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HURRICANE EDITION

City tries again to bring life to shattered area

Algiers residents back, but most of N.O. unlivable



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN POAG

New Orleans Police Officer Len Major looks at IDs Monday at a checkpoint on Behrman Highway and Holmes Boulevard in Algiers. While drinking water, sewerage and power have been restored to Algiers, most of the city's east bank remains without electricity and clean water, which officials now say could be restored in two to three weeks.

By **Martha Carr**
Staff writer

With many parts of New Orleans largely unscathed by Hurricane Rita, Mayor Ray Nagin began allowing some residents and business owners to re-enter the city Monday, a move that he hopes will jump-start a stalled effort to rebuild.

Starting at 10 a.m., Algiers residents began moving back into their homes, while business owners in the CBD, the French Quarter and parts of Uptown poured in to begin the arduous task of cleaning up.

Yet despite the eagerness of residents to return and city officials to rebuild, serious questions remain about whether New Orleans' shattered infrastructure is ready to handle a substantial influx, even in the sections least damaged.

While drinking water, sewerage and power have been restored to Algiers, most of the city's east bank remains without electricity and clean

water, which officials now say could be restored in two to three weeks.

Nagin also warned of potentially serious public health risks, including illness from bacteria-laden tap water, limited police and fire services, and only a single military hospital to provide emergency services.

Food, medicine and gas also are in short supply, with only a handful of businesses open.

While the toilets are flushing, only one of the city's 65 sewer lift stations on the east bank was operating as of late last week. Sewerage and Water board officials did not provide an update on the sewerage system Monday.

The city's east bank wastewater treatment plant also was decimated. As a result, raw sewage probably will have to be pumped into the Mississippi River and possibly Lake Pontchartrain for at least nine months while it is rebuilt, water board officials have said.

To help manage a risky situation,

See **RETURN**, A-6



AP PHOTO

Danny Newchurch carries clothes from his car after returning to his Algiers home. New Orleans Mayor Nagin warned of potentially serious public health risks and limited emergency services.

249 cops went AWOL

Tribunal will weigh each case in N.O.

By **Michael Perlstein**
and **Frank Donze**
Staff writers

The New Orleans Police Department has identified 249 officers who left their posts without permission during Hurricane Katrina and the storm's chaotic aftermath, and is now trying to distinguish out-and-out deserters from those who had compelling reasons to be AWOL.

The announcement puts a number to a phenomenon that was of uncertain magnitude when first revealed by angry police brass as looters swept through New Orleans in Katrina's wake.

Police Superintendent Eddie Compass said he will assemble a tribunal of his four assistant chiefs to hear the circumstances

See **COPS**, A-8

Engineers examining floodwall failures

By **John McQuaid**
Staff writer

Reconstructing exactly how and why a structure failed is one of the most formidable engineering challenges. Investigators do it after plane crashes. They did it after the World Trade Center collapsed.

Now, it's going to be done with New Orleans' canal floodwalls, some of which burst during Hurricane Katrina, flooding large portions of the city. The floodwall failures will spark one or more CSI-type investigations, with engineers poring over design specs, studying broken concrete and twisted

► **Task force aims to restore levees but not upgrade them, A-9**

See **CONCRETE**, A-9

FEMA hands out rent aid checks

► **Rental check questions and answers, A-5**

253,000 in La. eligible for money

By **Robert Travis Scott**
Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE — With the help of satellites spotting storm-damaged areas in New Orleans, the federal government has determined that 253,000 applicants for federal aid in

Louisiana are eligible for a newly announced \$2,358 cash advance toward three months rent to assist people displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Ron Sherman, the housing coordinator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Louisiana, said Monday the agency is expecting to shell out \$600 million of rental assistance in the next two weeks to people across the nation who left the New Orleans area because they

See **RENTAL**, A-5

Response tapes show plans unraveling

Parishes didn't expect trouble getting supplies

By **Kate Moran**
East Jefferson Bureau

Eleven days after Hurricane Katrina pounded the New Orleans area, Walter Maestri erupted in frustration that Jefferson Parish was without basic supplies such as food and generators. In conference calls before the

storm, state leaders had assured him that the parish could get provisions fast by requesting them through a computer system. But after an initial influx, the supplies had disappeared into bureaucratic limbo.

"In the beginning, food and water were pouring in. Now it's trickling," Maestri, the parish's emergency management director, belted in a Sept. 9 conference call with state and parish officials. "We have no supermarkets

► **Transcripts of the conversations among emergency officials during and after the storm, A-7**

See **TAPES**, A-7

DAY 29 • Katrina death toll: 1,084, In Louisiana: 864 • Utility trucks head to aid Rita cleanup, A-10 • Confusion continues over FEMA's role, A-2 • SAT testing sites outside N.O., A-15 • FULL COVERAGE AT NOLA.COM

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