

# Press Release

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## **UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE KATRINA**

President Bush has directed Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff to chair a Cabinet-level task force to coordinate all Federal assistance and recovery efforts in response to the catastrophic effects caused by Hurricane Katrina.

The federal government positioned unprecedented resources in affected areas prior to the hurricane's landfall. Secretary Chertoff activated the National Response Plan by declaring an "Incident of National Significance" as a result of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina "the first-ever use of this designation. An incident of national significance is a major disaster or emergency that overwhelms the resources of state and local authorities, requiring significant coordination across the Federal government.

Federal disaster declarations are covering 90,000 square miles of affected areas.

As President Bush said yesterday, our first priority is saving lives. Our second priority is to sustain lives by ensuring adequate food, water, shelter, and medical supplies for survivors and dislocated citizens. Our third priority is executing a comprehensive recovery effort.

Hurricane Katrina has proved to be one of the most dangerous storms in U. S. history. Hazards from weakened and damaged trees, downed power lines, high water, and other dangers remain. We urge citizens to be mindful of instructions from state and local officials who have asked that individuals remain in shelters, homes, or safe places until given further notice.

**Highlights of the federal response as of 8:00 a.m. include:**

**Department of Homeland Security Incident Leadership & Management**

🕒 ▪ **National Response Plan (NRP).** The NRP, finalized in December 2004, fully mobilizes the resources of the entire federal government to support response and recovery efforts of state and local authorities—particularly in the event of a catastrophic incident like Hurricane Katrina. The NRP brings all of the federal government’s response and recovery resources under a single effort led by the Department of Homeland Security.

This streamlines the process of coordinating immediate federal support to the states, cities, and counties that need federal assistance. The NRP was jointly developed by federal, state, local, tribal, private sector, and professional responders and provides a unified and coordinated response effort.

🕒 ▪ **Interagency Incident Management Group (IIMG).** Secretary Chertoff activated the IIMG. This group of senior experts from all federal departments, key agencies, and the American Red Cross, provides the White House, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and other national leaders with a focal point for strategic coordination and recommended courses of action.

🕒 ▪ **Principal Federal Official (PFO).** Michael Brown, head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been designated by Secretary Chertoff as the PFO to lead the deployment and coordination of all Federal response resources and forces in the Gulf Coast region. This role, established under the NRP, streamlines leadership and gives state and local leaders one point for delivery of critical Federal aid and support.

🕒 ▪ **National Communications System (NCS).** The National Communications System is responsible for coordinating restoration of national security and emergency preparedness telecommunications services and facilities. NCS is assisting telecommunications companies which have suffered damage or lost power and equipment.

🕒 ▪ **Protective Security Advisors (PSAs).** Protective Security Advisors stationed in areas affected by the hurricane have been deployed to state Emergency Operations Centers to support state and local emergency management officials. PSAs are providing federal, state, and local officials with real-time subject matter expertise regarding protection of critical infrastructure and key resources.

🕒 ▪ **Customs and Border Protection (CBP).** More than 100 CBP officers are en route to the affected area to provide security and law enforcement support during the evacuation of the Super Dome.

## **FEMA**

🕒 ▪ FEMA deployed more than 57 National Disaster Medical System Teams and 28 urban search and rescue teams with nearly 1,800 personnel to save lives and render medical assistance. Teams have rescued more than 350 hurricane victims.

- 🕒 ▪ FEMA has moved millions of commodities of water, ice, and meals ready to eat (MRE). FEMA also supplied generators and thousands of cots and blankets.
- 🕒 ▪ FEMA established a Housing Area Command to oversee all temporary housing operations across the Hurricane Katrina impacted areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Housing Strike Teams are being readied for deployment into each state to begin the process of quantifying temporary housing needs.
- 🕒 ▪ Individuals in declared counties can register online for disaster assistance at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or call FEMA's toll free registration line at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).

### **Coast Guard**

- 🕒 ▪ The Coast Guard's mission emphasis is saving lives and ensuring the safety of people in the areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Coast Guard, U.S. Marine Corps, and Air National Guard aircraft and crews are rescuing people day and night.
- 🕒 ▪ Coast Guard air and boat crews have assisted in the rescue of nearly 2,000 people, and Coast Guardsmen are assisting in the evacuation of refugees at the Superdome.
- 🕒 ▪ The Coast Guard is working closely with FEMA to identify needs and is delivering relief supplies aboard its C-130 cargo planes.
- 🕒 ▪ Approximately 4,000 Coast Guardsmen are working in the affected areas on response and recovery efforts. This includes 15 Coast Guard cutters, 37 airplanes and rescue helicopters, 63 small boats, three maritime safety and security teams, and three oil and hazardous material response teams.
- 🕒 ▪ The hurricane has caused catastrophic devastation to critical waterways. This will require prolonged restoration efforts and environmental cleanup operations.
- 🕒 ▪ Currently, five oil rigs from West Delta Platform are missing, one submersible rig is grounded, two mobile offshore drilling units are adrift, and two semi-submersibles are listing.
- 🕒 ▪ The ports of Gulfport and Pascagoula are closed. The port of Mobile is also closed, with the exception of barge traffic. The Intracoastal Waterway is open from the Mobile Ship Channel east to Apalachicola, Fla., and closed from the Mobile Ship Channel west to Pass Christian, Miss.
- 🕒 ▪ The Mississippi River is closed to deep draft traffic from Sea Buoy to Mile Marker 55, and open to tug and barge traffic only from Sea Buoy to Mile Marker 507, Natchez, Miss. Deep draft vessels may move within anchorages if they have pilots on board.
- 🕒 ▪ The Coast Guard is conducting port surveys and moving assets into these ports to restore buoys, lights, and aids-to-navigation, thus allowing maritime traffic to safely

navigate.

### **National Guard**

- ⌚ ▪ Currently there are more than 13,000 National Guard members on state active duty in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. By tonight that number will increase more than 20,000. And we will provide as many more as may be required
- ⌚ ▪ Through Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) agreements, more than 320,000 National Guard soldiers, airmen, and their equipment from all states are available to support emergency operations.
- ⌚ ▪ The National Guard is augmenting civilian law enforcement capacity, not acting in lieu of it.
- ⌚ ▪ National Guard elements from nearly all states are providing or are positioned to provide additional assistance as required.

### **Department of Defense**

- ⌚ ▪ As directed by the Secretary of Defense and in accordance with the National Response Plan, U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) is supporting the FEMA disaster relief efforts. NORTHCOM, the lead Department of Defense (DOD) organization for Hurricane Katrina response, is moving and/or mobilizing resources to support FEMA's response and recovery efforts.
- ⌚ ▪ NORTHCOM established Joint Task Force (JTF) Katrina to act as the military's on-scene command in support of FEMA. Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, commander of the First Army in Fort Gillem, Ga., is the JTF-Commander. JTF Katrina will be based out of Camp Shelby, Miss.
- ⌚ ▪ The Department of Defense will make available a fleet of approximately 50 helicopters to support FEMA's operations. Eight civilian swift water rescue teams have been transferred from California to assist with recovery operations.
- ⌚ ▪ DOD anticipates providing a 500-bed hospital and is considering deploying as many as 800 personnel to assist the American Red Cross with shelter support.
- ⌚ ▪ DOD is moving to the area approximately eight ships to provide medical support, humanitarian relief, and transportation.
- ⌚ ▪ DOD also anticipates moving the hospital ship USNS Comfort from Baltimore, Maryland to the Gulf region.
- ⌚ ▪ DOD is prepared to provide over 20 million pre-packaged Meals-Ready-To-Eat (MRE) to augment current food supplies

## **Environmental Protection Agency**

- 🕒 ▪ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has temporarily waived standards for gasoline and diesel fuels in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida under the Clean Air Act. Waivers have also been sent to the Governors of the 46 remaining states and territories providing temporary relief from volatility and sulfur standards.
- 🕒 ▪ These waivers will ensure that fuel is available throughout the country to address public health issues and emergency vehicle supply needs. They will be effective through September 15 and only apply to volatility standards - the rate at which fuel evaporates - and the amount of sulfur in fuel.
- 🕒 ▪ EPA emergency and response personnel are helping assess the damage and prepare to support cleanup in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. Teams are traveling to affected areas and conducting aerial assessments.

## **Department of Health and Human Services**

- 🕒 ▪ Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt declared a public health emergency for Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama. This action allows the Department to waive certain Medicare, Medicaid, State Child Health Insurance Program, and HIPAA requirements as well as make grants and enter into contracts more expeditiously during this emergency.
- 🕒 ▪ HHS is establishing a network of up to 40 medical shelters, staffed by 4,000 medical personnel and with the collective capacity of 10,000 beds. The first shelters are in place in Baton Rouge and currently treating patients. More shelters will be opened within hours.
- 🕒 ▪ HHS identified 2,600 beds in hospitals in the immediate area and 40,000 beds nationwide should they be needed.
- 🕒 ▪ HHS continues to ship pallets of basic first aid materials and supplies to the area, and the Centers for Disease Control and Food and Drug Administration are assembling public health teams.

## **Department of Energy**

- 🕒 ▪ Department of Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman has authorized the release of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

## **Department of Transportation**

- 🕒 ▪ The Department of Transportation (DOT) is working closely with state and local authorities, federal partners, and private sector transportation service providers to assess

damage to transportation infrastructure and assist in immediate recovery efforts.

- 🕒 ▪ To date, DOT has shipped 13.4 million liters of water, 10,000 tarps, 3.4 million pounds of ice, and 144 generators among other essential supplies to affected areas.
- 🕒 ▪ DOT has also deployed teams from the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Aviation Administration and Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to help clear roads and inspect bridges, establish communications and increase operations at major airports, and to move generators to pipeline pumping stations to restore the flow of petroleum products to the southeast.

### **Department of Agriculture**

- 🕒 ▪ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is sending experienced emergency response personnel to assist in incident response coordination. To date, the Forest Service has assigned 13 management and logistical teams and 35 crews of 20 people each to the affected areas and host communities. These resources are intended to assist in setting up logistics staging areas, the distribution of food products, and debris removal.
- 🕒 ▪ USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is providing food at shelters and mass feeding sites, issuing emergency food stamps and infant formula, and distributing food packages directly to needy households. 80,000 pounds of USDA-donated commodities which consist of mixed meats, cheese, peanut butter, and pudding, arrived in Baton Rouge, La. today. Additionally, four trucks of baby food products were ordered for immediate shipment. One truck of infant formula will arrive in Baton Rouge today. The other three trucks of baby food products are on the way.
- 🕒 ▪ FNS will provide waivers to food stamp recipients to enable them to use funds to purchase hot meals and will be expediting deliver of September benefits. Two truckloads of commodities have been dispatched to New Orleans with more to follow as requested.
- 🕒 ▪ USDA Rural Development will provide a six-month moratorium on payments for 50,000 low-income residents in the affected areas. USDA will also be taking an inventory of vacant USDA housing to help accommodate displaced residents.

### **Department of Labor**

- 🕒 ▪ The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) continues to coordinate with the interagency community in providing support as outlined in the National Response Plan.
- 🕒 ▪ OSHA Region VI has deployed its eight member Emergency Response Team to Baton Rouge to assess the situation and provide technical assistance to recovery workers and utility employers engaged in power restoration.
- 🕒 ▪ In addition, OSHA is contacting major power companies in the affected areas to

provide safety briefings to employees at power restoration staging areas.

- 🕒 ▪ OSHA is releasing public service announcements to inform workers about hazards related to restoration and cleanup.

- 🕒 ▪ OSHA has identified all Lowes and Home Depot stores in Louisiana and will be distributing safety and health fact sheets and materials to these locations.

### **Department of State**

- 🕒 ▪ The Department of State advises concerned family members of foreign nationals residing or traveling in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina to try to reach their family members by phone, email, or other available means.

- 🕒 ▪ If family member cannot be reached, the State Department recommends they contact their embassy in Washington, D.C. for assistance. Reports from the region indicate that some phone lines are working but experiencing heavy call volume, so family members are encouraged to keep trying if lines are busy.

### **Department of Treasury**

- 🕒 ▪ The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced special relief for taxpayers in the Presidential Disaster Areas struck by the hurricane. These taxpayers generally will have until October 31 to file tax returns and submit tax payments. The IRS will stop interest and any late filing or late payment penalties that would otherwise apply. This relief includes the September 15 due date for estimated taxes and for calendar-year corporate returns with automatic extensions.

### **General Services Administration**

- 🕒 ▪ The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has updated links to Web sites with useful information for victims of the hurricane and interested citizens on the federal government's official portal, [www.FirstGov.gov](http://www.FirstGov.gov) and its Spanish-language counterpart, [FirstGov.gov en Espanol](http://www.FirstGov.gov/en/Espanol/) (<http://firstgov.gov/Espanol/index.shtml>).

### **Small Business Administration**

- 🕒 ▪ The Small Business Administration (SBA) will position loan officers in federal and state disaster recovery centers. SBA is also prepared to provide help in other states in the eastern half of the country where the storm may also lead to disaster area declarations.

### **American Red Cross**

- 🕒 ▪ The American Red Cross is providing a safe haven for nearly 46,000 evacuees in

more than 230 Red Cross shelters, from the panhandle of Florida, across Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and Texas.

- 🕒 ▪ The Red Cross is launching the largest mobilization of resources for a single natural disaster involving thousands of trained disaster relief workers, tons of supplies, and support.
- 🕒 ▪ The American Red Cross is asking everyone in affected areas to remain safely in shelters until local officials have deemed it safe to leave.
- 🕒 ▪ The Red Cross relies on donations of the American people to do its work. Citizens can help by calling 1-800-HELP-NOW (1-800-435-7669) or by making an online contribution to the Disaster Relief Fund at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).
- 🕒 ▪ Because of logistical issues, the Red Cross cannot accept donations of food or clothing.

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