



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

This review was conducted in conjunction with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency as part of its examination of relief efforts provided by the Federal Government in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We conducted this evaluation to assess the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) and the State of Mississippi's efforts to ensure that the public was provided with safe drinking water after Katrina.

Background

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, a Category 3 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale, made landfall on the Mississippi coast. Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and rendered many public water systems inoperable. As a result of the hurricane, 585 of the State's 1,368 public water systems were placed under a boil water notice because of potentially contaminated drinking water.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2006/20060214-2006-P-00011.pdf

EPA's and Mississippi's Efforts to Assess and Restore Public Drinking Water Supplies after Hurricane Katrina

What We Found

While we did not assess the extent to which drinking water-related communications were received and understood by the public, the information we reviewed indicated that the Mississippi Department of Health and drinking water system operators provided the public with timely and accurate information about the safety and proper treatment of public drinking water supplies. On August 31, 2005, less than 48 hours after Katrina made landfall, the Department of Health issued a blanket boil water notice for all public water systems in the State's six most impacted counties located in the coastal region of Mississippi.

Mississippi's process for determining the safety of drinking water appeared adequate to support the determinations made. EPA Region 4 provided both technical and logistical support to Mississippi in making these determinations. This support included, but was not limited to, providing Mississippi with a mobile laboratory to perform sample analysis, and providing personnel to help courier samples to the labs for analysis. Disease monitoring after Hurricane Katrina indicated that drinking water supplies were not a source of bacteriological contamination. Neither EPA, the Mississippi Department of Health, nor local water system operators we spoke with had identified or heard of occurrences of waterborne illnesses or diseases from drinking contaminated public water supplies in the 2 months following Hurricane Katrina.

With assistance from EPA and others, the State had assessed the operating status of all but 10 of the State's 1,368 public water systems by September 15, 2005, about 2 weeks after Katrina. These systems serve approximately 3.1 million people in Mississippi. While considerable progress has been made in assessing the operational status of the 1,368 public water systems in Mississippi and bringing damaged facilities back on-line, considerable work remains to restore the drinking water infrastructure to pre-Katrina conditions. Mississippi officials estimated public water system replacements and repairs due to Hurricane Katrina will cost approximately \$235 million.

Our review did not identify any conditions requiring corrective actions and no recommendations are made.