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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-1053T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Hurricane Katrina will have an enormous impact on people and the economy of the United States. The hurricane affected over a half million people located in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and has resulted in one of the largest natural disaster relief and recovery operations in United States history. In terms of public health, standing water and high temperatures have created a breeding ground for disease, and public health advisories have warned about the spread of disease in the affected areas. Hurricane Katrina also resulted in environmental challenges, such as water and sediment contamination from toxic materials released into the floodwaters. In addition, our nation's energy infrastructure was hard hit; it affected 21 refineries. In terms of telecommunications, Hurricane Katrina knocked out radio and television stations, more than 3 million customer phone lines, and more than a thousand cell phone sites.

GAO prepared this testimony to highlight past work on government programs related to Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters, and to provide information on plans and coordination among the accountability community—GAO, the Inspectors General, and other auditors at the state and local level.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-1053T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman J. Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or rabkinn@gao.gov.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Providing Oversight of the Nation's Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Activities

What GAO Found

GAO's past work has noted a host of needed improvements in a variety of government programs related to Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters. For example, GAO found that there have been a number of challenges in preparing health care providers for catastrophic events. In addition, GAO's work on energy issues has noted the interconnectedness of our petroleum markets and revealed the vulnerability of these markets to disruptions, natural or otherwise. GAO's environmental work has indicated that the loss of wetlands has increased the severity of damage from hurricanes, and that cleanup of contaminated sites takes a tremendous amount of coordination and funding. Finally, GAO's work on telecommunications issues has found that interoperable emergency communications are challenged by insufficient collaboration among federal, state, and local governments. In these areas, among others, GAO has made a number of recommendations which are still open.

While GAO has issued a number of relevant reports in the past, the accountability community has an active future agenda for evaluating the nation's response to Hurricane Katrina. The DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) has developed a plan to coordinate Katrina-related oversight activities with the OIGs of 12 other departments and agencies, focusing on waste, fraud, and abuse. GAO plans to provide the Congress with more strategic evaluations to assess the federal, state, local, and private sector preparedness, response and recovery efforts related to Hurricane Katrina. GAO also plans to be involved in reviewing the overall accounting of and use of Katrina-related funds by federal agencies.

Rescue Workers Search a Home in Flooded New Orleans



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.