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## Weekly Research Update

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*An examination of rebuilding efforts along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with an emphasis on displaced populations, inadequacy of government responses, and inequitable development strategies.*

**Weekly Update ~ October 27, 2006**

Reports Released:

- The House Katrina Task Force's Democratic constituency released their final report last week. The report recommends major legislative changes in the ways insurance companies and the federal government responds to disasters. The task force believes that recovery efforts for disasters are too large in scope for one governmental body (FEMA) to handle and recommends that the responsibilities be split between multiple agencies. The final result of the recommendations would have FEMA as an initial emergency responder. However, as recovery continues FEMA would step aside allowing for other, more specialized agencies to take up specific recovery efforts. For example, the Department of Education would be responsible for school recovery. In addition to recommendations, the report criticizes the lack of public bidding on recovery construction contracts and reiterates the need for levees to withstand a category 5 hurricane.  
*Source:* Shields, Gerard. "Task force urges changes for disasters." *The Advocate*. October 20, 2006. <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/4440892.html>
- A new RAND Corporation study released October 23<sup>rd</sup> concludes that closing flood-prone areas to redevelopment may be the most viable option to reducing death and property loss than building bigger and better levees and floodgates. The study warns public officials to engage in early planning so as to avoid a repeat of the breakdown in regional infrastructure and services in the event of a Katrinaesque phenomenon. The report examined historic floods in Oregon (1948), the Netherlands (1953), along the Mississippi River (1993), and the Yangtze River in China (1998) so as to glean lessons for New Orleans.  
For more information and the full report 'From Flood Control to Integrated Water Resource Management. Lessons for the Gulf Coast from Flooding in Other Places in the Last Sixty Years' by Rand Gulf States Policy Institute:  
[http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2006/RAND\\_OP164.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2006/RAND_OP164.pdf)  
*Source:* Schleifstein, Mark. "Rebuild smarter, study urges; Flood-prone areas to flood again, it says." *Times-Picayune*. October 24, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/neworleans/index.ssf?/base/news-6/116168649019990.xml&coll=1>

- A report by the National Academy of Engineering and National Research Council was issued October 25<sup>th</sup> documenting the observations of engineers and their analyses of the catastrophic failure of levees during Katrina. The report noted that engineers have not been candid with the public about living in low-lying New Orleans and stressed the fact that the public is looking to the Army Corps of Engineers for resettlement guidance.  
*Source:* Burdeau, Cain. "Report: Corps needs to be candid about New Orleans' future risk." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 26, 2006.  
<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-28/1161828555314870.xml&storylist=louisiana>
- The American Highways Users Alliance has given twenty of 37 urban areas an F. Since Katrina, the Bush administration and Congress has called for mass-evacuation planning yet the available plans are inadequate and while lessons can be learned from New Orleans, cities need to shape their plans to their particular needs as a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not work for spatially varying demographics, transportation networks and vulnerability.  
For more information on the full report 'Evacuation Report Card 2006':  
[http://www.highways.org/pdfs/evacuation\\_report\\_card2006.pdf](http://www.highways.org/pdfs/evacuation_report_card2006.pdf)  
*Source:* Hsu, Spencer S. "Caution Flag for Evacuation Plans; Road-User Group Gives Failing Grade to Majority of Urban Areas." *The Washington Post*. October 26, 2006.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/25/AR2006102501765.html>
- A survey entitled "Crisis of Confidence: Persistent Problems Within the NOPD" conducted by the local activist group Safe Streets-Strong Communities found that residents of several New Orleans neighborhoods do not report crimes due to lack of trust that local police will protect them. Of the 500 residents interviewed, two-thirds said they feared the NOPD.  
*Source:* Filosa, Gwen. "Survey: NOPD not trusted. Residents say they're afraid to report crimes." *Times-Picayune*. October 25, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/1161756000212810.xml&coll=1&thispage=2>

#### Governments' Responses:

- Louisiana state officials have informed the Army Corps of Engineers that they will be upset if the Corps' final report does not include specific recommendations for congress to act on. State representatives were baffled by a statement by Corps officials saying that there would be few, if any, recommendations in the final report. Some state reps ask, "...what use of this will be to Congress without recommendations?" The state is also working on its own coastal restoration plan to offer the legislature in the event that the Corps' report does not address needs they see as most pressing. The Corps was extended \$20 million to complete the report and Louisiana state officials would like to be sure the money is well spent.  
*Source:* Wold, Amy. "La. Officials want specifics in hurricane plan." *The Advocate*. October 20, 2006. <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/4440777.html>
- Parish officials are considering a regional body to regulate building codes. At an informal meeting many agreed that a regional approach may be most effective. The legislature enacted statewide building code regulation last year, even in areas without regulations. At the current time there are not enough code inspectors to meet the needs for rebuilding. A non-profit agency, the Institute for Building Technology and Safety (IBTS), is also assisting parishes by providing

inspectors and training new inspectors to enter the field. The parish representatives present at the meeting are hoping that others will join in creating a truly regional effort.

Source: Minton, James. "Parishes may work regionally to deal with new building codes." *The Advocate*. October 20, 2006. <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/4440717.html>

- Louisiana homeowners including those who do not qualify for Road Home grants to cover uninsured losses from Katrina and Rita can now apply for \$7,500 for "non-elevation mitigation measures" to use for projects that would lessen the potential for future flood damage.

Source: Krupa, Michelle. "Road Home program adds grant." *Times-Picayune*. October 21, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/1161411462244240.xml&coll=1>

#### Race/place issues:

- Despite efforts by the Louisiana insurance department to get the message out to homeowners victimized by Katrina, those without access to computers, radios or cell phones, mostly the poor and minority residents did not receive it. In fact a year later, Louisiana residents living in white neighborhoods have been three times more likely than those in black neighborhoods to seek help from the state agency. Analysis of Louisiana's insurance complaints settled indicates that people of color and of modest means are disconnected or distrustful of those in power.

Source: Callimachi, Rukmini. "Whites pursued Katrina insurance complaints more aggressively than minorities." *The Associated Press*. October 25, 2006.

<http://news.bostonherald.com/national/view.bg?articleid=164075>

- The influx of Hispanic migrant construction workers has come with the establishment of a Hispanic business community, community centers and social services catering to the new demographic. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana (HCCL) recognizes that the growth in Hispanic businesses is actively attracting more Hispanic-owned businesses. Though statistics are not available growth areas include grocery stores, money-sending facilities, immigration lawyers, car dealers, newspapers, etc. The HCCL opened the Hispanic Business Resources Center in March 2006 which offers English as a second language classes, business advice and counseling to the growing business community.

Source: "Hispanic headway. Demographic shift creates demand for new businesses" *New Orleans CityBusiness*. October 23, 2006.

<http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/viewStory.cfm?recID=17067>

#### Recovery:

- The Orleans Parish School Board, the Recovery School District and Head Start are working together to bring a center which would offer daycare, basic healthcare and early childhood education for up to 500 infants and pre-schoolers to the Central City. Advocates believe that the center would contribute to the reduction in poverty-related problems such as poor healthcare, high dropout rates and juvenile offenders.

Source: Pope, John. "Central City child care center plan unveiled; Advocates say site may open next fall." *Times-Picayune*. October 25, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/1161754246146060.xml&coll=1>

- Approximately 21,000 evacuees from Katrina remain in Texas public schools. This figure is 10,000 fewer than the Texas Education Agency has predicted and so indicative of students returning to their school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Source: "Texas schools seeing drop in Katrina evacuee students." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. October 24, 2006. <http://www.ktre.com/Global/story.asp?S=5581984&nav=2FH5>

- President of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center announced that the riverfront hall will not welcome hurricane evacuees in the event of an emergency. This diverts from Mayor Nagin's evacuation plan announced in May 2006 which called for the use of RTA buses to transport those left behind to the Convention Center as a staging and screening area.  
Source: Egger, Bruce. "City must change storm plans; Convention Center doesn't want evacuees." *Times-Picayune*. October 26, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1161843004280850.xml&coll=1>
- The battle rages on between 19 residents and HANO. The residents filed suit in June 2006 suing HANO over its decision to not reopen thousands of apartments post-Katrina, and accusing HANO of being in violation of the Fair Housing Act. However according to the government agency's attorney, HANO has not submitted a final plan to HUD or received approval and so the court has "no reason to believe that HUD won't follow the law while designing redevelopment of public housing."  
Source: Filosa, G. "Lawsuit claims HANO stalls reopening of development; Former tenants are being frozen out." *Times-Picayune*. October 26, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/1161845111280850.xml&coll=1>
- There has been a lot of discussion and criticism over recovery of public housing developments. According to HUD deputy chief Scott Keller, Lafitte is an environmental hazard because the sub-flooring is tainted with arsenic which was used to kill rats during numerous pre-Katrina years. Additionally, Katrina worsened the years of poor maintenance thus rendering the development unsalvageable. The article author notes that the public needs to be better informed of such issues by HUD so as to better understand the decision-making process.  
Source: Elie, Lolis Eric. "Talking rats and public housing." *Times-Picayune*. October 20, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-17/1161324757179470.xml&coll=1>