



Rescued, New Orleans

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# Hurricane Katrina: Timeline of Key Events

## Dates (all 2005) and Times (all Central) of Event

### Tuesday, August 23

*4 p.m.*: Tropical Depression 12 develops about 200 miles southeast of Nassau in the Bahamas.<sup>1</sup>

### Thursday, August 25

*2:30 p.m.*: The tropical storm is elevated to a hurricane and is named “Katrina.”<sup>2</sup>

*4 p.m.*: The National Hurricane Center, for the first time, reports that some models show Katrina coming ashore “between Mobile, Alabama, and Grand Isle, Louisiana.” Katrina, still about 15 miles east of Florida, is expected to gradually strengthen once in the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

*5:30 p.m.*: Katrina makes landfall in Florida as a Category 1 hurricane.<sup>4</sup>

### Friday, August 26

*10:30 a.m.*: Katrina, still moving westward, is elevated to a Category 2 hurricane, with note that the storm “could become a category three or major hurricane on Saturday.”<sup>5</sup>

*11 a.m.*: National Hurricane Center officials state in a video teleconference that their prediction models indicate a shift in Katrina’s path west “towards New Orleans.” Prior models had predicted a probable strike in the Florida panhandle.<sup>6</sup>

*1 p.m.*: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declares a State of Emergency and activates her state’s National Guard.<sup>7</sup>

*Afternoon-Evening*: Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour declares a State of Emergency and activates his state’s National Guard.<sup>8</sup>

*4 p.m.*: NHC issues an official forecast shifting Katrina’s track 170 miles west, predicting a probable Category 4 hurricane striking the Mississippi coast near the Alabama border with landfall on Monday, August 29.<sup>9</sup>

*10 p.m.*: NHC issues a forecast shifting the track farther west and predicting a probable strike at or near the Louisiana-Mississippi border, east of New Orleans, on Monday, August 29.<sup>10</sup>

### Saturday, August 27

*4 a.m.*: NHC issues a forecast stating that Katrina is a Category 3 hurricane and predicting a direct hit on New Orleans.<sup>11</sup>

*6 a.m.*: FEMA headquarters begins 24-hour operations in Washington, D.C.<sup>12</sup>

*7:30 a.m.*: National Weather Service, in teleconference, informs Louisiana state and local officials that the probable path of the storm is “smack dab through the metropolitan New Orleans area.”<sup>13</sup>

*9 a.m.*: The first phase of the Louisiana Emergency Evacuation Plan begins. Under Phase I, citizens in coastal areas, south of the Intracoastal Waterway, would evacuate 50 hours before a Category 3 or stronger hurricane hits.<sup>14</sup>

*11:41 a.m.:* Governor Blanco requests a declaration of a federal state of emergency for Louisiana under the Stafford Act. President Bush issues the declaration later in the day.<sup>15</sup>

*12 p.m.:* Phase II of the Louisiana Emergency Evacuation Plan is initiated.<sup>16</sup>

*1 p.m.:* (approximately) New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, in a joint press conference with Governor Blanco, declares a State of Emergency, announces he will issue a voluntary evacuation order, and announces that the Superdome will open at 8 a.m. on Sunday as a special-needs shelter.<sup>17</sup>

*2 p.m.:* Louisiana Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge goes to 24-hour operations.<sup>18</sup>

*4 p.m.:* The final phase of the Louisiana Emergency Evacuation Plan is initiated and contra-flow evacuation by highway begins.<sup>19</sup>

*7 p.m.:* National Weather Service advises City of New Orleans Office of Emergency Preparedness that the New Orleans levees could be overtopped.<sup>20</sup>

*7:25-8 p.m.:* NHC Director Max Mayfield briefs Governor Blanco, Governor Barbour, and Mayor Nagin about Katrina's potential impact.<sup>21</sup> Late evening traffic from Louisiana's evacuation into Mississippi subsides, allowing Mississippi to issue mandatory evacuations for three coastal counties – Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson.<sup>22</sup>

*10 p.m.:* NHC issues first official storm-surge forecast for Katrina, predicting surge flooding of 15 to 20 feet above normal tides and locally as high as 25 feet. NHC issues Hurricane Warning for north-central Gulf Coast from Morgan City, Louisiana, eastward to the Alabama-Florida border, including the City of New Orleans. Hurricane-force winds are expected within 24 hours.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sunday, August 28**

President Bush issues federal emergency declarations for Mississippi and Alabama, and declares Florida a federal disaster area.<sup>24</sup> Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana Governors request Presidential Major Disaster Declarations; they are signed the next day.<sup>25</sup>

*1 a.m.:* NHC issues Special Advisory: “Katrina Strengthens to Category 4 with 145 mph winds.”<sup>26</sup>

*7 a.m.:* NHC issues Special Advisory stating that Katrina is “now a potentially catastrophic category 5 hurricane” with maximum sustained winds near 160 mph.<sup>27</sup>

*8 a.m.:* The Superdome is opened as a special-needs shelter.<sup>28</sup>

*9:30 a.m.:* Mayor Nagin orders a mandatory evacuation of Orleans Parish.<sup>29</sup>

*10 a.m.:* NHC increases storm-surge forecast to 18 to 22 feet above normal tide levels and locally as high as 28 feet.<sup>30</sup>

*11 a.m.:* During a daily video teleconference with the President, DHS headquarters, FEMA headquarters, FEMA's regional offices, and representatives from Louisiana and Mississippi, National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield states, “I don't think any model can tell you with any confidence right now whether the levees will be topped or not, but that's obviously a very, very grave concern.” FEMA Director Michael Brown says, “Just keep jamming those lines full as much as you can with commodities.”<sup>31</sup>

*12 p.m.:* The Superdome is opened as a “refuge of last resort” for the general population.<sup>32</sup>

4 p.m.: NHC issues first official forecast addressing New Orleans levees which states, “Some levees in the greater New Orleans area could be overtopped.”<sup>33</sup>

5 p.m.: Contraflow highway evacuation in Louisiana ends.<sup>34</sup>

### Monday, August 29

12:47 a.m.: A Department of Homeland Security assessment detailing the storm’s likely impact is e-mailed to the White House’s Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC).<sup>35</sup>

6:10-7 a.m.: On August 29, at approximately 6:10 a.m. CT, Hurricane Katrina’s eye makes landfall at Buras on the Louisiana coast between Grand Isle and the mouth of the Mississippi River. Storm surge overtops the levees on the east bank of the river, “crosses” the river, overtops the levees on the west bank, and sends additional water into neighborhoods in Plaquemines Parish. The center of Hurricane Katrina moves ashore into southeast Louisiana just east of Grand Isle.<sup>36</sup> Morning Catastrophic flooding begins in New Orleans resulting from massive overtopping of levees in east Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes, overtopping and breaking of the Industrial Canal levees, and breaks in the 17th Street and London Avenue Canal floodwalls.<sup>37</sup> The Superdome’s roof begins to leak; it loses air conditioning, plumbing in all but the first floor, and its communication system. A backup generator provides minimal lighting.<sup>38</sup>

10 a.m.: Hurricane Katrina makes landfall in Mississippi. Storm surge reported 20 feet above normal in Biloxi area.<sup>39</sup>

*Afternoon:* State and local first responders’ communications begin to fail in the Greater New Orleans area and Mississippi.<sup>42</sup>

*Mid-afternoon:* Search-and-rescue operations begin by the U.S. Coast Guard, the New Orleans Police and Fire Departments, the Louisiana National Guard, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.<sup>40</sup>

2-3 p.m.: Local officials in Mississippi begin search and rescue.<sup>41</sup>

*Evening:* FEMA Director Brown assures Governor Blanco that FEMA will send 500 buses to New Orleans the next day.<sup>43</sup>

10 p.m.: MEMA search-and-rescue teams arrive and immediately begin life-saving operations.<sup>44</sup>

### Tuesday, August 30

Mayor Nagin opens the New Orleans Convention Center as a refuge for the general population.<sup>45</sup>

10:30 a.m.: Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense orders U.S. Northern Command to move all necessary assets to the Gulf Coast, giving blanket authority for forces to provide military assistance.<sup>46</sup>

4 p.m.: U.S. Army Lieutenant General Russel Honoré is designated Commander of Joint Task Force Katrina.<sup>47</sup> Evening Plumbing fails completely at the Superdome. Conditions at the stadium deteriorate due to the massive crowds and lack of air conditioning and sanitation.<sup>48</sup> DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff declares Katrina an “incident of national significance.” Chertoff designates Michael Brown as the Principal Federal Official (PFO) to manage the response and recovery operations for Hurricane Katrina.<sup>49</sup>

*Late evening:* Governor Blanco directs the Department of Social Services to find a shelter by 6 a.m. Wednesday for at least 25,000 people.<sup>50</sup>

### **Wednesday, August 31**

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt declares a public-health emergency for Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama.<sup>51</sup> Governor Blanco issues an Executive Order to commandeer school buses.<sup>52</sup>

*1:30-1:45 a.m.:* FEMA, for the first time, mission-assigns DOT to send buses to New Orleans.<sup>53</sup>

*8:30-9:30 a.m.:* Governor Blanco calls Governor Rick Perry of Texas to request that the Houston Astrodome open to house New Orleans evacuees.<sup>54</sup>

*11 a.m.:* Chief of the federal National Guard Bureau directs all state Adjutants General to rapidly deploy available National Guard troops to Louisiana and Mississippi.<sup>55</sup>

*2:30 p.m.:* Governor Blanco and President Bush discuss by telephone the need for military assistance and the Governor's command of the Louisiana National Guard in a unified-command structure.<sup>56</sup>

*4:11 p.m.:* President Bush holds a Cabinet meeting at the White House and speaks publicly to outline federal relief efforts.<sup>57</sup>

*Evening:* Some federally contracted buses arrive in New Orleans and begin evacuation of overpasses and special-needs shelter.<sup>58</sup>

### **Thursday, September 1**

*10 a.m.:* Bus evacuation of the general population begins at the Superdome.<sup>59</sup>

*Late Evening:* Colonel Terry Ebbert, New Orleans Director of Homeland Security and Public Safety, requests assistance from Louisiana National Guard commander Major General Bennett Landreneau to secure and evacuate the Convention Center in conjunction with the New Orleans Police Department.<sup>60</sup>

### **Friday, September 2**

President Bush makes his first visit to the Gulf States after Katrina and meets with the governors of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi; and Mayor Nagin in New Orleans.<sup>61</sup>

*Late Morning:* In a private meeting, the President and Governor Blanco discuss command and control for the military response.<sup>62</sup>

*12-12:30 p.m.:* 1,000 National Guard forces (LA, TX, OK, NV, and AR) move toward the Convention Center and secure the building to begin relief operations.<sup>63</sup>

*11:20 p.m.:* White House faxes proposal to Governor Blanco under which there would be appointed a dual-status commander who would be an active-duty military officer and who would exercise command and control on behalf of the Governor over National Guard forces and on behalf of the President over federal active-duty forces.<sup>64</sup>

### **Saturday, September 3**

*8:56 a.m.:* Governor Blanco declines the White House proposal to appoint a dual-status commander and retains sole command of National Guard troops in Louisiana.<sup>65</sup>

*9:06 a.m.:* President Bush orders 7,200 active-duty troops to the Gulf Coast.<sup>66</sup>

10 a.m.: Convention Center evacuation begins.<sup>67</sup>

1 p.m.: Superdome evacuation is complete.<sup>68</sup>

6:30 p.m.: Convention Center evacuation is complete.<sup>69</sup>

### Monday, September 5

I-10 Cloverleaf and Causeway Boulevard evacuations are complete.<sup>70</sup> Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen is appointed Deputy PFO.<sup>71</sup>

### Tuesday, September 6

5 a.m.: Search and recovery efforts in New Orleans continue.<sup>72</sup>

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6 Bill Reed, FEMA Daily Video Teleconference, Aug. 26, 2005, transcript p. 7. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates no. DHS-FEMA-0105-0000028; NHC Timeline, p. 1.

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10 National Hurricane Center, Hurricane Katrina Forecast/Advisory #15, Aug. 26, 2005, 0300 Z; Hurricane Katrina Advisory #15, Aug. 26, 2005, 11 p.m. ET; Hurricane Katrina Discussion #15, Aug. 26, 2005, 11 p.m. ET; and Hurricane Katrina Probabilities #15, Aug. 26, 2005, 11 p.m. ET. Provided to Committee. All documents filed as Bates nos. DHS-FEMA-0037-0000238 through 0000245; NHC Timeline, p. 2; National Hurricane Center, "Katrina Graphics Archive," Aug. 30, 2005. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates no. DHS-FEMA-0037-0000237; National Hurricane Center, "Katrina Graphics Archive," Aug. 30, 2005. [http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/2005/KATRINA\\_graphics.shtml](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/2005/KATRINA_graphics.shtml). Accessed on Apr. 30, 2006.

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- 17 City of New Orleans, Mayors Press Office, "Mayor Nagin Urges Citizens to Prepare for Hurricane Katrina," press release, Aug. 27, 2005. Provided to Committee.
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- 19 Louisiana's Preparation and Response to Hurricane Katrina, Integrated Timeline, p. 13. Provided to Committee; Louisiana Citizen Awareness Guide.
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- 22 MEMA, Director's Brief, Aug. 28, 2005, 7 p.m. CT, p. 3. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates no. MEMA 0010690; MEMA, Hurricane Katrina Situation Report #6, Aug. 28, 2005, 8 a.m. CT. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates nos. MEMA 0010864 through 0010869.
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- 31 Max Mayfield, FEMA Daily Video Teleconference, Aug. 28, 2005, transcript p. 6. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates no. DHS-FEMA-0105-0000071. Michael Brown, FEMA Daily Video Teleconference, Aug. 28, 2005, transcript p. 29. Provided to Committee; filed as Bates no. DHS-FEMA-0105-0000094.
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37 NHC, "Tropical Cyclone Report, Hurricane Katrina," p. 9.

38 Louisiana National Guard, Timeline of Significant Events, Hurricane Katrina, Dec. 7, 2005, pp. 4-5. Provided to Committee [hereinafter LANG Timeline]; Committee staff interview of Lonnie Swain, Assistant Superintendent, New Orleans Police Department, LA, conducted on Nov. 9, 2005, transcript pp. 49-52.

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40 Written Statement of Capt. Bruce C. Jones, U.S. Coast Guard, Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Air Station New Orleans, for the U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, hearing on *Always Ready: The Coast Guard's Response to Hurricane Katrina*, Nov. 9, 2005, pp. 24-25; Committee staff interview of Lt. Col. Keith LaCaze, Assistant Administrator, Law Enforcement Division, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, conducted on Nov. 30, 2005, transcript pp. 46-47; Committee staff interview of Capt. Tim Bayard, Commander, Vice Crimes and Narcotics Section, New Orleans Police Department, LA, conducted on Nov. 21, 2005, transcript pp. 30-33; Committee staff interview of Capt. Paul Hellmers, Engine 18, Second Platoon, Sixth District, New Orleans Fire Department, LA, and Capt. Joseph Fincher, Engine 18, Third Platoon, Sixth District, New Orleans Fire Department, LA, conducted on Nov. 7, 2005, transcript pp. 92-93, 95-96.

41 Committee staff interview of Paul Bennett, Deputy Chief of Police, Gulfport Police Department, MS, conducted on Dec. 8, 2005, transcript pp. 32-33.

42 Capt. Bayard interview, Nov. 21, 2005, p. 40; Lt. Col. LaCaze interview, Nov. 30, 2005, pp. 14-17; James L. Barksdale, Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal, *After Katrina: Building Back Better than Ever*, Dec. 31, 2005, p. 9; Testimony of Gov. Haley Barbour, Mississippi, before the U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, hearing on *Hurricane Katrina: The Role of Governors in Managing the Catastrophe in the Response*, Feb. 2, 2006; Written Statement of Gov. Haley Barbour, Mississippi, for the U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, hearing on *Hurricane Katrina: The Role of Governors in Managing the Catastrophe in the Response*, Feb. 2, 2006, pp. 1-4.

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- 59 U.S. Department of Transportation, Actions for Hurricane Katrina, Annotated Chronology of Significant Events, Oct. 6, 2005, p. 5; LANG Timeline, p. 7; Committee staff interview of Brig. Gen. Mark Graham, U.S. Army, Deputy Commanding General, Fifth U.S. Army, U.S. Department of Defense, conducted on Jan. 12, 2006, transcript pp. 76-80; Committee staff interview of Dolph Diemont, Region X Regional Emergency Transportation Representative, Office of Intelligence, Security and Emergency Response, U.S. Department of Transportation, conducted on Jan. 6, 2006, transcript pp. 57-59; Committee staff interview of Col. Jacques Thibodeaux, Joint Director of Military Support to Civilian Authorities, Louisiana National Guard, conducted on Jan. 12, 2006, transcript p. 24.
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