



Remarks Prepared for Delivery

The Honorable Sandy K. Baruah  
Acting Administrator  
U.S. Small Business Administration

Delivered at the

**Hurricane Ike Press Conference**

Friday, September 19, 2008

The Small Business Administration is not a first responder agency, but given the critical role SBA plays in economic recovery, we are actively and closely engaged in disaster response as well as long-term recovery activities with FEMA and other State and Federal entities.

Along with our sister Federal agencies, SBA has overhauled its processes and response protocols to be proactive. We learned important lessons from the '05 hurricanes and we are prepared to effectively execute our role to support the post-disaster economic recovery.

Since 2005, SBA has:

- Improved and streamlined our disaster application review process and approval process.
- Upgraded our disaster system technology infrastructure to allow for 12,000 concurrent users -- up from 2,000.
- Added 200,000 square feet of space to address surge processing volume needs.
- Implemented an on-line application for SBA disaster loans -- eliminating the need to mail in an application or make a physical trip to a Disaster Recovery Center.
- Expanded our disaster response workforce, including 2,600 reserve employees ready to jump into action if needed. We currently have more than 1,000 on board.
- Established the Executive Office of Disaster Strategic Planning and Operations, led by retired Navy Rear Admiral Steve Smith, to improve our internal coordination as well as our partnership with our Federal and State partners.

SBA is coordinated with FEMA and the States of Texas and Louisiana and we have already pre-positioned employees in the region. We are ready to work side-by-side with FEMA and others to conduct PDAs -- Preliminary Damage Assessments. Our Customer Service Representatives will be in Disaster Recovery Centers as they open.

We currently have 116 SBA Disaster staff in Texas and 200 SBA Disaster staff in Louisiana. We are simultaneously responding to Hurricanes Ike, Dolly, and Gustav. We have already approved more than \$1 million in loans to residents affected by Gustav.

I am traveling to Texas today and to Louisiana next week to see first hand our response activities and to ensure our SBA team members have what they need to be fully responsive. I also visited the Processing and Disbursement Center in Fort Worth, Texas, several weeks ago. My Deputy, Jovita Carranza, was just there this past week reviewing the operations to ensure our effectiveness.

As I mentioned, SBA is not a first responder agency, but we play a critical role in economic recovery. You don't have to be a small business owner to take advantage of SBA's disaster recovery programs. We have low-interest loan program for businesses of all sizes, homeowners, renters, and nonprofits. In fact, more than 80 percent of the direct loans we make are to homeowners and renters. Loan applicants can apply:

- In person at any Disaster Recovery Center where they can receive personal, one-on-one help from an SBA representative; or by
- Using our online Electronic Loan Application available on our website; or by

- Completing a paper application and mailing it to SBA.

For telephone assistance, applicants can call our Customer Service Center number: (800) 659-2955.

Allow me to express again how willing and ready we are to assist with the economic side of the recovery efforts. Given the extent of the damage the people of Gulf region have experienced, we hope that they will take full advantage of our loan opportunities as they start the process of rebuilding their homes and their businesses.

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