcements saying to look out for your Social Security number, here they’ve displayed mine in the mail," he said this morning.

Cone — a Columbia dad who took a course at MU last semester — was among UM students who received Internal Revenue Service 1098-T forms in the mail last week. It’s unclear how many of those mailings allowed Social Security numbers to be visible from the envelope.

Yesterday, UM Vice President for Finance and Administration Nikki Krawitz sent a mass e-mail alerting students about the error. Although the university can’t give credit monitoring advice, she noted that it does have an agreement with Experian to provide credit services at a discounted price.

Spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said administrators aren’t sure what happened to cause the mailing error.

"It could have been a variance of the window placement on the envelopes or the folding machine was a little off," she said. "There’s not a large margin of error on standardized IRS forms."

Hollingshead said the university is taking the situation seriously but doesn’t consider it a security breach.

"The university takes very seriously the protection of its student information," she said. "We always regret when something happens. But it wasn’t a security breach. While we’re sensitive to the issue, we’re thinking the risk is relatively low."

Cone has since checked his credit report and doesn’t believe his number was misused. But he fears others — such as students who have moved without leaving forwarding addresses — could be at risk.
"I don't think people are going around snatching mail trying to find Social Security numbers, but there are hiccups in mail service," he said.

MU graduate student Charles Neiss said he realized his number was completely visible from outside the envelope after receiving the UM e-mail. He said he might check his credit report soon but isn't taking any other precautions.

"I'm not terribly worried about it," he said. "The university and post office were the only ones who handled it."

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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM reacts to possible breach of student Social Security numbers

By Katy Bergen
January 21, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — About 100 people responded to an e-mail sent Tuesday afternoon notifying students that their Social Security numbers may have been visible in the envelope window of a tax form sent by the University of Missouri System, said Nikki Krawitz, UM vice president of finance and administration.

More than 75,000 Form 1098-Ts were mailed at the end of last week. The four-campus system has no way of accessing how many envelopes displayed the numbers. Form 1098-T is an Internal Revenue Service form that reports tuition billed and paid.

"People are concerned as everyone would expect them to be," Krawitz said. "They are expressing their frustration and asking for guidance."

Campus Mail Services committed the folding errors but Krawitz said the system is reviewing the entire process. She said concerned students and parents should look into credit monitoring services, such as Experian, that offers a reduced monthly rate of $3.46 to faculty, staff, retirees and students in the system. The UM System also has consistently encouraged students and employees to take advantage of a free service at www.annualcreditreport.com, Krawitz said.

Columbia resident Rex Cone received Form 1098-T in the mail Friday for taking a class fall semester. He said his Social Security number was printed above his name and could be seen through the envelope window.

"I was originally stunned," Cone said. "It was so blatant — Student Social Security Number — boom!"

Cone’s calls to the University of Missouri Taxpayer Relief Hotline did not go through on Friday. He made three more calls the next day that did not go through. A cashier’s office representative
told him that the problem was a folding error. An accounting services representative told Cone that a supervisor would be notified.

Cone, who already monitors his credit, is not concerned but still felt the error needed to be reported.

"I was not as concerned for myself as I was for students who are not monitoring their own credit information," Cone said.

Cone said a friend's form was sent to the friend's parents' former residence, which could place his friend at a higher risk for identity theft.

Krawitz said the UM System Social Security Number Remediation Project will help ensure that this problem does not happen again. The project was formed more than a year ago in the hopes of removing Social Security numbers from as many information systems as possible. Next year all tax forms will only contain the last four digits of Social Security numbers.

The project aims to move away from using Social Security numbers as an identifying factor to keep people's information secure, Krawitz said.

"It's a comprehensive project meant to change the way we store information into our system so we can better protect this kind of information," she said.

Cone noticed that on his 1099 tax forms, his Social Security number is labeled as a "tax ID number" and that many companies print their statements on larger paper so that folding errors are less likely. The forms are records of income from businesses and share a similar format to Form 1098-T.

The placement of Social Security numbers has been changed on some tax forms, such as the W-2 form, but has not yet been changed on Form 1098-T, Krawitz said.

In 2007, a computer hacker stole the names and Social Security numbers of more than 20,000 UM System employees by accessing an unused database. UM officials urged affected employees to notify creditors and also suggested Experian's credit monitoring services.

A Missourian reporter called the University of Missouri Taxpayer Relief Hotline, which worked, and was directed to http://cashiers.missouri.edu/tra97.htm or a student representative.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM system to offer benefits survey for employees

By Kourtney Geers
January 21, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — University of Missouri System employees will soon be asked to analyze their current pay and benefits package.

System President Gary Forsee wrote in an e-mail to employees that a confidential survey will be conducted online at the end of January to determine what faculty and staff value about their compensation and benefits.

Betsy Rodriguez, system vice president for human resources, said it has been at least 10 years since a survey of this kind has been conducted by the university. The survey questions will cover current benefit areas and are designed to allow employees an "avenue for input on the value of various benefits."

Forsee wrote that the results of the survey will be used to assess the value of benefits and determine which features have the most appeal. Different pay and benefit combinations will also be analyzed.

"For example, some employees may prefer that the university spend more on medical insurance and less on life insurance. Other employees may prefer that benefit dollars are directed toward salary," Rodriguez said.

Hewitt Associates, a human resources consulting firm, will be conducting and analyzing the results of the "Pay and Benefits Preference Survey."

"We have used them for a number of years in related surveys," Rodriguez said. "This survey will complement other Hewitt work for us."
Hewitt Associates conducts a benefits index survey which compares the university's benefits values to other universities. The upcoming employee survey will compare employee perceptions of value to the actual value of the benefit programs.

Although all employees are encouraged to respond to the survey, the expected response rate is approximately 45 percent, according to Rodriguez. The cost of the survey is $100,000 and will be coming from employee benefits. Overall, the university spends $300 million a year on employee benefits.
MU professor speaks on the science behind new mammogram recommendations

By Kelly Brdicka
January 21, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — A University Hospital physician who served on the task force that issued new recommendations for mammograms last year said he regrets that many women under 50 concluded they should not be screened.

"Women should be aware of the risks of mammograms and consult with their physician before undergoing the procedure," said Michael LeFevre, one of 16 members of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and a professor of family and community medicine at MU.

"My recommendation: Discuss at age 40, encourage at age 50, strongly encourage at age 60," LeFevre told an audience largely made up of medical students and professors Wednesday at MU's School of Medicine.

In his presentation, LeFevre explained the controversial new mammogram recommendations and the research behind two of the key conclusions:

- Women over 50 should have mammograms every other year instead of annually. As a doctor, LeFevre said he would recommend biennial (every other year) screenings, "but I will not discourage annual."
- Women under 50 should consult with their physician about benefits and harms of undergoing a mammogram. The investigation found that breast cancer risk is much higher in older women and that younger women are more likely to have a false positive result from a mammogram.

The task force, which began the project in 2006, examined the pros and cons of regular mammograms for women in different 10-year age groups.
The study looked at some of the harms of mammogram screening, including exposure to radiation, overdiagnosis, pain, anxiety and false positives and negatives.

"The goal was to balance benefits and harms and look at net benefit," LeFevre said.

The task force found relevant data to support its conclusion that it is statistically more efficient to screen older women than younger ones.

In one study, 556 women in the 40- to 49-year-old age bracket needed a mammogram to detect one case of invasive breast cancer. Among 80- to 89-year-olds, 143 were screened to reach the same result.

The task force also looked at overexposure to radiation from frequent mammograms and concluded, though not conclusively, that it may increase the possibility of harm.

"At the end, radiation did not weigh heavily in the task force decision," LeFevre said.

However, he emphasized that radiation is not benign and should be taken into consideration.

The issue of overdiagnosis is complicated because it is possible to identify and treat some cancers that ultimately would not have made the patient ill. In those cases, intervention may only have a negative effect, he said.

It may either subject a patient to unnecessary treatment or falsely persuade a woman that her life has been saved.

After reviewing all the data, the task force ultimately found that by screening women between 40 and 49, in addition to women over 50, just one more life out of 1,000 would be saved.

This led to the panel's recommendation that women under 50 should consult with a physician about the harms and benefits of a mammogram. Women over 50 should be screened every two years.

"I was waiting to hear this talk to adjust what I was going to do about advising patients about mammograms," said Anne Fitzsimmons, a physician at the Green Meadows Family Medicine Clinic who attended LeFevre's lecture.
Fitzsimmons said she plans to keep lines of communication open with her patients.

"I want to have a discussion with them about the good and bad things...to discuss this particularly with women under 50," she said. "Benefits are small, and risks are not negligible."

But one member of the audience heatedly accused LeFevre of "throwing 40- to 49-year-old women under the bus" for the sake of cost savings on mammograms.

LeFevre responded with nearly equal fervor: "One sort of vicious thing I am not willing to accept is that this is a political, cost-conserving, rationing-motivated recommendation, which is absolutely, unequivocally false."

Fitzsimmons said she doesn't believe the new recommendations are motivated by cost savings.

"Often, I don't think we take the time to discuss the risk-benefit ratio," she said.

LeFevre explained that women have the same option to have a mammogram at age 40 that they did before, but "the benefit is small and there are harms.

"Women are entitled to this information."
College without a classroom

By Jim Merkel

Every night after he puts his two daughters to bed, Jeremy Spoor sits with his laptop at his home in St. John and starts another night of college classes.

By doing this regularly, Spoor hopes to receive a graduate-level college degree without ever setting foot in a classroom.

Spoor is one of a growing number of students who are showing that with the right attitude and the right motivation, it's possible to receive a college education without the straitjacket of a college schedule.

In his case, Spoor, 29, is going online to obtain an education specialist degree in educational technology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. An educational specialist degree is for those who want to go beyond a master's degree, but don't want a doctorate.

By taking online courses, he can continue as an elementary teacher in the Ritenour School District and keep up with the demands of a family.

"It's more flexible. It's not specific hours I have to be away from my home every other day," Spoor said.

Tiffany Severson also needed flexibility to finish her degree - the flexibility to study anywhere in the world.

The wife of a U.S. Marine, the Chesterfield mother of three moves around a lot. That made it hard for her to finish college in one place.

Severson, 31, had credits from institutions in Florida and Okinawa, Japan, but not enough to finish.

By studying online when she had the time, Severon was able to receive a degree in information technology, multimedia and visual communications in December. The institution she attended, the University of Phoenix, offers online college courses as well as traditional classes at campuses in St. Louis and throughout the country.
But flexibility wasn't the only reason Severson liked to study online.

"I think I learned more going online because I definitely was engaged with it," Severson said.

Students like Severson are having more choices for online education than ever.

Sixty-one percent of colleges and universities offered online courses in 2006-2007, the National Center for Education Statistics reported.

More than 3.9 million college students in 2007 took at least one online course, up from 1.6 million in 2002, according to the Babson Survey Research Group said.

Just how many students have earned degrees online is unknown, but colleges report an increase in online students pursuing their degrees.

St. Louis University has four fully online degree program and nine online certificate programs.

"It's a market need, and a lot of universities are trying to fulfill that need," said Jennifer Giancola, associate dean of St. Louis University's School for Professional Studies, which is aimed at adults 22 and older.

A degree obtained online has as much currency in the business world as one earned on campus. The only deciding factor is whether the academic institution is accredited, several company spokespersons said.

Despite its conveniences and acceptance in the business world, online education may not be for everyone.

"Everybody has a different learning style," Sam Fitzgerald, director of academic affairs at the St. Louis campuses of the University of Phoenix, said. People who are more visual and auditory need to be in a classroom, she said.

"It's not a highly structured environment," Fitzgerald said. "You have to be self-directed."

Besides being an administrator, Fitzgerald teaches online and traditional on-campus classes in business management.

"The kind of individual that is best suited is the person who has an inflexible work schedule," she said.

Online classwork in Fitzgerald's classes includes reading her lectures, writing papers and contributing to an Internet forum.
Not all classes are suited to be taught online, Fitzgerald said. Subjects requiring a lab, like biology or chemistry, would not work.

The cost of an online degree is the same as basic tuition, with a few exceptions.

Some universities charge less for online programs, but they restrict enrollment to students who are 22 and older.

Online programs offer flexibility and convenience, but they have drawbacks.

Those who procrastinate, those who lack initiative should not try online learning, said Michelle Howard, a veteran of online courses.

Howard, 20, of Bridgeton, received a high school diploma online. After two years on a college campus, she decided to finish her bachelor's degree in general studies online.

She expects to graduate this spring from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Online courses can leave students feeling isolated, she said.

"You don't have a teacher to call whenever you have a problem. Basically, you're on your own," she said.

Online courses can give students a wider academic reach, allowing them to earn degrees that might not be available locally.

Adrienne Heilich, a teacher at Sappington Elementary School, was searching for a master's degree program in gifted education. She found one online at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

"There really just aren't that many programs out there for gifted education," Heilich, 23, said.

Studying online offers other advantages as well, Heilich said.

"The classes are really small. When you work online, you interact with the professors and other students in a forum. It's actually part of your homework," Heilich said.

The key to online success seems to be its flexibility.

"That's why I loved online, because it was so flexible," Severson said. "It worked around my schedule."
Governor's address puts focus on jobs

By Terry Ganev

Wednesday, January 20, 2010

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon used his second State of the State address Wednesday night to call for more legislation to create private sector jobs, even as the state budget he proposed would eliminate 544 additional state positions.

Speaking to a joint session of the General Assembly, Nixon said he wanted Missouri to be first in job creation and “first in leading this nation to recovery.”

He said although Missouri had sustained revenue shortfalls of historic proportions, there were signs of improvement. He asked everyone to “hang tough a little longer.”

“Our discipline and hard work are paying off for the people of Missouri,” Nixon said in a 49-minute speech in a packed House chamber. “Let’s make 2010 the year we put politics second and put Missouri first.”

The eroding economy has sapped the state’s tax revenue, forcing more budget cuts, but Nixon pointed to examples where some businesses had managed to expand using state incentives, some of which the legislature approved last year.

“We eliminated the franchise tax for some 16,000 small businesses like Kelley’s Furniture in Kirksville, so they could expand and add jobs,” Nixon said.

The governor asked lawmakers to approve two additional programs designed to help businesses grow. One called “Missouri First” would provide financial incentives to existing Missouri companies to expand plans and payrolls. The other, the Missouri Science and Innovation Reinvestment Act, will use taxes paid by existing bio-tech firms to recruit new companies.

Nixon, a Democrat, got a standing ovation from the Republican-controlled legislature when he said, “Let’s roll up our sleeves and pass this 2010 jobs plan.”
The governor also asked lawmakers to move on bills such as that proposed by state Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, that would limit interest rates payday lenders can charge people facing hard times.

“Missouri laws aren’t tough enough to protect folks caught in this downward spiral of debt,” Nixon said. “We need to stand up for them and pass meaningful payday loan reform this year.”

Nixon also asked lawmakers to take on insurance companies requiring them to cover the diagnosis and treatment of children with autism. He used as an example the family of Myles and Lora Hinkel, whose 7-year-old son Blake underwent therapy at the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders in Columbia.

“When the Hinkels’ insurance company refused to pay for Blake’s therapy, they willingly took the hit,” Nixon said. “Children with autism shouldn’t have to wait for their parents to come up with the cash or for insurance companies to grow a conscience.”

Nixon also asked the legislature to pass a tougher law to take drunken drivers off the road, as well as ethics reforms that give Missourians “a state government that’s as honest and straight-shooting as they are.”

He also announced the creation of the Missouri State Parks Youth Corps, a program to put 1,000 young people to work this summer at 85 state parks and historic sites.

In the year since Nixon took office, the number of state jobs has dropped by 1,800, mostly because state revenues have fallen by $793 million for the current fiscal year. Nixon said his budget still protected elementary education funds and funded state colleges and universities in such a way that they should not increase tuition.

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Nixon calls for job growth while proposed budget cuts jobs

NO MU Mention

By Ben Wieder
January 20, 2010 | 11:29 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon called job growth his top legislative priority in his State of the State address Wednesday, but his budget recommendation for next year calls for a reduction of 544 state jobs.

With more than 1,000 job cuts slated for the current fiscal year, the additional reduction would mean Nixon had cut almost 1,800 state positions in his first two years.

State Budget Director Linda Luebbering said the reductions do not mean Missouri's payroll is unnecessarily bloated.

"This is more about demanding more from people left behind," Luebbering said.

The Department of Social Services would be hardest hit by job cuts, but Luebbering said many of these reductions would be positions already vacant — although increases in welfare programs would give the agency one of the largest percentage increases among the state's departments.

Nixon's budget recommendation calls for $253 million in cuts, $121 million of which is to come from Medicaid.

Luebbering said these cuts wouldn't result in the elimination of any Medicaid services or eligibility reductions but would come from examining services provided, reducing provider rates and better managing higher-cost clients, among other things.

"In some cases, clients will receive less service because they need less service," she said.
The recommendation assumes $300 million in additional federal stabilization funds for Medicaid through an extension of the current enhanced federal rate that pays an extra 10 cents for each matching dollar.

The former Senate Appropriations Chair Gary Nodler, R-Joplin, warned that congressional authorization of those funds is not guaranteed.

To help balance a budget shortfall for the current fiscal year, Nixon's plan will withhold an additional $50 million in funding for the rest of the fiscal year, including a proposed increase to Access Missouri Scholarship Funds for the spring semester, and make use of $150 million in federal stabilization funds that had been put on hold.

This would include the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority funds — $100 million set aside for higher education capital projects originally proposed by Gov. Matt Blunt and more than $30 million for the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center in Columbia.

Although the budget calls for an $18 million increase in funding to the K-12 Education Foundation Formula, Luebbering said the foundation would not be fully funded.

In November, Nixon and the presidents of Missouri's public four-year higher education institutions agreed to a deal that would freeze tuition for in-state undergraduates in exchange for a maximum 5 percent reduction to the higher education appropriation, which his plan maintains.

House Budget Director Allen Icet, R-St. Louis County, did not see Nixon's budget recommendation before the 7 p.m. address but said he was concerned about the number of new programs the governor discussed in his speech.

"Where does the money come from?" he asked.

Icet also expressed surprise at Nixon's call for a bipartisan approach to budget problems.

"I just don't recall that happening last year," he said.
Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said he was surprised that Nixon didn’t focus more on budget challenges because it’s on everyone’s radar.

Actual revenue collection for the current year has been lower than expected. The consensus revenue estimate for 2010 was reduced by an additional $480 million in early January, and tax revenue is now expected to be nearly $800 million less than the original projection for the second consecutive year.

Schaefer, vice chair of the Appropriations Committee, acknowledged some concern about the estimate for next year.

"I think some of those budget predictions are not realistic," he said.

Other legislators said they are also concerned about the budget for two years from now.

Nixon’s budget recommendation includes $1.2 billion in federal stabilization funds that will expire next year.

"It’s a pit we don’t know to get out of," Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said.
JEFFERSON CITY — A deep partisan divide emerged Wednesday night following Gov. Jay Nixon's State of the State address to a joint session of Missouri's legislature.

While Nixon praised his administration's efforts to manage the state's budget shortfall, his address was followed by a blistering attack by Republican Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder. Some of the initiatives Nixon focused on heavily, such as the curbing of payday loans and the cutting of business taxes to spur growth, were either dismissed or harshly criticized by Kinder and House Republican leaders.

In a televised address after Nixon's address, Kinder accused Nixon's administration of enticing some legislators with offers to work in his administration in exchange for votes on certain bills. Kinder also accused Nixon's administration of breaking the promise the governor made Wednesday to not raise taxes and also claimed that he "cooked the books" to make the 2010 budget.

"Last year, the governor refused to consult with us," Kinder said. "He borrowed money from the state's rainy day fund, shuffled money in closed door meetings and 'cooked the books' with Wall Street-style accounting."

Kinder, who has served in his position since 2005 and is the only Republican statewide office holder, has delivered the Republican rebuttal to both of Nixon's State of the State speeches. Seizing on the growing national unpopularity with President Barack Obama's proposed policies, Kinder devoted a large portion of the response to criticizing the health-care reform bills being debated in Washington and the federal stimulus plan.

While the Republicans took shots at Nixon, the governor's speech took full advantage of the theatrical power inherent with State of the State addresses.
Speaking to an overflow crowd from the dais of the House Speaker, Nixon brought in Missourians as visual assistance to promote a diverse array of initiatives: the CEO who moved his company from San Diego because of lower taxes and the Ray family in St. Louis who gave him the opportunity to promote a continued freeze in higher-education tuition.

He said these initiatives would require bi-partisanship, especially because the Republicans control both the House and Senate.

"In everything we do this year, we must put our differences aside and put Missouri first," Nixon said. "Our most pressing economic challenges ... are too important to be sidetracked by partisan bickering."

Rep. Allen Icet, R-St. Louis County, who chairs the House Budget Committee, said last year's budget negotiations were dominated by the administration, and fellow Republicans also criticized Nixon for only issuing his 2010 budget right before the address was delivered, not giving the legislators a chance to look at it.

"If we had bipartisanship, it would make my life much easier," Icet said. "I would not characterize what happened last year as bipartisanship."

While Sen. Frank Barnitz, D-Lake Spring, was unhappy with the Republican response, he was most upset with the accusation that Nixon's administration used misleading accounting techniques to balance the budget. He said the state's Constitution has been amended in such a way that book-cooking could not occur and equated Kinder's speech to one that would be heard during a campaign, not as an official party response.

"I think the Republican response was that he (Nixon) had 'dismantled' the budget or broken the budget," Barnitz said. "You can't dismantle our budget because of previous things with the Constitution. I don't think anything they threw out there was anything other than a partisan way of trying to divide. I found it to be very combative."

Kinder accused Nixon's acceptance of stimulus funds as a reason why unemployment has risen in 2009 and used the salaries of Nixon's staff as a mechanism to portray the governor as out-of-touch with the financial problems of many Missourians.
After asking for a cut in salaries for 2009, Nixon's administration asked for an increase this year. Nixon currently has five members of his staff making over $100,000 annually, compared with two in the final year of former Gov. Matt Blunt's one term in office.

State Budget Director Linda Luebbering said the salary increase was necessary given the increased burden Nixon's staff has in facing what she last year called the "worst economic conditions in our lifetimes."

She said the problems facing Missouri were based on global factors and not an indication that Nixon's policies were detrimental.

"All states are facing difficult budget times," Luebbering said. "The governor's office took cuts last year. It needs more resources to manage difficult times."

After several requests, the governor's office was unavailable to comment on the accusations Wednesday night.
Tigers team up with Red Cross for Haiti relief

By Elisa Essner
January 21, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Sports fans will have a chance to donate to American Red Cross relief efforts for Haiti at Saturday's home basketball games. Members of various MU student groups will collect donations before and after both the men's and women's games at Mizzou Arena.

"It's certainly been on everyone's mind since the tragedy occurred, not just in the athletics department, but throughout the university," said Chad Moller, department spokesman.

The fundraising idea originated after the university approached the department about ways to get involved.

"I know that Chancellor Deaton was looking at ways to engage Tiger Nation and asked us to reach out to fans," Moller said.

This is not the first time the athletics department has mobilized its fans in times of need. After several recent disasters, including the Thailand tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina and 9/11, Tiger fans were asked to donate funds and aid in supply gathering efforts, Moller said.

"In the past, we've felt like our efforts were very successful and the fans very receptive," Moller said.

To get the message to fans, the athletics department will use its Web site as well as social and electronic media.

The 7.0-magnitude earthquake, which struck Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, has launched extensive relief efforts led by the Red Cross and other aid organizations.
The death toll is estimated at 70,000 people, according to the Haitian prime minister.

Mike Odneal, executive director of the mid-Missouri chapter of the Red Cross, encourages people to make cash donations to the agency's international relief efforts.

"The Red Cross doesn't recommend material donations because of the logistic challenges involved in shipping from a local level," Odneal said.

The Columbia Red Cross office has raised about $14,000 from people walking in and calling, he said. The Red Cross assesses need throughout the progression of a disaster and uses cash donations to buy in bulk supplies needed at the moment.

Nationally, the Red Cross has raised more than $23 million through mobile phone donations alone. The money comes via text messages that automatically add a $10 pledge to an individual's phone bill, according to a briefing from the U.S. State Department.

Fans can donate at the next basketball games on Saturday: the MU women's basketball team plays Baylor at 1p.m., and the men's team faces Nebraska at 5 p.m.

Checks can be made out to the American Red Cross. Please note on the check that the donation should go to “Haiti Relief.”