

# Hurricane katrina



Hurricane Katrina Hurricane Katrina made landfall near Grand Isle, Louisiana at around 6: 00am on August 29th, 2005 (ESA). When Katrina hit, she was a powerful category 4 storm on the Saffir-Simpson scale with maximum sustained wind speeds in excess of 145mph (National Weather Service).

Were the people of New Orleans aware of hurricane Katrina??™s power and magnitude prior to her landfall As they scuffled about deciding where to go and what to do, did the people of New Orleans understand the imminent danger they were facing Was there a federal plan in place to aid victims in the aftermath of a category 4 or 5 hurricane Only one day before Katrina??™s wrath would shred the Gulf Coast, New Orleans??™ mayor, Ray Nagin officially declared a mandatory evacuation for the city of New Orleans (Wikinews). Defenders of the federal government feel that much was done before and after the storm to diminish damages and loss of life. The Federal Emergency Management Association did send 200 buses from out of state to assist in evacuating remaining residents.

Many citizens were transported to local shelters on state buses, and shelters of last resort were opened to offer those stuck in New Orleans a place of refuge. Were preventative actions taken by the federal government enough As hurricane Katrina raged onto shore, cries for help filled the air. Two long, hard days would pass before evacuees would start being bused out of the region. What went wrong The Federal Government is ultimately responsible for the delayed efforts in aiding victims of hurricane Katrina. There is evidence to suggest that the federal government understood the serious threat hurricane Katrina posed on the low-lying Gulf region, and that they did make some effort to convey this danger and urge people out of harm??™s

way. On Saturday August, 27th, President Bush declared a state of emergency in Louisiana and encouraged people to evacuate the New Orleans area before the storm made landfall. Prior to the storm, flood and storm surge predictions were made by the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

At least 200 buses were sent to aid in evacuations before the event. The federal government did express concerns over the levee system's ability to weather the storm and operate under such difficult conditions. State and local officials were encouraged to follow emergency procedures and make preparations for a worst-case scenario.

And still, thousands ignored the government's pleas and remained in New Orleans during the storm. Did these residents knowingly place themselves in harm's way? No, the federal government failed to get the public's attention and failed to express the power and danger of hurricane Katrina in the moments leading up to landfall on the Gulf Coast. Following the tragic hurricane, FEMA sent 500 buses to the region to assist in evacuating remaining citizens. The Red Cross immediately deployed thousands of volunteers to help in the relief efforts. The National Guard was sent to maintain order and provide a military presence. Food and water were distributed to victims who were left homeless and stranded by the storm. Several lives were saved as military helicopters pulled victims from trees and rooftops. Boats patrolled the city tirelessly in search of life.

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the federal government did much to assuage the incompetence of the Louisiana state and local government. But,

was it enough The President waited two days before assessing the damage of the storm. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff waited two days before giving FEMA full authority to act. And, FEMA waited two days before sending buses to evacuate the hungry, thirsty, sick, and dying victims out of an area that has been compared to a nuclear war zone. Precious moments were lost, and unnecessary suffering resulted in these delays. In response to criticism that the federal government did not act quickly following the storm, many have argued that it takes time to mobilize a relief and rescue effort of such magnitude.

Resources must be kept out of the storm's path, and it takes time to move agencies and relief workers into the area after the storm hits. But, the Federal government had a responsibility to get the public's attention and assist those who could not help themselves, and they failed to do so. Earlier in the week, hurricane Katrina hit Florida as a category 1 storm, and many residents successfully weathered the hurricane by boarding up their homes and businesses and stocking up on necessities such as food and water.

This may have given Louisiana and Mississippi residents the idea that Katrina's bark would be worse than her bite. In the past two years, several hurricanes have entered the Gulf of Mexico and threatened the city of New Orleans. Many residents had become jaded with the recent fluctuations in hurricanes and tropical storms and decided to stay and wait this one out. Though voluntary evacuations began days before landfall, the government waited too long before enacting mandatory evacuations and facilitating emergency plans.

Once the storm had passed, the Federal government did a poor job of enforcing evacuations and putting people out of harm's way. The Federal Emergency Management Association failed to adequately alert people to the dangers of Katrina. Due to a lack of resources, and confusion between state and federal officials, New Orleans was not equipped to handle anything greater than a category 3 storm. In the days that followed, chaos ensued, and the already devastated area became even more dangerous for those stuck there.

As days turned to weeks, the country demanded accountability, and finger pointing that started with local and state government soon turned towards Washington. The former FEMA director, Michael Brown, bore the brunt of the blame game, and later resigned during the fall-out. However, a recent memo seems to suggest that it was Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff [that] delayed the federal response to Hurricane Katrina by deviating from the National Response plan and being too slow in giving FEMA the necessary authority to react (Barrett, Tom CNN). Chertoff had the power to call federal agencies into action without consulting state and local government. But, he waited until thirty-six hours after the storm made landfall to designate FEMA director, Michael Brown, as the principal federal official responsible for storm relief (Chertoff). Homeland Security and White House administrators declined to explain this delay in action, and speculations of class and race discrimination soon followed the federal silence in the matter. Two days following Katrina's landfall, President George W.

Bush flew over the area and assessed the damage from Air Force One. He would later be criticized for being two days too late, and would eventually take ??? full responsibility??? for the Federal government??™s failure to do its job in the wake of hurricane Katrina (Goddard and Luscombe). Americans watched in horror as all local and cable news networks aired footage of desperate refugees, the dying, and the deceased. It soon became apparent that state and local resources had been exhausted and overwhelmed.

But, where were the Federal government??™s first responders Where was FEMA Where were the buses that were supposed to evacuate residents after the storm On August 29th, only hours after Katrina hit, FEMA ??? announced a plan to send 500 commercial buses into New Orleans to rescue thousands of people left stranded on highways, overpasses, and in shelters, hospitals, and homes??? (Millhollon, Michelle). But, FEMA had originally turned down the governor??™s suggestion to use local school buses, because they weren??™t equipped with air-conditioning. In the aftermath of the hurricane, New Orleans had to rely on FEMA buses that were being sent from out of state and would take days to arrive.

This further delayed the evacuation of victims and fueled the frustration of an entire country. Had the FEMA buses arrived before the storm hit, they would have proven insufficient to evacuate a city of over a million people in such a short time. The National Response Plan was designed as a detailed outline for quickly distributing federal agencies in the event of a disaster that is too extensive for local government to oversee. Rather than implement the National Response Plan and allow it to do what it was intended to do, Chertoff waited too long and President Bush bypassed the National Response

Plan and created a task force that would manage the storm relief efforts. Both the Homeland Security Director and the President of the United States deviated from the National Response Plan. Any time there is a delay in response to a national disaster, lives are at risk. The federal government's failure to adhere to a National Response Plan that was already in place, delayed evacuation and relief efforts, and resulted in an untold number of unnecessary deaths. Just as America sends aid to foreign countries in the aftermath of a natural disaster, it is the responsibility of the federal government to take charge when states get in over their heads.

If we cannot take care of our own citizens, then what good are we to anyone else? The federal response to Hurricane Katrina was regrettably deficient. It is clear that Hurricane Katrina was a powerful force of nature, but the federal government could have done more to respond to the needs of Gulf residents prior to and following the storm. Preventative action might have minimized the flooding in New Orleans. And, a swifter response would have alleviated the suffering and loss of life following the disaster. It is important for America to review the mistakes and lessons of Hurricane Katrina and improve response strategies so that future disasters do not result in similar chaos.

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