

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 22, 2007

The Honorable R. David Paulison
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

Thank you for your leadership of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Your efforts to ensure that residents are safe before and after disasters strike are invaluable. We are writing you today about the safety and availability of temporary emergency housing used by FEMA following catastrophes. This issue is of great importance to our constituents, many of whom have been affected by multiple hurricanes in the past three years.

As you know, earlier this year, reports surfaced that some of the travel trailers FEMA was using to temporarily house disaster victims in the Gulf Coast contained high levels of formaldehyde. As a result, FEMA decided to temporarily suspend the installation, sale, transfer or donation of travel trailers or park model recreational vehicles currently in its inventory. We applaud FEMA for its decision to protect the health and well-being of current and future disaster victims that may be housed in such emergency housing; however, we remain concerned that this decision may result in an immediate shortage of emergency housing.

The urgency and need for adequate emergency housing was highlighted with the formation of Hurricane Dean in the Atlantic last week. As local emergency managers in St. Lucie County, Florida prepared for the possible storm, they were reportedly informed by FEMA that emergency trailers may not be available for use. While it appears that this powerful storm will have a minimal impact on the United States, a different track could have devastated the Gulf Coast, leaving thousands of families homeless. A shortage of emergency housing would have served to exacerbate the problem.

As Members of Congress that represent significant areas of Florida that are located in floodways, we are understandably troubled about the current lack of travel trailer availability. As you know, by law, FEMA can not sell mobile homes if they are to be located in floodways or in coastal high hazard areas unless they meet the specific criteria under 44 CFR part 9, Floodplain Management and Protection of Wetlands, and the regulations under 44 CFR part 10, Environmental Considerations. We remain concerned that FEMA has not provided us with another temporary housing solution for the areas located in floodways.

To that end, we respectfully request that FEMA provide us with a detailed analysis of the steps being taken to ensure there is an adequate supply of safe emergency housing, particularly in areas located in floodways. Specifically, we are interested in learning when air quality testing and research will begin on the travel trailers, and when you expect that testing to be completed. Likewise, to what threshold level will the travel trailers be tested to? Finally, in the event that FEMA determines that the travel trailers cannot be safely occupied by families, what alternative forms of emergency housing are being considered?

As the 2007 hurricane season continues, it is important that FEMA take immediate action to ensure an adequate supply of safe emergency housing, including adequate air quality testing and workable alternatives. As we learned in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, safe housing is one of the most important resources we can provide the public after a disaster.

Again, thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to a prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Tim Mahoney
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress