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## National Report

### **FEMA Vows New Effort On Trailers Posing Risk**

By LESLIE EATON

The federal government pledged Thursday to intensify its efforts to move Gulf Coast hurricane victims out of trailers and into apartments or hotels after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finally confirmed that many trailers were contaminated with high levels of formaldehyde.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, which issued about 144,000 trailers to victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, has been widely criticized for its slow response to extensive evidence that many trailers contain unsafe levels of formaldehyde, an industrial chemical classified as a probable carcinogen.

About 38,000 families are still living in the trailers and mobile homes, federal officials said Thursday at a news briefing, including more than 7,000 in trailer parks that FEMA had already vowed to close by May, before hurricane season begins again along the Gulf. Most of the other trailers are parked next to flooded houses that families are trying to repair.

FEMA will now hasten to move families living in trailers into apartments or, if necessary, into hotels, said R. David Paulison, the administrator of the agency.

But many details of the new effort remain unclear. For example, the agency has not yet decided whether to force out people who have the trailers parked on their own property. Nor does the agency have a program to help families that have incurred medical bills because of formaldehyde exposure, Mr. Paulison said, adding that the agency would look into that.

But the agency appears determined not to repeat its mistakes with the tinny white trail-

### **A plan to move hurricane victims to apartments or hotels.**

ers, which have become an emblem of government incompetence and inadequacy in New Orleans and Mississippi.

"We will not ever use trailers again," Mr. Paulison said, though larger mobile homes might still be used for temporary housing and were sent to victims of recent tornadoes.

But some mobile homes in the Gulf Coast produced high formaldehyde levels, Mr. Paulison said, and it was unclear on Thursday how FEMA would house victims of future disasters.

Almost from the time families started occupying the trailers, complaints began to surface about respiratory and other health problems associated with formaldehyde exposure. The Sierra Club started reporting what it said were dangerous levels of the chemical in trailers after it began testing in spring 2006.

More than 7,000 families have asked to leave their trailers because of concerns about formaldehyde, according to FEMA; not quite half of them have moved into hotels or apartments.

Congressional critics of FEMA and advocates for the families living in the trailers said they were concerned that there was not enough appropriate housing available to accommodate them.

"We're on a collision course between dangerous levels of formaldehyde in the trailers, which is very real, and a lack of wherewithal in terms of safe places for these children," said Dr. Irwin Redlener, president of the Children's Health Fund, which has been doing extensive work at the group trailer sites.

Children, the elderly and people with respiratory problems are the most vulnerable to problems from formaldehyde exposure, said Dr. Julie L. Gerberding, director of the disease control centers. About a third of the 519 trailers and mobile homes tested by her agency had levels of formaldehyde that could be expected to cause symptoms in such people, Dr. Gerberding said.

In one out of 20, the levels were high enough that they might cause symptoms in the general population, she said, warning that levels in the trailers were likely to rise as the weather warms up.

The C.D.C. is still investigating why the formaldehyde levels are so high in the trailers, and whether the problems are associated with particular brands, she said.