

# Katrina: What Happened When

September 16, 2005

Updated: November 8, 2005

It will take months to get the full story, but meanwhile here are some of the key facts about what happened and when officials acted.

## Summary

Multiple investigations are likely into the response by federal, state, and local officials to the disastrous flooding of New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina. New facts are still emerging, and we expect it will be months or years before a full picture can be properly assessed.

In response to numerous requests, we present here a brief timeline of events, as best as we can document them from public records and the best news reporting from the scene. We do not blame or excuse anyone, and leave it to others to judge what, if anything, could or should have been done differently. All times are converted to Central Daylight Time.

## Analysis

### July 23, 2004 - 13 Months Before Katrina

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) conducts "Hurricane Pam" exercise to assess results of a theoretical Category 3 hurricane. It assumes that a storm with 120-mph winds would force Lake Pontchartrain's waters over the tops of the New Orleans' 17.5-foot levees and through a gap in the levee system would flood major portions of the city and would damage up to 87 percent of the city's homes. The *Times-Picayune* reports that officials expect up to half the city's residents won't evacuate and that many will be trapped in attics, on rooftops, and in makeshift shelters for days.

—"In Case of Emergency," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, as [posted](#) on the Web site of the Louisiana Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, 20 Jul 2004.

### Friday, Aug 26 2005 - 3 Days Prior to Katrina's Louisiana Landfall

Hurricane Katrina strikes Florida between Hallandale Beach and North Miami Beach as a Category 1 hurricane with 80 mph winds. Eleven people die from hurricane-related causes.

—"A chronology of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath," *Associated Press*, 3 Sept 2005.

The storm heads into the Gulf of Mexico and by 10:30 am CDT is reported to be "rapidly strengthening."

—"Hurricane Katrina [Special Advisory Number 13](#)," National Hurricane Center, 26 Aug 2005.

Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declares a State of Emergency in Louisiana.

—"Governor Blanco Declares State of Emergency," Louisiana Governor's Office, 26 Aug 2005.

### Saturday, Aug 27 2005 - 2 Days Prior

Blanco asks President Bush to declare a State of Emergency for the state of Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina. Bush does so, authorizing the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA "to coordinate all disaster relief efforts..." and freeing up federal money for the state.

—"Governor Blanco asks President to Declare an Emergency for the State of Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina," Louisiana Governor's Office, 27 Aug 2005.

—"Statement on federal Emergency Assistance for Louisiana," Office of the White House Press Secretary, 27 Aug 2005.

Katrina is a Category 3 storm, predicted to become Category 4. At 4pm CDT, it is still 380 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi.

—"Hurricane Katrina Special Advisory Number 18," [National Hurricane Center](#) , 26 Aug 2005.

Director of the National Hurricane Center, Max Mayfield, calls the governors of Louisiana and Mississippi and the mayor of New Orleans to warn of potential devastation. The next day he participates in a video conference call to the President, who is at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

—Tamara Lush, " [For forecasting chief, no joy in being right](#)," *St. Petersburg Times* , 30 Aug 2005.

### **Sunday, Aug. 28 2005 - 1 Day Prior**

**1 a.m.** - Katrina is upgraded to a Category 4 storm with wind speeds reaching 145 mph.

—"Hurricane Katrina Special Advisory Number 20," [National Hurricane Center](#), 28 Aug 2005.

**7 a.m.** - Katrina is upgraded to a "potentially catastrophic" Category 5 storm. NOAA predicts "coastal storm surge flooding of 15 to 20 feet above normal tide levels."

—"Hurricane Katrina Special Advisory Number 22," [National Hurricane Center](#), 28 Aug 2005.

—"New Orleans braces for monster hurricane," [CNN.com](#), 29 Aug 2005.

**9:30 a.m.** - With wind speeds reaching 175 mph, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin orders a mandatory evacuation of the city. The evacuation call comes only 20 hours before Katrina would make landfall – less than half the time that researchers had determined was necessary to evacuate the city.

—Gordon Russell, "[Nagin orders first-ever mandatory evacuation of New Orleans](#)," *New Orleans Times-Picayune* , 31 Aug 2005.

—Lise Olsen, "[City had evacuation plan but strayed from strategy](#)," *Houston Chronicle* , 8 Sept 2005.

**10 a.m.** - NOAA raises their estimate of storm surge flooding to 18 to 22 feet above normal tide levels. The levee protecting New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain is only 17.5 feet tall, but other levees and floodwalls designed to protect against storm-driven waters from the Gulf of Mexico vary in height, and are much lower.

—"Hurricane Katrina [Special Advisory Number 23](#)," National Hurricane Center, 28 Aug 2005.

The *Associated Press* reports that New Orleans could become "a vast cesspool tainted with toxic chemicals, human waste and even coffins released...from the city's legendary cemeteries."

"The storm threatened **an environmental disaster of biblical proportions** , one that could leave more than 1 million people homeless," the *AP* says.

—Matt Crenson, "Katrina may create environmental catastrophe on epic scale," *Associated Press* , 28 Aug 2005.

**11:31 a.m.** - The President – at his ranch in Crawford – speaks briefly to reporters. His statement contains 203 words about Katrina and 819 congratulating Iraqis on their new constitution. "We will do everything in our power to help the people in the communities affected by this storm," he says of the approaching hurricane.

—"[President Discusses Hurricane Katrina](#), Congratulates Iraqis on Draft Constitution," Prairie Chapel Ranch, Crawford, Texas, 28 Aug 2005.

**8:30 p.m.** - An empty Amtrak train leaves New Orleans, with room for several hundred potential evacuees. "We offered the city the opportunity to take evacuees out of harm's way...The city declined," said Amtrak spokesman Cliff Black. The train left New Orleans no passengers on board.

—Susan Glasser, "[The Steady Buildup to a City's Chaos](#)," *The Washington Post*, 11 Sept 2005.

Two weeks later, Nagin denies on NBC's *Meet the Press* that Amtrak offered their services. "Amtrak never contacted me to make that offer," the mayor tells host Tim Russert. "I have never gotten that call, Tim, and I would love to have had that call. But it never happened."

—"[Interview with Mayor Nagin](#)," *Meet the Press*, NBC, 11 Sept 2005.

## **Monday August 29, 2005 - Day of Katrina**

**6 a.m.** - Katrina makes landfall on Louisiana coast as a strong Category 4 storm, with sustained winds of nearly 145 mph and predicted coastal storm surge of up to 28 feet. The National Hurricane Center warns that "some levees in the greater New Orleans area could be overtopped." It says a weather buoy located about 50 miles east of the mouth of the Mississippi river had reported waves heights of at least 47 feet.

—"Hurricane Katrina [Intermediate Advisory Number 26A](#) ...Corrected," National Hurricane Center , 29 Aug 2005.

**8.a.m.** -A massive storm surge sends water sloshing up Lake Borgne and the lower reaches of the Mississippi River . Local officials immediately report flooding. Months later, a study sponsored by the National Science Foundation concludes that the storm surge reached approximately 18 to 25 feet, "massively" overtopping levees whose actual height varied between 11 and 15 feet above sea level. A gate tender at one lock station watches from a crows-nest lookout tower as the storm surge rises 5 to 10 feet above the top of the levee system, leaving debris caught high up in the tower. The rushing water caused flood protection to give way entirely in several spots. "The levees in this area, which were largely earthen levees constructed of relatively poor materials, were simply overwhelmed and were massively eroded," the report concludes.

It also concludes that a runaway barge, initially suspected of contributing to one breach, was not at fault: "Various barges and other floating structures made contact with the earth levees without causing significant damage."

-Raymond Seed, et al, "[Preliminary Report on the Performance of the New Orleans Levee Systems in Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005](#)," Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society (University of California – Berkeley), 2 Nov 2005

- "[Testimony of Raymond B. Seed](#)," Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, U.S. Senate, 2 Nov 2005

—John McQuaid, "[Katrina trapped city in double disasters](#)," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 7 Sept 2005.

**9 a.m.** - The eastern part of the city and Bernard Parish are already flooded several feet deep, even before the eye of the storm has passed. Thousands of survivors are trapped. But worse flooding is to come: within hours, city canal floodwalls will also collapse and a second, slower wave of flooding will take place.

—John McQuaid, "[Katrina trapped city in double disasters](#)," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 7 Sept 2005.

**11 a.m.** - New Orleans is spared a direct hit, as the center of the storm passes over the Louisiana-Mississippi state line 35 miles away from the city. Maximum sustained winds are now reduced, but still a strong Category 3 storm with 125 mph winds.

—"Hurricane Katrina Advisory Number 27," [National Hurricane Center](#), 29 Aug 2005.

**11:06 a.m.** - Bush promotes his Medicare prescription drug benefit at a 44-minute event in El Mirage, Arizona. He devotes 156 words to the hurricane, among them: "I want the folks there on the Gulf Coast to know that the federal government is prepared to help you when the storm passes. I want to thank the governors of the affected regions for mobilizing assets prior to the arrival of the storm to help citizens avoid this devastating storm."

—"President Participates in Conversation on Medicare," White House, 29 Aug 2005.

**Late Morning (exact time uncertain)** - The vital 17th Street Canal levee gives way, sending the water from Lake Pontchartrain into the city in a second, slower wave of flooding than inundates the downtown area. A full day will pass before state or federal officials fully realize what is happening.

—John McQuaid, "[Katrina trapped city in double disasters](#)," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 7 Sept 2005.

Eventually, engineers will conclude that there was little or no overtopping at these spots, and the best evidence suggests that waters remained 3 to 5 feet below the tops of the walls. The NSF report says "these three levee failures were likely caused by failures in the foundation soils underlying the levees." But it also says the failures could easily have been prevented: "**The performance of many of the levees and floodwalls could have been significantly improved**, and some of the failures likely prevented, with relatively inexpensive modifications of the levee and floodwall system details."

**The report's lead author will say these failures are probably due to human error, and possibly to outright malfeasance.** Raymond Seed of the University of California Berkeley will tell reporters, "It may not have been the result of human error. There's a high likelihood that it was. But we're receiving some very disturbing reports from people who were involved in some of these projects, and it suggests that perhaps not just human error was involved; there may have been some malfeasance. **Some of the sections may not have been constructed as they were designed.**"

- Raymond Seed, et al, "[Preliminary Report on the Performance of the New Orleans Levee Systems in Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005](#)," Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society (University of California – Berkeley), 2 Nov 2005.

- "[Flawed walls led to flooding in New Orleans](#)," All Things Considered, NPR, 2 Nov 2005.

**About 11 a.m. (exact time uncertain)** - Roughly five hours after Katrina strikes the coast, FEMA director Michael Brown sends a memo – later obtained and made public by *The Associated Press* – requesting an additional 1,000 rescue workers from the Department of Homeland Security "within 48 hours" and 2,000 more within seven days. It is addressed to his boss, Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security. Brown refers to Katrina as "this near catastrophic event" (our emphasis.) He proposes sending the workers first for training in Georgia or Florida, then to the disaster area "when conditions are safe." Among the duties of the workers, Brown proposes, is to "convey a positive image of disaster operations to government officials, community organizations and the general public." (Emphasis added.)

—Michael D. Brown, "Memorandum to Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security," 29 Aug 2005.

Later Brown will say FEMA itself has only 2,600 employees nationwide, and normally relies on state workers, the National Guard, private contractors and other federal agencies during disaster relief operations.

—David D. Kirkpatrick and Scott Shane, "[Ex-FEMA Chief Tells of Frustration and Chaos](#)," *New York Times*, 15 Sept 2005: A1.

**4:40 p.m.** - Bush appears in Rancho Cucamonga, California for another Medicare event. He again devotes a few words to Katrina: "It's a storm now that is moving through, and now it's the time for governments to help people get their feet on the ground. . . For those of you who are concerned about whether or not we're prepared to help, don't be. We are. We're in place. We've got equipment in place, supplies in place. And once the -- once we're able to assess the damage, we'll be able to move in and help those good folks in the affected areas."

—"[President Discusses Medicare, New Prescription Drug Benefits](#)," James L. Brulte Senior Center Rancho Cucamonga, California, 29 Aug 2005.

**Time uncertain** - Blanco calls Bush, saying, "Mr. President, we need your help. We need everything you've got." Bush later assures her that "help is on the way."

—James Carney et al, "4 Places Where the System Broke Down," *Time*, 11 September 2005.

—Evan Thomas, "How Bush Blew It," *Newsweek*, 19 September 2005.

## **Tuesday August 30, 2005 - 1 Day After Katrina**

**Dawn** - Water has continued to rise overnight and is coursing through the city's central business district, still rising. Eventually, at least 80 percent of New Orleans is under water. Reports of looting surface.

—John McQuaid, "[Katrina trapped city in double disasters](#)," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 7 Sept 2005.

**11:04 a.m.** - In San Diego, California, Bush delivers a 31-minute speech marking the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. Of Katrina, he says, "we're beginning to move in the help that people need."

—"[President Commemorates 60th Anniversary of V-J Day](#)," Naval Air Station North Island San Diego, California 30 Aug 2005.

Immediately after the speech, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan tells reporters that Bush will return to Crawford, then cut short his Texas stay and go to Washington. McClellan says, "This is one of the most devastating storms in our nation's history. I think that's becoming clear to everyone. The devastation is enormous."

—"Press Gaggle by Scott McClellan," Naval Air Station North Island San Diego, California, 30 Aug 2005.

**3 p.m.** - With water still pouring into the city, officials report that the Army Corps of Engineers has surveyed the damage to levees and will soon attempt repair.

At a Baton Rouge briefing, Sen. Mary Landrieu reports that "most of the roads and highways are impassable, and water is still coming into the city of New Orleans. The water is up to the rooftops in St. Bernard and Plaquemine. We think there may be only one major way into the city right now and it has to be used for emergency personnel to get food and water and rescue equipment to people who are in desperate need."

But even now, federal and state officials alike seem unaware of the full extent of the unfolding disaster.

US Sen. David Vitter said of the still-rising water:

**Sen. Vitter:** In the metropolitan area in general, in the huge majority of areas, it's not rising at all. It's the same or it may be lowering slightly. In some parts of New Orleans, because of the 17th Street breach, it may be rising and that seemed to be the case in parts of downtown.

**I don't want to alarm everybody that, you know, New Orleans is filling up like a bowl. That's just not happening.**

None of the officials present at the press conference correct the mistaken remark. And Blanco seems puzzled when a reporter asks the governor about the water pollution that will later emerge as a major public health risk:

**Q:** Does the water that's downtown -- does this represent what everyone feared before the hurricane would come, that you would have this toxic soup that has overrun the city?

**Blanco:** It didn't -- **I wouldn't think it would be toxic soup** right now. **I think it's just water from the lake, water from the canals. It's, you know, water.**

**Q:** Well, something could be underneath that water.

**Blanco:** Pardon?

—"The Situation Room; [Hurricane Katrina Aftermath](#); Rescue Efforts and Assessing the Damage," Transcript, CNN, 30 Aug 2005.

### **Wednesday August 31, 2005 - 2 Days After**

**Morning** - Bush, still in Crawford, participates in a half-hour video conference on Katrina with Vice President Cheney (who is in Wyoming) and top aides. Later, he boards Air Force One and flies over New Orleans on his way back to Washington. His press secretary tells reporters: "The President,

when we were passing over that part of New Orleans, said, 'It's devastating, it's got to be doubly devastating on the ground.'"

—"[Press Gaggle with Scott McClellan](#)," Aboard Air Force One, En Route Andrews Air Force Base, MD, 31 Aug 2005.

Looting intensifies in New Orleans. Nagin orders most of the police to abandon search and rescue missions for survivors and focus on packs of looters who are becoming increasingly violent. The *AP* reported, "Police officers were asking residents to give up any guns they had before they boarded buses and trucks because police desperately needed the firepower."

—"[Mayor: Katrina may have killed thousands](#)," *Associated Press*, 31 Aug 2005

**Late Afternoon** - Bush, back at the White House, holds a cabinet meeting on Katrina and speaks for nine minutes in the Rose Garden to outline federal relief efforts. He says FEMA has moved 25 search and rescue teams into the area. As for those stranded at the Superdome, "Buses are on the way to take those people from New Orleans to Houston," the President says.

—"[President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts](#)," The Rose Garden, 31 Aug 2005.

### **Thursday September 1, 2005 - 3 Days After**

**7 a.m.** - Bush says "I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees." His remark comes in a live interview on ABC's *Good Morning America* :

**Bush:** I want people to know there's a lot of help coming. **I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees.** They did anticipate a serious storm. These levees got breached and as a result, much of New Orleans is flooded and now we're having to deal with it and will.

—“Good Morning America,” Transcript, ABC News, 1 September 2005.

**Time Uncertain** - Red Cross President Marsha Evans asks permission to enter the city with relief supplies, but Louisiana state officials deny permission.

—"Red Cross: State rebuffed relief efforts: Aid organization never got into New Orleans, officials say" [CNN.com](#), 9 Sept 2005.

Thirty-thousand National Guard Troops from across the country are ordered to report to the Gulf Coast, but many do not arrive for several days.

—"[More Navy Ships, National Guard troops head to the Gulf Coast](#)," *Associated Press*, 1 Sept 2005.

The first buses arrive at the Superdome to take evacuees to the Astrodome in Houston, 355 miles away. But the evacuation goes slowly and will take several days.

—Evan Thomas, "The Lost City," *Newsweek*, 12 September 2005.

*Associated Press* photographer Phil Coale makes an aerial shot of scores of school buses sitting unused in a flooded New Orleans lot. Many will later question why city officials did not use these busses to evacuate residents who lacked transportation prior to the hurricane, or at least move them to higher ground for use later.

—AP Photo/Phil Coale "Aerial view of flooded school busses," Yahoo News, 1 Sept 2005.

**Evening** - In a special report that is typical of the picture that television is conveying to the world, CNN Correspondent Adaora Udoji reports: "Three days after Hurricane Katrina, and the situation is getting more desperate by the minute. Thousands are still stranded in misery. . . . They are marching in search of food, water and relief. They're surrounded by a crumbling city and dead bodies. Infants have no formula, the children no food, nothing for adults, no medical help. They're burning with frustration, and sure they have been forgotten."

And CNN's Medical Correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, reports live from Charity hospital in New Orleans: "It doesn't appear to be safe now, but it seems that a sniper standing atop one of the buildings just above us here and firing down at patients and doctors as they were trying to be evacuated, unbelievable. It just boggles my mind, actually."

—"Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees, [Special Edition: Hurricane Katrina](#)," CNN Transcripts, 1 Sept 2005.

Brown says FEMA officials were unaware for days that – besides the hurricane victims stranded in the Superdome – thousands more had taken refuge in the New Orleans Convention Center nearby. Speaking from Baton Rouge in a live interview with CNN's Paula Zahn, he says:

**Brown** : And so, this -- this catastrophic disaster continues to grow. I will tell you this, though. Every person in that Convention Center, **we just learned about that today** . And so, I have directed that we have all available resources to get to that Convention Center to make certain that they have the food and water, the medical care that they need...

**Q**: Sir, you aren't telling me...

**Brown** : ... and that we take care of those bodies that are there. . . .

**Q**: **Sir, you aren't just telling me you just learned that the folks at the Convention Center didn't have food and water until today, are you?** You had no idea they were completely cut off?

**Brown**: **Paula, the federal government did not even know about the Convention Center people until today.**

—Paula Zahn Now, "Desperation in New Orleans; Interview With FEMA Director Mike Brown," [Transcript](#), 1 Sept 2005.

Later, Brown will say he was wrong and that FEMA actually knew about the victims at the Convention Center 24 hours earlier but was unable to reach them until Thursday.

—David D. Kirkpatrick and Scott Shane, "Ex-FEMA Chief Tells of Frustration and Chaos," *New York Times* 15 Sept 2005: A1

**Evening** - Nagin delivers a rambling diatribe in an interview with local radio station WWL-AM, blaming Bush and Blanco for doing too little:

**Nagin** : I need reinforcements, I need troops, man. I need 500 buses, man. . . .

I've got 15,000 to 20,000 people over at the convention center. It's bursting at the seams. The poor people in Plaquemines Parish. ... We don't have anything, and we're sharing with our brothers in Plaquemines Parish. It's awful down here, man.

. . . Don't tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They're not here. It's too doggone late. **Now get off your asses and do something** , and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country.

—"Mayor to feds: 'Get off your asses,'" [Transcript](#) of radio interview with New Orleans' Nagin, CNN.com, 2 Sept 2005.

## Friday September 2, 2005 - 4 Days After

The Red Cross renews its request to enter the city with relief supplies. "We had adequate supplies, the people and the vehicles," Red Cross official Vic Howell would later recall. Louisiana officials say they needed 24 hours to provide an escort and prepare for the Red Cross's arrival. However, 24 hours later, a large-scale evacuation is underway and the Red Cross relief effort never reaches New Orleans.

—"Red Cross: State rebuffed relief efforts: Aid organization never got into New Orleans, officials say" [CNN.com](#), 9 Sept 2005.

**8:02 a.m.** - Bush leaves the White House to tour the hurricane area. He says, "A lot of people are working hard to help those who have been affected, and I want to thank the people for their efforts. **The results are not acceptable .**"

—"President Heads to Hurricane Katrina Affected Areas," [The South Lawn](#) , 2 Sept 2005.

**10:35 am** - Bush, arriving in Alabama to tour the disaster area, says of the FEMA director at a live news conference: "**Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job.** The FEMA director is working 24 -- (applause) -- they're working 24 hours a day. Again, my attitude is, if it's not going exactly right, we're going to make it go exactly right. If there's problems, we're going to address the problems."

—"President Arrives in Alabama, Briefed on Hurricane Katrina," [Mobile Regional Airport Mobile](#) , Alabama 2 Sept 2005.

**Noon** - A convoy of military trucks drives through floodwaters to the convention center, the first supplies of water and food to reach victims who have waited for days. Thousands of armed National Guardsmen carrying weapons stream into the city to help restore order. Commanding is Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, a cigar-chomping Louisiana native who soon wins praise for his decisive style of action.

—Allen G. Breed, "National Guardsmen Arrive in New Orleans," *The Associated Press*, 2 Sept 2005.

**5:01p.m.** - Bush speaks at New Orleans airport, saying, "I know the people of this part of the world are suffering, and I want them to know that there's a flow of progress. We're making progress."

—[President Remarks on Hurricane Recovery Efforts](#) , Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport 2 Sept 2005.

## Saturday, September 3, 2005 - 5 Days After

**10:06 am** - Bush announces he is ordering additional active duty forces to the Gulf coast. "The enormity of the task requires more resources," he says in his Saturday radio address. "In America we do not abandon our fellow citizens in their hour of need." He says 4,000 active-duty troops are already in the area and 7,000 more will arrive in the next 72 hours. Those will add to some 21,000 National Guard troops already in the region.

—[President Addresses Nation](#), Discusses Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts, The Rose Garden, 3 Sept 2005.

## Sunday, September 4, 2005 - 6 Days After

The President issues a proclamation ordering the US Flag to be flown at half-staff at all federal building until Sept. 20 "as a mark of respect for the victims of Hurricane Katrina."

—"[Proclamation](#) by the President: Honoring the Memory of the Victims of Hurricane Katrina," 4 Sept 2005.

### **Monday September 5, 2005 - One Week After**

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers repair the levee breach on the 17th Street Canal and begin to pump water from the city.

—"Pumps begin to drain New Orleans." [CNN.com](#), 6 Sept 2005.

### **Tuesday September 6, 2005 - 8 Days After**

FEMA asks reporters to refrain from taking pictures of the dead. *Reuters* quotes a FEMA spokeswoman as sending an email saying, "The recovery of victims is being treated with dignity and the utmost respect and we have requested that no photographs of the deceased be made by the media."

—Deborah Zabarenko, "Media groups say FEMA censors search for bodies," *Reuters*, 7 Sept 2005

Nagin orders police and law enforcement officials to remove everyone from the city who is not involved in recovery efforts. Despite this order, many residents remain in New Orleans, refusing to leave.

—Cain Burdeau, "[New Orleans Mayor orders Forced Evacuation](#)," *Associated Press*, 7 Sept 2005.

### **Wednesday September 7, 2005 - 9 Days After**

FEMA brings in Kenyon International Services from Houston to assist in recovering bodies, many of which have been left in the open since the storm hit. A week later, state and federal officials will still be bickering over who is to pay the \$119,000 daily expense of the outside mortuary specialists, and many bodies will still lie uncollected in the open and in drained buildings two weeks after the storm.

—Michelle Krupa, "[Louisiana hires firm to help recover bodies](#); Blanco says FEMA moved too slowly," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 14 Sept 2005.

A bipartisan joint Congressional Committee is announced to investigate the response to Hurricane Katrina at "all levels of government," as federal, state, and local officials continue to blame each other for the slow response in dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

—"GOP leaders agree to joint Katrina hearings," [CNN.com](#), 8 Sept 2005.

### **Friday September 9, 2005 - 11 Days After**

Chertoff removes Brown from his role in managing the Katrina relief effort, and puts Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad W. Allen in charge.

—Peter Baker, "[FEMA Director Replaced as Head of Relief Effort](#)," *Washington Post*, 10 Sept 2005: A01.

### **Monday September 12, 2005 - Two Weeks After**

Brown resigns as head of FEMA saying, "it is important that I leave now to avoid further distraction from the ongoing mission of FEMA."

—"Statement by Michael D. Brown, Under Secretary of Department of Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness & Response and Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency," [News Release](#), FEMA, 12 Sept 2005.

### **September 13, 2005**

**11:30 a.m.** – Bush takes responsibility for the federal government's failures while speaking at a press conference with Iraqi President Talabani.

**Bush:** Katrina exposed serious problems in our response capability at all levels of government. **And to the extent that the federal government didn't fully do its job right, I take responsibility.** I want to know what went right and what went wrong.

—"President Welcomes President Talabani of Iraq to the White House," The East Room, [news release](#), 13 Sept 2005.

### **Thursday, September 15, 2005**

Brown, in an interview published in the *New York Times*, says the governor and her staff had failed to organize a coherent state effort in the days after the hurricane, and that his field officers in the city were reporting an "out of control" situation to his superiors. He says he asked state officials, "What do you need? Help me help you. . . . The response was like, 'Let us find out,' and then I never received specific requests for specific things that needed doing." A spokesman for the governor said, "That is just totally inaccurate."

—David D. Kirkpatrick and Scott Shane, "[Ex-FEMA Chief Tells of Frustration and Chaos](#)," *New York Times* 15 Sept 2005: A1

**8:02 p.m.** - Bush says, in a prime-time, televised speech from New Orleans, that "the system, at every level of government, was not well-coordinated, and was overwhelmed in the first few days." He says the military should have a greater role in reacting to future large disasters. "Congress is preparing an investigation, and I will work with members of both parties to make sure this effort is thorough." He promises massive aid, tax breaks, and loan guarantees to aid rebuilding, saying that "there is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again."

—President Discusses Hurricane Relief in [Address to the Nation](#), Jackson Square, New Orleans, Louisiana 15 Sept 2005.

*Correction, Sept. 16: In our original article, we said that the empty Amtrak train left with room for thousands of potential evacuees. Actually, the Washington Post article cited reported that the train had room for several hundred passengers.*

*Update, Sept. 16: We originally identified the official who said on Aug. 30 that New Orleans was not filling up "like a bowl" as FEMA's David Lokey, which was incorrect. We relied on a CNN transcript of that news conference naming Lokey as the speaker. FEMA later contacted us with video of the news conference showing that the speaker was actually Sen. David Vitter, who was standing next to Lokey at the time.*

**Correction, Oct. 5: We had originally reported that Nagin ordered New Orleans evacuated "after talking with Bush." In fact, Bush called Gov. Blanco just prior to a news conference in which Blanco and Nagin appeared, and Nagin announced a mandatory evacuation.**

#### Sources

- "In Case of Emergency," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, as posted on the Web site of the Louisiana Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, 20 Jul 2004.
- "A chronology of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath," *Associated Press*, 3 Sep 2005.
- "Hurricane Katrina Special Advisory Number 13," National Hurricane Center, 26 Aug 2005.
- "Governor Blanco Declares State of Emergency," Louisiana Governor's Office, 26 Aug 2005.
- "Governor Blanco asks President to Declare an Emergency for the State of Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina," Louisiana Governor's Office, 27 Aug 2005.
- "Statement on federal Emergency Assistance for Louisiana," Office of the White House Press Secretary, 27 Aug 2005.
- "Hurricane Katrina Special Advisory Number 18," National Hurricane Center, 26 Aug 2005.
- Tamara Lush, "For forecasting chief, no joy in being right," *St. Petersburg Times*, 30 Aug 2005.
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- Lise Olsen, "City had evacuation plan but strayed from strategy," *Houston Chronicle*, 8 Sep 2005.
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