

Group shows FEMA anticipated Katrina's destruction of New Orleans

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A major report published Wednesday by a Washington, DC-based watchdog shows that the Federal Emergency Management Agency anticipated the destruction that would result from a major hurricane striking New Orleans, yet failed to follow through on its own internal warnings.

"FEMA's disaster planning was based on a set of predictions that proved to be remarkably accurate. In 2000-2001, FEMA looked at a population of New Orleans that was over 1.3 million people and predicted that when a catastrophic hurricane struck, the city would be flooded with 14-17 feet of water. One million people would evacuate and 250-350,000 people would be trapped in the city," according to the report, *The Best Laid Plans: The Story of How the Government Ignored Its Own Gulf Coast Hurricane Plans*.

The report, published by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, is based on 7,500 documents that were released to the group by the Department of Homeland Security in whole or in part. A key documents was the 'Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Plan,' which CREW called "strikingly comprehensive."

"The documents CREW received from its FOIA request reveal failures by FEMA and the federal government at nearly every stage of preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina," the report notes. "Why, despite longstanding anticipation of a hurricane strike on New Orleans, significant forewarning of Katrina's imminent landfall, the potential impact on the Gulf Coast, as well as the extensive planning in the days leading up to Katrina's landfall was the federal response so flawed?"

RAW STORY was awaiting comment from FEMA officials at press time on CREW's findings.

While the report could not explain precisely why FEMA did not follow its own plan, it did identify several themes that might have undermined the agency's ability to respond to the disaster. Dysfunction at the agency emerged as a key cause of the poor disaster preparation and response.

"Documents portray FEMA as an agency plagued with low morale and the federal disaster response structure in general as woefully disorganized," CREW's report states. "Several documents suggest a level of disarray that is alarming. For instance, the day before Katrina made landfall, some of FEMA's key officials did not have copies of the SLCHP, including Deputy Director Patrick Rhode, who stated that he believed Michael Brown had his copy."

Melanie Sloan, CREW's executive director, stated in a press release that "The next national emergency — whether another natural disaster or a terrorist attack — undoubtedly will require both adequate preparation and competent execution; based on the findings in this report, what confidence can the American people have that our government will be ready to face those challenges?"

CREW's full report can be downloaded at this link.

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