

FEMA: UNPREPARED FOR DISASTER, TURNING AWAY HELP

Under the leadership of Michael Brown, former Commissioner of Judges and Stewards for the International Arabian Horse Association, FEMA has badly bungled the federal response to Katrina and turned away desperately needed help for victims of the storm because of bureaucratic red tape. Under President Bush, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has been sidelined and burdened with new layers of bureaucracy. In 2004, former FEMA Director James Lee Witt warned that he was deeply concerned about where FEMA was headed. The agency was left without the focus and resources to adequately prepare and respond to a disaster like Hurricane Katrina. President Bush's cuts in emergency response programs and the increased bureaucracy created a botched and chaotic response to the largest natural catastrophe to ever hit the U.S.

Relief Efforts Hampered by "Stupid, Idiotic Regulations by FEMA"

FEMA Urged First Responders Not To Respond To Hurricane Areas. While the situation in New Orleans became increasingly worse, FEMA issued a press release urging all fire and emergency services departments not to respond to counties and states affected by Hurricane Katrina without being requested and lawfully dispatched by state and local authorities. [FEMA Press Release, 8/29/05, <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=18470>]

FEMA Refuses to Ship Trailers to Mississippi To Help With Relief Efforts. "Senator Trent Lott called on President Bush to authorize the immediate release of 20,000 trailers sitting idle in Atlanta. Lott said FEMA has refused to ship the trailers because of red tape and paperwork." [CNN, 9/6/05]

FEMA Turned Away Generators. According to Ben Morris, the mayor of Slidell, Louisiana, "We are still hampered by some of the most stupid, idiotic regulations by FEMA. They have turned away generators; we've heard that they've gone around seizing equipment from our contractors." [Associated Press, 9/6/05]

FEMA Would Not Let Red Cross Deliver Food to New Orleans. As the National Guard delivered food to the New Orleans convention center, American Red Cross officials said that FEMA authorities would not allow them to do the same. "The Homeland Security Department has requested and continues to request that the American Red Cross not come back into New Orleans," said Renita Hosler, spokeswoman for the Red Cross. [Pittsburg Post-Gazette, 9/4/05]

FEMA Turned Away Trucks Filled With Water, Prevented Coast Guard From Delivering Fuel, and Cut Communication Lines Of Local Officials. According to Aaron Broussard, president of Jefferson Parish, when Wal-Mart sent three trailer trucks loaded with water, FEMA officials turned them away. Agency workers prevented the Coast Guard from delivering 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel, and on Saturday they cut the parish's emergency communications line, leading the sheriff to restore it and post armed guards to protect it from FEMA. [New York Times, 9/5/05]

FEMA Failed to Utilize Navy Ship With 600-Bed Hospital. "While federal officials scramble to get more military relief to Gulf Coast communities stricken by Hurricane Katrina, a massive naval goodwill station has been cruising offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, underused and waiting for a larger role in the effort... But the Bataan's hospital facilities are empty... The Bataan has been in the stricken region the longest of any military unit, but federal authorities have yet to fully utilize the ship... The role in the relief effort of the sizable medical staff on board the Bataan was not up to the Navy, but to FEMA officials directing the overall effort." [Chicago Tribune, 9/4/05]

FEMA Refused Amtrak's Offer Of Trains To Evacuate Victims. "Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) accused the Federal Emergency Management Agency of 'dragging its feet' when Amtrak offered trains to evacuate victims. 'Offers of medicine, communications equipment and other desperately needed items continue to flow in, only to be ignored by the agency,' she said." [[Financial Times](#), 9/5/05]

FEMA Delays Acceptance of Tens of Millions in Foreign Aid. "Offers of foreign aid worth tens of millions of dollars -- including a Swedish water purification system, a German cellular telephone network and two Canadian rescue ships -- have been delayed for days awaiting review by backlogged federal agencies, according to European diplomats and information collected by the State Department... More than 90 countries and international organizations [have] offered to assist in recovery efforts for the flood-stricken region, but nearly all endeavors remained mired yesterday in bureaucratic entanglements, in most cases, at the Federal Emergency Management Agency." [[Washington Post](#), 9/7/05]

FEMA Not Prepared for Emergencies Under Bush

Federal Government Has Neglected Disaster Preparedness, Left Enormous Vulnerabilities. Disaster and emergency experts have warned for years that governments, especially the federal government, have put so much stress on disaster response that they have neglected policies to minimize a disaster's impact in advance. Robert Hartwig, chief economist for the Insurance Information Institute, said "It's going to be very evident that there were an enormous number of vulnerabilities that weren't addressed. There's going to be a lot of finger-pointing." [[Newhouse News Service](#), 8/31/05]

Federal Auditors Criticized Administration Emergency Response Plans In 2004. A March 2004 General Accounting Office report disclosed that not one of 23 major departments and agencies it investigated had fully complied with a 1998 presidential directive to develop emergency plans complying with FEMA guidelines. The GAO faulted FEMA for inadequate oversight of agencies' plans and for a lack of detail in supplied guidance, noting, "If FEMA does not address these shortcomings, agency... plans may not be effective in ensuring that the most vital government services can be maintained in an emergency." [[Washington Post](#), 3/31/04]

Bush Was Warned That First Responders' Training Did Not Focus Enough On Natural Disasters. "A report from the congressional General Accounting Office says the Bush Administration was warned this summer that some first responders were concerned their training and equipment was tilting too much toward combating terrorism rather than natural disasters... The emphasis changed once the Federal Emergency Management Agency lost its independence and joined the 22-agency Homeland Security Department in March 2003." [[Associated Press](#), 9/6/05]

Bush Buried FEMA "Beneath a Massive Bureaucracy"

Bureaucratic Reconfigurations Have Stripped FEMA Of Its Focus. When FEMA was folded into the Department of Homeland Security, it became part of the new department's prime focus on terrorism, not winds or floods. The result has been shakeups and reconfigurations that have left the old agency stripped of many of its funding programs and some of its money, prompting cries of protest from emergency managers across the country. [Editorial, [Wall Street Journal](#), 8/16/04]

Former FEMA Director James Lee Witt: Extra Bureaucracy Hindered FEMA's Success. Former FEMA Director James Lee Witt told the House Government Reform Committee in 2004: "I want you to know that I and many others in the emergency management community across the country are deeply concerned about the direction FEMA is headed. First, we are greatly concerned that the successful partnership that was built between local/state/federal partners and their ability to communicate, coordinate, train, prepare, and respond has been sharply eroded. Second, FEMA... is being buried beneath a massive bureaucracy whose main and seemingly only focus is fighting terrorism while an all hazards mission is getting lost in the shuffle. I firmly believe that FEMA should be extracted from the DHS bureaucracy and re-establish it as an independent agency reporting directly to the President... Third, the FEMA Director has lost Cabinet status and along with it the close relationship to the President and Cabinet Affairs." [House Government Reform Committee, 3/24/04]

Bush Cut FEMA's Disaster Relief Funds

Bush Tried To Cut Post-Disaster Relief Funds For Victims of Natural Disasters. In 2003, Bush proposed a budget that cut immediate post-disaster relief funds. Bush would put \$300 million in the disaster-preparation grants programs. Post-disaster grants averaged more than \$380 million a year from 1996 through 2001, not including money allocated after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. [[The Ledger](#), 2/6/03]

Disaster Mitigation Programs Slashed Since 2001. Since 2001, key federal disaster mitigation programs, developed over many years, have been slashed and tossed aside. FEMA's Project Impact, a model mitigation program created by the Clinton Administration, has been canceled outright. Federal funding of post-disaster mitigation efforts designed to protect people and property from the next disaster has been cut in half, and now communities across the country must compete for pre-disaster mitigation dollars. [[Baltimore City Paper](#), 9/29/04]

- **In 2003 White House Slashed Mitigation Programs In Half.** President Bush tried to kill the FEMA'S Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which provides an extra percentage of federal disaster aid to states and communities so they can prepare for future catastrophes. As a result, in 2003, Congress approved a White House proposal to cut HMGP in half. Such post-disaster mitigation efforts, specialists say, are a crucial way of minimizing future losses. [[Gambit Weekly](#), 9/28/04; [The Ledger](#), 8/18/04]

Democrats Call for Immediate Action to Help Victims

Senate Democrats Urge Immediate Action To Help Victims Of Hurricane Katrina. Senate Democrats are calling for immediate access to Medicaid, emergency housing vouchers, and food stamps for victims and the expansion of the Disaster Unemployment Insurance Program. Democrats want to alleviate the burden on school districts with funding for additional teachers, teachers' aides, and counselors and are proposing the establishment of an "800" number for a national victims database and information. Democrats want to give private employers incentives to hire displaced victims by temporarily qualifying them for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and ensure that Guard units serving in the Gulf Coast qualify for federal benefits. Democrats are also calling for the President to submit regular reports to Congress on the status of recovery efforts. [Senate Democratic Caucus, 9/5/05]