



DEATH TOLL MAY NOT BE AS HIGH AS FEARED



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANDERSON

*'0-0' on house:
No one inside,
no one dead*

By Bruce Nolan
Staff writer

Eleven days after Hurricane Katrina plunged New Orleans into agonies of flood, panic and chaotic evacuation, authorities finally began searching house-to-house in once-flooded neighborhoods Friday for those who did not escape.

Early results retrieved far fewer bodies than officials expected.

That led one key official to hope the death toll might be much less than 10,000, Mayor Ray Nagin's early estimate that quickly became an unchallenged benchmark.

That figure was based on the speed with which Hurricane Katrina flooded the Lower 9th Ward and other poor, densely populated neighborhoods as the storm roared past on Aug. 29 with winds of at least 105 mph.

The estimate became more credible as thousands of traumatized refugees slogged into the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center during the next two days, bearing nightmarish tales of pushing bloated bodies out of the way or passing them sprawled on rooftops.

But in the first day of organized searching, there seemed some reason for hope.

"I think there's some encouragement in what we found in the initial sweeps that some of the catastrophic death that some people predicted may not, in fact, have occurred," said Terry Ebbert, chief of homeland security for the city.

"The numbers so far are relatively minor as compared to the dire predictions of 10,000," he said.

At least in the Lower 9th Ward, federal, state and local teams along with officers from all over the country broke open doors and entered homes, calling out for survivors and looking for corpses.

Where they found neither, they scrawled "0-0" on the house and moved on.

As they worked, Katrina claimed a victim of a different sort: Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Michael Brown was relieved of his onsite command Friday.

Brown was the focus of scorching criticism from state and local officials, as well as evacuees who cursed his relief agency's ineffectiveness.

A woman is rescued by the Georgia National Guard from the roof of a flooded two-story house on Tulane Avenue near the Dixie Brewery on Friday.

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Before Katrina, there was Pam

Simulation intended as emergency training

By John McQuaid
Staff writer

The document's cover page reads, "Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Functional Plan."

It maps out detailed instructions for emergency managers responding to a deadly hurricane that floods New Orleans and kills more than 60,000, including how to rescue and evacuate hundreds of thousands of people stranded on rooftops or trapped by rising waters; how to quickly mobilize federal, state and local agencies; and

how to drain water laced with toxic sludge and clean up a ruined city.

But officials never put the plan into action. It wasn't an official disaster playbook but an experiment, the product of a weeklong simulation conducted last year in which emergency managers confronted a fictional "Hurricane Pam."

The halting emergency response to Hurricane Katrina's aftermath left thousands of people stranded in New Orleans and adjacent areas for days without food and water, with many vulnerable to roaming gangs of out-

laws. Flaws in communications and coordination between government agencies at the federal, state and local levels apparently slowed the response, though exactly what went wrong has yet to be determined.

The 109-page report on Pam, dated Sept. 20, 2004, and provided by a participant in the exercise, addresses many of these issues.

The simulation imagined a grim scenario even worse than Katrina: a slow-moving Category 3 hurricane that strikes the New Orleans area, topping levees and causing 10 to 12

feet of flooding in New Orleans and the entire east bank metro area.

Katrina's flood waters spared most of Jefferson Parish and parts of New Orleans.

In the simulation, 61,290 people die, including 24,250 in New Orleans. An additional 384,000 are injured or fall ill.

The exercise grew out of an initiative at the Federal Emergency Management Agency started early in the Bush presidency to develop plans for

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