

FEMA suspends use of disaster trailers

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Federal Emergency Management Agency has stopped donating and selling disaster trailers while it studies reports that people living in them after hurricanes Katrina and Rita got sick from formaldehyde exposure.

Federal health scientists are in Louisiana and Mississippi investigating the safety of the travel trailers being used by hurricane victims, FEMA officials said.

The scientists have been asked to identify an acceptable air quality level for formaldehyde, which is commonly used in building ma-



FEMA trailers await use. Federal officials are investigating the safety of its donated trailers.

terials but can cause respiratory problems in high doses or with prolonged exposure.

FEMA provided about 120,000 travel trailers to victims of the 2005 hurricanes. The health review comes after some occupants last year began reporting illnesses, including nosebleeds and headaches.

Congressional leaders were outraged after documents revealed that FEMA lawyers had discouraged the agency from investigating reports that some trailers had high levels of formaldehyde.

FEMA said in a recent statement that "out of an abundance of caution," it is

suspending further deployment of the travel trailers in its inventory temporarily pending the results of the formaldehyde studies, which will take into account relative humidity, the trailers' design and how long they are lived in.

The agency recently sent about 40 of the trailers to Miami, Okla., where residents were forced out of their homes because of flooding.

Officials said FEMA may continue using other types of manufactured housing, such as mobile homes designed as long-term housing, to help disaster victims.

Court agrees with Rep. Jefferson over FBI raid

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Justice Department trampled on congressional independence when raiding U.S. Rep. William Jefferson's office last year, a federal appeals court ruled Friday, siding with Congress in a constitutional showdown.

In a rare textbook case involving all three branches of government, the court held that investigators violated the Constitution by reviewing legislative documents as part of a corruption investigation.

The court ordered the Jus-

tice Department to return any legislative documents it seized from the Louisiana Democrat's office on Capitol Hill. Still undecided is whether prosecutors can use other records it confiscated as part of their bribery case against Jefferson.

The raid was part of a 16-month international bribery investigation of Jefferson, who is accused of accepting \$100,000 from a telecommunications businessman, \$90,000 of which was later recovered in a freezer in the congressman's Washington

home.

Jefferson pleaded not guilty in June to charges of soliciting more than \$500,000 in bribes while using his office to broker business deals in Africa.

The Justice Department has predicted a ruling such as this recent one will turn Congress into a haven where lawmakers can keep evidence of corruption off-limits to prosecutors.

That's not the case, said the three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

The raid itself was constitutional, the court held.

But the FBI crossed the line when it viewed every record in the office without allowing Jefferson to argue that some involved legislative business.

The Constitution prohibits the executive branch from using its law enforcement powers to interfere with the lawmaking process.

"The review of the congressman's paper files when the search was executed exposed legislative material to the executive"

and violated the Constitution, the court wrote. "The congressman is entitled to the return of documents that the court determines to be privileged."

The court did not rule whether, because portions of the search were illegal, prosecutors should be barred from using any of the records in their case against Jefferson. That will be decided by a Virginia federal judge presiding over the criminal case, which is scheduled for trial in January.

Defense attorney Robert Trout said that fight is ahead. He accused the government of "overreaching" in its investigation.

"This was an illegal search," Trout said. "And anything they got, privileged or not, was unlawfully obtained."

The Justice Department responding to the ruling said

it was pleased prosecutors were allowed to keep records unrelated to legislative business. Spokesman Brian Roehrkasse said the department was disappointed, however, because the ruling required authorities to notify lawmakers before any raid.

The court did not say lawmakers would have to have advance notice of the FBI's arrival. Rather, the court said the Justice Department can't broadly review legislative records. One solution mentioned in the opinion was for FBI agents to lock down the office, then allow the lawmaker to set aside disputed documents. It would be up to a judge — not the FBI — to decide whether the records could be seized.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said she wanted to work with the Justice Department to set up a (See Jefferson, Page 14)

Religion looms large over 2008 race

WASHINGTON (AP) - When George Romney ran for the 1968 Republican presidential nomination, his Mormon heritage was mostly a footnote. It was scarcely mentioned in news accounts of the day. But for son Mitt Romney, the family religion presents a formidable political hurdle.

The younger Romney repeatedly is called on to defend his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its teachings, encountering skepticism particularly from Christian conservatives, a key component of the GOP base.

"I believe that there are some pundits out there that are hoping I'll distance myself from my church so that'll help me politically. And that's not going to happen," Romney asserts.

Religion has not played so prominent a role in a U.S. national election since 1960, when John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic to be

elected president.

And it's not only Romney under scrutiny. All the Democratic and Republican presidential hopefuls have been grilled on their religious beliefs. Most seem eager to talk publicly about their faith as they actively court religious voters.

Democratic Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasizes her Methodist upbringing and says her faith helped her repair her marriage.

Chief rival Sen. Barack Obama frequently uses the language of religion and proclaims a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ. The Illinois Democrat — whose middle name is "Hussein" — scoffs at suggestions of Muslim leanings because he spent part of his childhood in Indonesia. He is a member of the United Church of Christ.

In the most recent Democratic debate, a pastor in a YouTube video asked Democrat John Edwards to defend his use of religion to deny gay marriage. The former

North Carolina senator, a Methodist, talked about his faith and his "enormous conflict" over the issue.

Republican Sen. John McCain, an Episcopalian, said, "I do believe that we are unique and that God loves us."

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister, emphasizes his belief that "God created the heavens and the earth. To me, it's pretty simple."

Unlike the others, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a divorced Roman Catholic who favors abortion rights, sidesteps such questions, claiming one's relationship with God is a private matter. But he attended Catholic schools and at one point considered being a priest.

Clearly, the religious issue is the most problematic for Romney. Polls suggest he faces continued misgivings over his faith. An ABC News-Washington Post poll conducted July 18-21

showed that 32 percent of those who said they leaned Republican described themselves as "uncomfortable" with the idea of a Mormon president.

An earlier poll by the Pew Research Center said 30 percent of respondents said they would be less likely to vote for a candidate that was Mormon. The negative sentiment rose to 46 percent for Muslim candidates and to 63 percent for a candidate who "doesn't believe in God."

Pollster Andrew Kohut, Pew's director, said that between the late 1960s, when Romney's father ran, and now there has been "one of the great transformations of our era. There is more mixing of religion and politics than there was then. As a consequence, people scrutinize Mormonism — or any other religion — more closely than back then."

He cites the growing influence of the Christian right, the political activism of tele-

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Sharpton

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Black residents. Residents said racial tensions have escalated because of events at Jena High School.

Last year, the morning after a Black student sat under a tree on campus where White students traditionally congregated, three nooses — unmistakable lynching symbols in the old South — were hung in the tree.

Students accused of placing them were suspended from the school for a short period, and tensions increased.

Then on Dec. 4, six Black students were accused of jumping Barker and beating and kicking him.

"You cannot have two levels of justice," Sharpton said Sunday.

"Some boys assault people and are charged with nothing. Some boys hang nooses and finish the school year. And some boys are charged with attempted murder."

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