

Hurricane Katrina— Actions, Non-Actions

Aug. 2: National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issues its “August 2005 Update to Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook,” stating that there is “a 95% to 100% chance of an above-normal 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. . . . Therefore, for the remainder of the season, we expect an additional 11-14 tropical storms, with 7-9 becoming hurricanes, and 3-5 of these becoming major hurricanes.” It concludes: “Given the forecast that the remainder of the season will be very active, it is imperative that residents and government officials in hurricane-vulnerable communities have a hurricane preparedness plan in place.”

Aug. 20: DOD/NorthCom starts planning with FEMA, about five days before Katrina makes landfall in Florida.

Aug. 22-25: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District, pre-positions much of its staff and some equipment out of area.

Aug. 24: Tropical Depression 12 strengthens into Tropical Storm Katrina over the Central Bahamas. A hurricane warning is issued for the southeastern Florida coast by NOAA.

Aug. 25: Hurricane Katrina (Category 1) strikes Florida near the Broward/Miami Dade County line at 11:00 p.m. Six people die, and a million homes are left without power.

- NOAA’s 72-hour forecast is that Katrina may develop into “a major hurricane.”

Aug. 26: Katrina grows to a Category 2 hurricane with 90 knot (103 mph) winds, predicted to veer north and west toward Mississippi and Louisiana.

- Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco declares a state of emergency.

- Bush remains on vacation at Crawford, Tex.

Aug. 27: National Hurricane Center staff fully brief Bush Administration officials on impending dangers—including the likely breach of the levees.

- NOAA: “Dangerous Hurricane Katrina threatens north central Gulf Coast . . . Hurricane Warning issued.”

- Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour declares a state of emergency and asks President Bush to do the same and free up Federal resources.

- Governor Blanco writes to President Bush, asking for Federal declaration of emergency and Federal assistance.

- Bush remains on vacation at Crawford, Tex.

Aug. 27-28: NorthCom moves disaster control officers (DCOs), active-duty Army Colonels, forward to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana.

URGENT - WEATHER MESSAGE
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE NEW ORLEANS LA
1011 AM CDT SUN AUG 28 2005

..DEVASTATING DAMAGE EXPECTED

HURRICANE KATRINA

A MOST POWERFUL HURRICANE WITH UNPRECEDENTED STRENGTH...RIVALING THE INTENSITY OF HURRICANE CAMILLE OF 1969.

MOST OF THE AREA WILL BE UNINHABITABLE FOR WEEKS...PERHAPS LONGER. AT LEAST ONE HALF OF WELL CONSTRUCTED HOMES WILL HAVE ROOF AND WALL FAILURE. ALL GABLED ROOFS WILL FAIL...LEAVING THOSE HOMES SEVERELY DAMAGED OR DESTROYED.

THE MAJORITY OF INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS WILL BECOME NON FUNCTIONAL. PARTIAL TO COMPLETE WALL AND ROOF FAILURE IS EXPECTED. ALL WOOD FRAMED LOW RISING APARTMENT BUILDINGS WILL BE DESTROYED. CONCRETE BLOCK LOW RISE APARTMENTS WILL SUSTAIN MAJOR DAMAGE...INCLUDING SOME WALL AND ROOF FAILURE.

HIGH RISE OFFICE AND APARTMENT BUILDINGS WILL SWAY DANGEROUSLY...A FEW TO THE POINT OF TOTAL COLLAPSE. ALL WINDOWS WILL BLOW OUT.

AIRBORNE DEBRIS WILL BE WIDESPREAD...AND MAY INCLUDE HEAVY ITEMS SUCH AS HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES AND EVEN LIGHT VEHICLES. SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES AND LIGHT TRUCKS WILL BE MOVED. THE BLOWN DEBRIS WILL CREATE ADDITIONAL DESTRUCTION. PERSONS...PETS...AND LIVESTOCK EXPOSED TO THE WINDS WILL FACE CERTAIN DEATH IF STRUCK.

POWER OUTAGES WILL LAST FOR WEEKS...AS MOST POWER POLES WILL BE DOWN AND TRANSFORMERS DESTROYED. WATER SHORTAGES WILL MAKE HUMAN SUFFERING INCREDIBLE BY MODERN STANDARDS.

From Aug. 2 to Aug. 28, the hurricane warnings were publicized, and alarming.

Aug. 28: National Weather Service posts this message on its website: "URGENT—WEATHER MESSAGE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE NEW ORLEANS LA:

"Extremely dangerous Hurricane Katrina continues to approach the Mississippi River Delta.

"Devastating damage expected.

"Most of the area will be uninhabitable for weeks . . . perhaps longer. At least one half of well-constructed homes will have roof and wall failure. All gabled roofs will fail . . . leaving those homes severely damaged or destroyed.

"The majority of industrial buildings will become non-functional. Partial to complete wall and roof failure is expected. All wood framed low-rising apartment buildings will be destroyed. Concrete block low-rise apartments will sustain major damage . . . including some wall and roof failure.

"High-rise office and apartment buildings will sway dangerously . . . a few to the point of total collapse. All windows will blow out.

"Airborne debris will be widespread . . . and may include heavy items such as household appliances and even light vehicles. Sport utility vehicles and light trucks will be moved. The blown debris will create additional destruction. Persons . . . pets . . . and livestock exposed to the winds will face certain death if struck.

"Power outages will last for weeks . . . as most power poles will be down and transformers destroyed. Water shortages will make human suffering incredible by modern standards.

"The vast majority of native trees will be snapped or uprooted. Only the heartiest will remain standing . . . but be totally defoliated. Few crops will remain. Livestock left exposed to the winds will be killed.

"An inland hurricane wind watch is issued when sustained winds near hurricane force . . . or frequent gusts at or above hurricane force . . . are possible within the next 24 to 36 hours."

- Ivor van Heerden, director of the Louisiana State Uni-

versity Hurricane Center, says: "This has the potential to be as disastrous as the Asian tsunami. Tens of thousands of people could lose their lives. We could witness the total destruction of New Orleans as we know it."

- At 10:00 p.m., NOAA issues the following: "Potentially catastrophic Hurricane Katrina continues to approach the northern Gulf Coast. . . . Some levees in the greater New Orleans area could be overtopped."

- Mayor Nagin orders evacuation of New Orleans.
- Louisiana Governor Blanco writes to President Bush, requesting that he "declare an expedited major disaster for the State of Louisiana as Hurricane Katrina, a Category V Hurricane, approaches our coast south of New Orleans. . . . Based on the predictions we have received from the National Weather Service and other sources, I have determined that this incident will be of such severity and magnitude that effective response will be beyond the capabilities of the State and the affected local governments and that supplementary Federal assistance will be necessary."

- Blanco asks for "direct Federal assistance for work and services to save lives and protect property."

- Alabama Gov. Bob Riley declares a state of emergency and asks President Bush to issue an "expedited major disaster declaration" for six Alabama counties.

- NorthCom puts forces on alert, to be prepared for when the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA would determine what assets they need. They include Transport Command heavy aircraft (for food, water, ice); the large amphibious ship *USS Bataan* is moved into the region.

- Bush remains on vacation at Crawford, Tex.; Vice President Dick Cheney is on vacation in Wyoming.

Aug. 29: At 4:00 a.m., NOAA says the following: "Extremely dangerous Category 4 Hurricane Katrina" getting ready to come ashore in S.E. Louisiana and points east. Coastal storm surge 18-22 feet, and locally up to 28 feet. "Some levees in the greater New Orleans area could be overtopped." By 6:00 a.m. NOAA reports: "Katrina ashore, with 110+ Kt [knot] winds. Flooding 15-20 feet above normal expected. . . . The potential loss of life due to falling trees is a major concern . . . as is freshwater flooding."

- Five hours after Katrina makes landfall, FEMA director Michael Brown asks Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff to send 1,000 DHS employees to the region, giving them 48 hours to get there; among their duties: to "convey a positive image" about the Federal disaster operations. They are also to support rescues, establish communications, and coordinate with victims and community groups. (This is despite the fact that Brown testified to Congress in 2003, that FEMA intended to ensure that disaster teams could reach any part of the country within 12 hours, and that "disaster packages, commodities, and equipment can be delivered anywhere in the country within 24 hours of a disaster declaration.")

- Bush takes a break from his vacation to travel to Arizona, New Mexico, and southern California, to talk about Medicare and border security. Cheney is on vacation.

Aug. 30: Two levees break in New Orleans and water pours in, covering 80% of the city and rising to 20 feet in some areas.

- Governor Blanco says everyone still in New Orleans—an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people—must be evacuated. Crowds swell at the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center. Rescuers in helicopters and boats pick up hundreds of stranded people. Reports of looting emerge. About 40,000 people are in American Red Cross shelters, not including New Orleans.

- Mississippi Governor Barbour says: “90% of the structures between the beach and the railroad in Biloxi, Gulfport, Long Beach, and Pass Christian are totally destroyed. They’re not severely damaged, they’re simply not there. . . .”

- At some point, DHS Secretary Chertoff finally declares “an incident of national significance,” triggering Federal government mechanisms for response, and activating FEMA.

- FEMA’s Brown says FEMA has 500 trucks of ice, 500 trucks of water, and 350 trucks of military MREs (meals ready to eat) set for distribution over the next ten (!) days.

- Capt. Nora Tyson, commander of the *USS Bataan*, the nearest rescue ship, says she was alerted for rescue duty on Aug. 28, but not given any tasking until late on Aug. 30. . . . For the next five days, the ship’s 600 hospital beds remain unused, and the ship is scarcely utilized.

- Bush, in San Diego for celebrations of end of World War II, is photographed smiling and playing a guitar given to him by a popular singer. Cheney remains on vacation.

Aug. 31: Mayor Nagin estimates New Orleans death toll: “Minimum, hundreds. Most likely, thousands.” Governor Blanco says, “At first light, the devastation is greater than our worst fears.” Governor Blanco asks the White House to send more people. New Orleans police are called off search-and-rescue missions to combat out-of-control looting. As of now, an estimated 52,000 people are in Red Cross shelters. An additional 25,000 are in the Superdome, where conditions worsen by the hour. An exodus from the Superdome begins, with the first buses leaving for Houston’s Astrodome. Water levels stop rising in New Orleans. Engineers work to close a 500-foot gap in a failed floodwall.

- At the New Orleans Superdome, New Orleans official Terry Ebert warns that the slow evacuation there had become an “incredibly explosive situation,” and complains: “This is a national emergency. This is a national disgrace. FEMA has been here three days, yet there is no command and control. . . .”

- Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt declares a Federal health emergency throughout the Gulf Coast and sends in medical supplies and workers.

- The Pentagon mounts one of largest search-and-rescue operations in U.S. history, sending four Navy ships with emergency supplies.

- Air Force special operations team flies into New Orleans airport to reopen the runway.

- “We’re not getting any help yet,” says Biloxi Fire Department Battalion Chief Joe Boney. “We need water. We

need ice. I’ve been told it’s coming, but we’ve got people in shelters who haven’t had a drink since the storm.”

- “We are extremely pleased with the response of every element of the Federal government [and] all of our Federal partners have made to this terrible tragedy,” says DHS Secretary Chertoff.

- Bush cuts his vacation short, flies back to Washington, with fly-over of devastated Mississippi and New Orleans. Cheney still on vacation in Wyoming.

- Bush authorizes a draw-down from the nation’s Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Gasoline prices surge above \$3.00 a gallon, and shortages arise.

Sept. 1: Mayor Nagin issues a statement to CNN saying: “This is a desperate SOS. Right now we are out of resources at the Convention Center and don’t anticipate enough buses. . . . the Convention Center is unsanitary and unsafe, and we are running out of supplies for 15,000 to 25,000 people.”

- Looting, carjacking, and other violence spreads, and the military decides to increase National Guard deployment to 30,000. Outside the New Orleans Convention Center, the sidewalks are packed with people without food, water, or medical care, waiting for buses that do not come. Tempers flare. Crowds at the Superdome swell to 30,000 with another 25,000 at the convention center. The first refugee buses arrive at the Houston Astrodome. Elsewhere, 76,000 people are in Red Cross shelters.

- Doctors at two New Orleans hospitals plead for help, saying food, water and power are almost gone. Helicopters evacuate up to 600 patients but 1,500 remain stranded.

- The death toll in Mississippi hits 126.

- Texas agrees to take in 75,000 hurricane evacuees.

- NorthCom establishes Joint Task Force-Katrina to act as on-scene military command in support of FEMA, under the command of Lt. Gen. Russel Honore; there are 113 helicopters—61 National Guard and 52 DoD—involved in rescue and relief operations.

- An 80-person expeditionary medical support team deploys from Scott AFB in Illinois, to New Orleans.

- 600 massive sand bags arrive to help shore up New Orleans’ broken levees.

- Doctors complain that DHS sent disaster medical assistance teams to Baton Rouge, not New Orleans. Medical supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile did not begin arriving in Louisiana and Mississippi until three days after the hurricane struck.

- FEMA Director Brown defends FEMA’s response, and urges the nation to “take a deep collective breath” and realize that the Federal government is doing all it can. He tells Paula Zahn of CNN—three days after the hurricane hit—that “the Federal government did not even know about the Convention Center people until today.”

- Bush asks former Presidents Bush and Clinton to lead a fund-raising campaign for hurricane victims.

- Cheney cuts short his vacation, and returns to Washington.

Sept. 2: Mayor Nagin says that “the people of our city are holding on by a thread. Time has run out. . . .”

- Bush tours Gulf Coast areas and acknowledges the failure so far of government hurricane-relief efforts. “The results are not acceptable,” he says.

- Thousands of National Guardsmen arrive in New Orleans and begin distributing food and water, and start providing security for the tens of thousands of people at the Convention Center and the Superdome.

- Congress approves \$10.5 billion to cover the immediate rescue and relief efforts. The United States and European nations tap oil and gasoline stockpiles for 2 million barrels a day, hoping to stem gas shortages.

- Fifteen airlines get permission to fly up to 25,000 refugees out of New Orleans to San Antonio. Texas opens two more giant centers for victims after the Astrodome fills up. States as far away as Utah, West Virginia, Wyoming, and Michigan offer to accept refugees.

- Alabama Gov. Bob Riley announces that FEMA has approved the use of military police dormitories at Fort McClellan, a former military base in Anniston, to shelter about 1,000 homeless hurricane victims.

Sept. 3: Almost everyone is evacuated from the Convention Center and Superdome. Tens of thousands of New Orleans residents still need to be evacuated. Bush authorizes the deployment of 7,200 active-duty ground troops to the area.

- Five days after Federal help is sought by Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny DuPree, two representatives from FEMA arrive there and ask if help is needed.