

Disaster News Update –July 7 to 13, 2007

RECENT DISASTER / HAZARD ACTIVITY (Past 7 days)

- **Drought:** California, Arizona, Nevada, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Wyoming, Kentucky, Virginia
- **Fire:** California, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, South Dakota, Colorado, Alaska, Wyoming
- **Heat:** Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, Oregon, South Dakota, California, Texas, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, Montana
- **Heavy Rains / Flooding:** New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Texas, Oklahoma
- **Transportation Accident:** Plane Crash (FL)
- **Tornado:** South Carolina

CURRENT FEMA MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATIONS (Past 30 days)

- [Oklahoma](#): Severe Storms, Flooding, and Tornadoes
- [Kansas](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [New York](#): Severe Storms and Flooding (7/2)
- [Texas](#): Severe Storms, Tornadoes, and Flooding (6/29)
- Fire Declarations: [Washington \(7/8\)](#), [South Dakota \(7/8\)](#), [Nevada \(7/8\)](#), [California \(7/8\)](#), [Utah \(7/7\)](#), [California \(7/7\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#), [Nevada \(7/6\)](#), [Utah \(6/30\)](#), [California \(6/29\)](#), [Hawaii \(6/28\)](#), [California \(6/24\)](#), [Alaska \(6/22\)](#), [Colorado \(6/19\)](#)

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM NEWS

St. Bernard creating teams of volunteers (New Orleans Times Picayune, 7/11)

St. Bernard Parish emergency officials are seeking volunteers to help out in emergencies, including hurricane evacuations. The parish's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness wants to put together teams of volunteers with various skills who are willing to help in times of need, the parish said in a recent news release. Volunteer services will range from processing residents being evacuated during hurricanes or other emergencies, to donating services as boat operators, clerks, computer techs and equipment operators. "We need people who can make a commitment to help their community above themselves," David Dysart, manager of the parish's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, said in the news release. Dysart said Katrina showed there isn't enough manpower in government to handle all emergencies, evacuations and other needs, especially now that transportation will be provided for residents who can't leave on their own during an ordered evacuation, Dysart said. The old Super Wal-Mart site on West Judge Drive next to the parish government complex and the old Kmart site in the 4200 block of East Judge Perez Drive in Meraux have been designated as hurricane evacuation pick-up points for residents who need transportation during an evacuation order, the news release said. Dysart said volunteers would be needed to help register the evacuees boarding the buses. He also said there could be a need for equipment operators, ham radio operators, mechanics and other helpers.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM NEWS

[Mississippi Schools to Set Storm Shelter Standards](#) (FEMA, 7/12)

Officials broke ground late June for two new schools in Harrison County that also will serve as state-of-the-art storm shelters for residents in the event of severe weather. Two Hazard Mitigation Grants for about \$19 million will pay for shelters in D'Iberville and west Harrison County high schools that will incorporate special construction measures such as double roof and windows to withstand 200 mph wind gusts. The grants will also pay for specially reinforced concrete and steel shelter areas with backup water, sewer and electrical systems. The two shelters will provide refuge for more than 5,000 Coast residents when another hurricane strikes. The schools, to be completed in 2008 and 2009, will serve as examples of near absolute protection against a tornado, hurricane or other severe weather event. "These schools will set storm safety standards for others throughout Mississippi and the southeast U.S.," said Dennis Kizziah, acting director of the FEMA Mississippi Transitional Recovery Office. Mike Womack, MEMA director, commended Harrison County School Superintendent Henry Arledge for his tireless work in seeing the projects come to fruition and termed him a visionary in his efforts to educate and shelter Mississippi coast citizens.

[FEMA Announces New Pre-Disaster Planning Office in Alaska](#) (FEMA, 7/10)

FEMA officially opened their Alaska Area Office in the Anchorage Federal Building Annex Monday, 9 July 2007. FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison announced that the new office will serve as a work station for agency pre-disaster preparedness initiatives, and as an initial operating facility for federally declared disasters. "The New FEMA is committed to working with our partners on the ground and at every level of government," said Paulison. "Regional offices help us build strong relationships and open lines of communication before a disaster strikes. A permanent regional presence is an essential part of our effort to build the foundation for FEMA's future activities in Alaska." The FEMA Alaska Area Office will also serve as a forward field office for pre-disaster preparedness and planning, as well as a staging and work area for Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) teams. FEMA staff will be joined by uniformed Defense Coordinating Element (DCE) personnel.

[Tampa Red Cross To Offer Youth Aid Projects](#) (Tampa Tribune, 7/7)

Angelina Samreny hates turning down students when they call her office looking for volunteer opportunities. As youth specialist for the American Red Cross of Tampa Bay, she gets calls from students looking to join the organization's peer educational teams, assist in disaster shelters or help with training courses. But the spots fill up quickly, Samreny said, leaving more than 10 students a week wondering what to do next. One solution may be the newly formed Youth Council. The 12-member council plans service projects for ages up to mid-20s and includes Red Cross clubs in South Tampa schools such as Academy of the Holy Names, Ballast Point Elementary and Robinson High. Council director Shelby Ericsson, 16, said the group's first meeting July 28 will determine project specifics. Potential projects include providing supply-filled backpacks for the homeless, educating people about homelessness and making survival kits for disaster victims.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY NEWS

AL Recovery Shows “Enterprise” (Disaster News Network, 7/13)

"Crunch time" is fast approaching for the long-term recovery committee working in the Enterprise, Ala., area, as a six-month federally funded rental assistance program nears an end for residents who survived a deadly tornado there. Grants from FEMA to uninsured residents to help them get into temporary housing and pay rent after the March 1 twister are scheduled to end in two months. "People can apply for an extension, but there's no guarantee they will get it," said the Rev. Gary Daniel, pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Enterprise. "In the meantime, we still have many families still needing rebuilds. In another couple months, we'll be at real crunch time." Helping affected residents has been the goal of the Recovery Organization of Coffee County, which was formed shortly after the tornado devastated the town, killing nine people including eight students at Enterprise High School. The storm caused some \$307 million in damages in the town of 23,000 people. Rebuilding the local high school and an elementary school was expected to cost about \$70 million, according to school officials. The 30-member recovery committee is composed of volunteers from local churches, national recovery organizations and state-employed caseworkers. It was formed to assist with long-term recovery needs for those who suffered major damage but were either uninsured or underinsured.

NY Town Responds to Deadly Flooding (Disaster News Network, 7/13)

Despite being flooded in the past, residents in this small southern New York town never expected a June storm to set off deadly flash flooding that swamped the area. "What we thought was just a thunderstorm turned into a massive flood event in a couple of hours," said the Rev. Dale Ashby of Colchester Community United Methodist Church. "If you saw the stream that flooded, you wouldn't believe it," added the Rev. Nancy Asbury of For Faith Presbyterian Parish in nearby Roscoe. "It's maybe six inches deep normally, but it washed away huge sections of road and trees. I couldn't believe what it looked like when I got there." The June 19 flash flood that swelled the normally tiny stream left four people dead and two missing. Six homes were destroyed, 12 were severely damaged and more than 30 others sustained some damage. The flooding occurred after 6 to 8 inches of rain drenched the area during a two-hour period. Asbury said most of the affected residents did not have flood insurance because they did not live in a flood plain. Despite the area being flooded in past years, the flash flood caught everyone off-guard, Ashby said. Both Ashby and Asbury were working with community members and outside volunteers to help clean up the damage and debris. Volunteer teams spent the past weeks cleaning out basements and first floors, along with cutting up trees and removing debris from yards. Both pastors visited affected homes to see if their services were needed.

Remembering Hurricane aftermath in Cobb (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 7/12)

In July two years ago, rain from Hurricane Dennis drenched southwest Cobb County. 430 homes in southwest Cobb were affected by flooding from the hurricane. Those figures include 54 houses that were damaged beyond repair and 166 with major damage.

Although the flood broke records in Cobb, it wasn't big enough to be declared a federal disaster. Some displaced families received grants totaling \$181,000 through the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. The county received \$2.5 million in federal emergency housing money to buy 22 of the most badly damaged homes. After the waters receded, a grassroots volunteer group of more than 20 churches, nonprofits, businesses and local governments organized to help their Cobb neighbors get back on their feet. The Cobb Disaster Recovery Program helped 84 families in 18 months. More than 200 volunteers mucked out houses and repaired 15 houses with more than \$8,000 in damage. Volunteers canvassed neighborhoods to find families needing help, and social workers signed up to give direction to families in trouble. Lanita Lloyd, Cobb Emergency Management deputy director, said the community was left to support itself in the recovery process. She said the mission became a personal one. Gene DeWulf, the disaster group's program manager, said a volunteer plotted all of the damaged homes on a map, which helped the group find families needing help. Myrt Simpson said the mud wasn't dry on the floor of their home before two women from a coalition of Lutheran churches arrived to help them pack up their personal belongings. Later, volunteers from another church joined the group to help tear out and replace flooring and Sheetrock.

Buffalo tree-removal blitz to end in 2 weeks amid gripes (Buffalo News, 7/12)

Buffalo's tree-removal blitz will be finished in two weeks, and hundreds of residents think the city moved too quickly in its chopping mission. Some think the city fast-tracked the process to make sure the tab for all tree removals ultimately would be picked up by Washington. The city faces an October deadline for receiving reimbursements from FEMA, although some local leaders are asking for a one-year extension. More than 6,000 trees have been taken down in the city, including 2,500 that were removed within weeks after the October storm. The final phase began this spring and targeted 3,991 trees that experts concluded should be removed. Fewer than 400 of the damaged trees along city streets remain, and acting Public Works Commissioner Daniel E. Kreuz said he expects those to be removed by the end of the month. City Hall offices have been flooded with hundreds of complaints over the past couple of months from property owners who don't think their trees should have been cut down.

Rain Remains a Pain for the Plains (Disaster News Network, 7/11)

A flood-weary region cringed again early this week as more rain fell, causing more high water. Storms drenched parts of Oklahoma and Texas, dropping 3 to 6 inches of rain. Thunderstorms were forecast for the region for the rest of the week. The hardest hit areas in the latest deluge included the Oklahoma counties of Atoka, Cleveland, Creek, Grady, McCurtain, Muskogee, Oklahoma and Pottawatomie counties, the Department of Emergency Management reported. Flood warnings were in effect for parts of central and eastern Oklahoma. High water again closed numerous roads and highways. In McClain County, high water forced the evacuation of several families. The storms Monday and Tuesday also brought high winds to parts of the state. Businesses and several homes saw wind damage in Eufaula and Muskogee County. More than 13,000 people lost power during the storm and some 1,800 remained without power late Tuesday. Four structures were damaged Monday night by a tornado that hit Warner. A church and a mobile home sustained roof damage.

CT Storm's Insured Toll \$56 Million (Hartford Courant, 7/11)

A mid-April windstorm with drenching rains caused an estimated \$56 million of insured property damage in Connecticut, part of the storm's total \$1.225 billion of claims in 18 states and Washington, D.C., an industry group said Tuesday. The Property Claim Services unit of New Jersey-based ISO, which tracks catastrophe claims, reported that U.S. property-casualty insurers are expected to pay \$2.175 billion for second-quarter property claims stemming from six catastrophes in 25 states. One of them was the mid-April storm that spawned tornadoes and large hail in some states and brought as much as 7 inches of rain in parts of Connecticut. It also caused some of the worst flooding in the state in 14 years, although damage from flooding by surface waters is not covered by regular homeowners' policies. FEMA, which initially refused to declare Connecticut a disaster area after the April nor'easter, later made disaster aid available to every county except Tolland County. ISO said this year's second quarter tied the record for the second-lowest number of catastrophes in a second quarter in the past 10 years. In 2004's second quarter, six catastrophes spurred \$2.33 billion in claims.

Georgia's Wildfires: \$100 Million Up In Smoke (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 7/11)

Jimmy Brown hoped he'd seen the last of the Great Fire of '07, the largest wildfire ever to burn Georgia. "It was putting up some pretty good smoke Sunday. We still have some hot spots in the Okefenokee," Brown, fire chief for Ware County, said Tuesday. "But it's not likely to come out of the swamp." For two months, starting in mid-April, the fire in Southeast Georgia raged, waned, raged anew and spilled into Florida before heavy rains and firefighters from 44 states, Puerto Rico and Canada put it out. Even Atlantans, 215 miles to the north, awoke a couple of mornings to hazy, smoky skies. Local and state officials say the destruction tops \$100 million so far in Georgia alone. Remarkably, nobody died. And less than two dozen structures --- houses, trailers and sheds --- burned.

- \$44.1 million cost to fight the fire
- \$11 million (estimate) covered by state of Georgia
- \$33.1 million (estimate) expected to be covered by FEMA
- Firefighters came from 44 states, Puerto Rico and Canada
- Main counties affected: Ware, Charlton, Clinch
- 3,326 people fought the fire
- \$60 million estimated value of timber lost
- 440,732 acres burned in Georgia
- 560,000 total acres burned, including Florida

11 Additional Counties Designated for Individual Assistance (FEMA, 7/10)

FEMA announced today that 11 additional counties are now eligible for individual assistance to help homeowners, renters and businesses recover from the effects of the recent severe storms, tornadoes and flooding. Archer, Bell, Burnet, Eastland, Hood, Parker, Starr, Victoria, Webb, Wichita and Williamson counties have been added to the June 29th, 2007, major disaster declaration. This decision was made possible when the incident period for the June 29th, 2007 major disaster declaration was extended to include continuing damages from ongoing circumstances," said Joan Haun, state coordinating officer for the Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM). The

announcement makes a total of 17 counties now eligible for individual assistance. Cooke, Coryell, Denton, Grayson, Lampasas and Tarrant Counties were included in the original declaration. Residents who suffered damages in any of these 17 designated counties should register with FEMA.

Thomas County Added For FEMA Public Assistance (FEMA, 7/9)

Following additional damage assessments, FEMA has approved Public Assistance funding for Thomas County in the state of Nebraska to help local governments recover from damage associated with the severe storms, flooding and tornadoes May 4 - 19, 2007. Public Assistance funding goes to local governments, state agencies and certain approved, private, nonprofit organizations, including public utilities, to assist them in the recovery. Federal funding is also available for hazard mitigation measures statewide to increase protection against future events. The federal disaster declaration June 6 for Nebraska made FEMA Public Assistance funding available in 18 counties, including Blaine, Brown, Cass, Custer, Gage, Garfield, Jefferson, Johnson, Keya Paha, Knox, Loup, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline, Saunders, and Wheeler. The amendment approved July 6 adds Thomas County to the list. All counties in the state were eligible under the original declaration to apply for assistance under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

Texas skies clear, land still flooded (Associated Press, 7/8)

The sky was mercifully clear over much of Texas yesterday after three weeks of drenching rain, as search teams combed the swollen Trinity River for a missing rafter. The death toll from storms that have battered Texas since last month climbed to 15 with the recovery of two other flood victims elsewhere in the state. The 26-year-old missing man was on a rubber raft that capsized Friday on the Trinity. "We don't know if he's still trapped in that low-head dam or whether he went downstream," Fort Worth fire department spokesman Kent Worley said. A companion had to swim about 300 yards against the swift current to safety, but Worley said that man never saw his friend after their raft flipped. Elsewhere across the region, rivers in Oklahoma and Kansas have been receding, revealing millions of dollars in damage to thousands of homes and businesses, besides the 1,000 or so damaged in Texas. Authorities found a man believed to be the flood's first fatality in Kansas.

CA Fire victims flood SBA center (Sacramento Bee, 7/7)

Minutes after the doors opened Friday morning, Angora fire victims began streaming into a new South Lake Tahoe financial relief center, looking for low-interest federal loans to help jump-start their recovery from the disaster. Homeowners asked about loans to help rebuild their destroyed houses and replace clothing, furniture, personal computers and other items lost in the devastating 3,100-acre blaze. Property owners asked about loans to help them pay bills after losing their rental income and to rebuild their real estate investments. In the first two hours, about two-dozen victims met with SBA disaster loan officers. "We expect to be busy for the coming weeks," said Richard Jenkins, an SBA spokesman. With the U.S. government declaring El Dorado County a disaster area Thursday, wildfire victims now are eligible for low-interest government loans. The declaration also covers Alpine, Amador and Placer, Sacramento counties as well as

Douglas County in Nevada. The Angora fire destroyed 254 homes and 75 other structures, and caused more than \$141 million in property damage. Another 17 residences suffered damage. The California Department of Insurance said about 400 insurance claims have been filed so far. Roughly 78 percent of the residences are insured.

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION NEWS

DHS to Buy Disease Monitoring System (Government Computer News, 7/11)

DHS's Science and Technology Directorate unveiled plans to award a sole-source contract to Mitre to expand the capabilities of a system to monitor global news media for signs of catastrophic disease outbreaks. The department said it would pay Mitre to specify, design, build, test and provide documentation for a system modeled on Global Argus, an existing project developed by Georgetown University and Mitre. According to the Argus Web site maintained by the university, the technology is designed to track "indications and warnings" (I&Ws) about pending disease threats to humans, animals and plants. "I&Ws are markers occurring globally, outside of U.S. borders, before an outbreak can affect U.S. interests, forces, citizens or territory, thus allowing the U.S. time to respond," according to the Argus program. "In effect, I&Ws can prime the national response infrastructure by alerting agencies of an evolving threat that could ultimately be catastrophic." The Argus Web site claims that it is the first such early warning system to integrate I&W information on a global scale. That claim likely would come as news to international public health professionals, who have tracked the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases around the world for decades.

FL Storm Shelters Must Weather Power Shortage (Tampa Tribune, 7/7)

Millions of dollars worth of backup generators, pledged for installation in Florida's special-needs hurricane shelters by June 1, are still in the planning stages. And most of them won't be installed before the end of hurricane season. The Legislature, fueled last year by post-Katrina worries, vowed that the equipment would be in place at every special-needs shelter by the start of hurricane season five weeks ago. Lawmakers had aimed to ensure that the state's most fragile residents could wait out storms in air-conditioned spaces with electricity for their medical equipment, even if the power goes out. But the \$53 million allotted for the cause isn't nearly enough for all those generators, state emergency planners say. And the planning required to install the behemoth equipment, which officials compare to mini-power plants, has taken much more time than the 12 months lawmakers allotted. Only 10 of the 70 shelters in line for generators will have them before the end of hurricane season. The goal for installing them is Sept. 30, Kilcollins said. As for the remainder of the 70 requests, planners still are receiving bids from companies supplying the custom-built generators, and they don't know how many they'll be able to afford. For those that are approved, the goal is to finish them this year.

GULF COAST RECOVERY NEWS

Road to New Life After Katrina Is Closed to Many (New York Times, 7/12)

For thousands of evacuees, going home to New Orleans has become a vague and

receding dream. Living in bleak circumstances, they cannot afford to go back, or have nothing to go back to. Over the two years since Hurricane Katrina hit, the shock of evacuation has hardened into the grim limbo of exile. Their options whittled away by government inaction, they represent a sharp contrast to the promise made by President Bush in Jackson Square on Sept. 15, 2005. "Americans want the Gulf Coast not just to survive, but to thrive; not just to cope, but to overcome," Mr. Bush said. "We want evacuees to come home, for the best of reasons -- because they have a real chance at a better life in a place they love." As of late May, however, there were still more than 30,000 families displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita spread across the country in apartments paid for by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and another 13,000 families, down from a peak of nearly 18,000, marooned in trailer or mobile home parks, where hunger is so prevalent that lines form when the truck from the food bank appears.

Parish leader vows to veto 'Camp Katrina' shutdown (N.O. Times Picayune, 7/11)

Saying the private-sector safety net has been restored since Hurricane Katrina, the St. Bernard Parish Council voted Tuesday to shut down a parish-run distribution center for donated goods. But Parish President Henry "Junior" Rodriguez vowed to veto the ordinance, deepening a rift with the council over the direction of the parish's recovery. While council members said the move would enable the parish to focus on rebuilding its infrastructure, Rodriguez said the center provides a vital public service that local charities can't match. The council voted 4-2 to close the food and clothing distribution center dubbed "Camp Katrina" on Aug. 31 and transfer any remaining relief supplies to nonprofit organizations. Councilman Mark Madary said the debate about whether to close the center was taking attention away from issues such as fixing crumbling streets and rebuilding the parish's sewer system. "The parish has enough to do other than worrying about giving people a jar of peanut butter," he said. "We're dividing our attention and wasting our time." He said local charities are capable of picking up the slack and ticked off a list of four groups distributing food, clothing and household supplies in his Arabi district.

FEMA accused of bottling up hurricane aid (Clarion Ledger, 7/11)

Nearly two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast, dozens of towns are still waiting for reconstruction funds from FEMA. The towns are victims of the "downright stupidity" of the bureaucratic process, said Sen. Mary Landrieu. A Louisiana Democrat and chairman of the special Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, Landrieu held a hearing Tuesday to determine whether Congress should change laws that govern the way FEMA distributes disaster aid. James Walke, director of FEMA's Public Assistance Division, said his agency is committed to the recovery effort. Walke said most government reconstruction projects in Louisiana and Mississippi have been approved. He said \$4.8 billion in public assistance money, or about 77 percent of what is needed, has been obligated to Louisiana and another \$2.12 billion to Mississippi, about 74 percent of that state's need. However, much of the money has not been released. Henry "Junior" Rodriguez, president of St. Bernard Parish, La., blamed FEMA for the slow pace of reconstruction in his community. "We're in no better shape now than we were two years ago and that's not acceptable," Rodriguez said.

Katrina devastation not unrivaled, analysis finds (Houston Chronicle, 7/11)s

If the Great Storm of 1900 had hit Galveston two years ago, it would have inflicted \$72 billion in damage, nearly as much as Hurricane Katrina, researchers say. Already the country's deadliest hurricane with an estimated 8,000 deaths, the 1900 storm also would rank as the nation's third costliest, say hurricane scientists who sought to gauge the economic damage that historic storms would have caused if they had occurred in 2005. Under the new analysis, which adjusted for inflation, population and coastal development, Hurricane Katrina and its \$81 billion cost ranked second to the Great Miami Hurricane of 1926, which caused damage estimated at almost \$140 billion. Another Galveston hurricane, in 1915, ranked fourth with \$57 billion in damage. Put simply, the devastation wrought by Katrina in 2005 was not unprecedented. That's significant in an era when some blame global warming for catastrophic hurricanes. The research concludes that economic damage from hurricanes, after being adjusted, has remained relatively constant during the last century. Furthermore, scientists involved in the study say, a \$500 billion storm in a major metropolitan area along the U.S. coast, such as Miami or possibly even Houston, is conceivable by 2020 if present development trends continue, as expected. When it comes to hurricanes, these scientists say, coastal development - not warming oceans - should perhaps be policymakers' biggest concern.

Gulf Coast officials: FEMA understates project costs (GovExec.Com, 7/11)

State and local representatives from the Gulf Coast told lawmakers Tuesday that FEMA has underestimated the cost of many projects to rebuild after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and that the process for seeking funds has been a significant cause of delays. In testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, the officials said FEMA's project worksheets -- the documents used to determine the scope of work and estimate costs -- are one of the biggest roadblocks to post-hurricane recovery. The worksheets, compiled with documents provided by local governments and approved by FEMA, become the basis for funding the Public Assistance Program. The worksheets "have been a persistent area of difficulty and challenge as we have worked to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding," New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin told the subcommittee.

FEMA red tape slows recovery, Senate panel told (NO Times Picayune, 7/11)

Burdensome federal paperwork and spats with FEMA over repair costs continue to hinder the Gulf Coast recovery nearly two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Louisiana officials told a Senate committee Tuesday. Despite billions of dollars in aid from Congress, the complaints underscore the difficulty local officials have faced in getting the money to repair sewerage systems, schools, police stations and other basic building blocks of their flood-damaged communities. "What is stymieing the recovery isn't the will of the people. It is the bureaucracy of the government," said Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., chairwoman of the Homeland Security subcommittee that was conducting its second hearing to examine roadblocks to rebuilding the Gulf Coast. However, James Walke, director of FEMA's Public Assistance Division, took issue with suggestions that the agency is dragging its feet or that federal Stafford Act requirements are slowing the pace of the recovery. He said FEMA had approved financing for 34,205 repair or rebuilding

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projects, or 88 percent of the total in Louisiana, worth about \$4.8 billion.