

Toxic state in FEMA trailers

By Jesse Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice
HOUSTON (NNPA) -

"My personal confidence in the government was never strong to begin with but since Katrina, it has become non-existent," said James Ferguson, a former resident of New Orleans whose family of four endured a brief stay in a mobile home after displacement by the hurricane.

"Members of my family and our neighbors began feeling sick all of a sudden, and I didn't know why until I started reading news reports about the dangerous toxins. We moved out immediately," he said. Mr. Ferguson and his family moved to San Antonio before finally residing in southwest Houston.

"I wasn't going to wait on them to come and inspect because, as you can see, they still haven't done anything. They do not care about us," he added, in a recent interview.

Despite two years of reports about the dangers of trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the government has not fulfilled its promise of thorough inspections throughout the Gulf Coast, according to critics and media reports.

FEMA employees, however, were ordered by bosses in early November to stay away from trailers while hurricane survivors endure the effects of lethal chemicals, critics charge.

According to ToxicTrailers.com, over 52,000 households displaced by Hurricane Katrina still live in mobile trailers and have been heavily exposed to formaldehyde, a known respiratory irritant and carcinogen. The website collects the stories and complaints of hurricane evacuees living in FEMA trailers.

Complaints posted online by trailer occupants provide accounts of suffering, including eye, nose and throat irritation, nausea, and breathing difficulties. The trailer residents charge the symptoms come from formaldehyde exposure.

Some children have experienced continuous vomiting while living in trailers, forcing some people to sleep outside on the ground, according to the complaints.

A CBS News report Nov. 7, "FEMA Protecting Itself, Not Evacuees," reported on e-mails circulating within



The federal government has promised to inspect dangerous, unhealthy FEMA trailers.

FEMA that ordered agency employees not go near the trailers for fear of toxic threats. CBS called the warnings a double standard, saying what's good for Katrina survivors should be good for FEMA inspectors.

The cited Emails did not involve FEMA staff working with residents in occupied travel trailers. Neither these instructions nor the referenced memo were ever sent to Individual Assistance Dept. employees who work with trailer residents in the field.

Why? Because there is no restriction on FEMA staff entering occupied trailers. As FEMA staff made clear to CBS News, "We enter trailers every day and, if invited, will do so today so that we can continue to work with anyone asking for assistance in moving to alternative housing," said FEMA in a statement released after the CBS report.

In a published report, FEMA's director said there was no double standard. The caution was based upon trailers ventilated by occupants and stored trailers, he said. According to FEMA, a stored trailer must be ventilated by a forced air pump for a minimum of 30 minutes before they are considered safe for employees.

The Channel 8 news network in Monroe, La., also conducted a special investigation that exposed the flawed and substandard designs of many FEMA trailers. Building expert Bobby Parks examined the inside walls of two mobile homes, Channel 8 News said. The "wall cavities were anywhere from 10-30,000 times higher on one

specific mold spore than what was found on the outside. This is very indicative of a wall that is exposed to an elevated level of moisture," said Parks. Mold is another potential health hazard.

FEMA officials said the agency is working to move all 52,520 households residing in travel trailers nationwide into permanent housing. "Of these, 4,609 households — or 8.7 percent — have expressed a health concern since July 21. Everyone who has called FEMA's formaldehyde call centers with concerns has been offered an immediate move to

a hotel or motel until alternate housing is located," FEMA said.

The sale and deployment of travel trailers has been suspended, pending the result of safety studies, FEMA said. The agency said formaldehyde and housing fact sheets were distributed to the occupants of every FEMA temporary housing unit across the Gulf Coast in July.

FEMA said, "In the Gulf Coast, an average of 810 households per week move out of these temporary housing units and back into permanent housing."

Jesse Muhammad writes for the Final Call.

Legislators eye 2008 candidates

By Sean Yoes
Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) - As the presidential campaigns heat up with most of the Black community divided between New York Sen. Hillary Clinton and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators gathered in Little Rock, Ark., earlier this month to develop the organization's national agenda for the 2008 presidential primary elections.

The 31st annual legislative conference featured speeches by a divergent group of leaders, including former President Bill Clinton, Julianne Malveaux, president of Bennett College for Women; Ernest Green, managing director of the investment banking firm Lehman Brothers and a member of the famous "Little Rock 9," along with Dr. Joycelyn Elders, former U. S. Surgeon General, and Bishop Eddie L. Long, head of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta.

The conference focus was to improve the financial stability and growth in communities across the country, according to spokesman Natalie C. Williams.

The opening plenary speech was delivered by NBCSL's president and Rep. Calvin Smyre from Georgia.

"As state legislators, we understand the impact of an unhealthy financial economy on our communities," Smyre said.

"We see firsthand the significant disparities affecting our families.

"In healthcare, minorities, low-income families and immigrants are more likely to be uninsured than their counterparts. Interesting enough, most of the uninsured are members of a working class family."

He pointed out that wage inequality between average workers and the wealthy is greater than it was three decades ago.

The gender wage gap has narrowed over the last three decades, but unfortunately women still earn considerably less than men, Smyre said.

Many of the gains that African-Americans have made in home ownerships have been negated by predatory lending practices and the subprime mortgage meltdown, he told the more than 500 state legislators from around

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McKinney seeking U.S. presidency

By Akwasi Evans
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Many political observers believe that it is highly unlikely that America will elect a woman for president and even less likely that America will elect an African-American, so what would be the odds of America electing an African-American woman for president?

Whatever they would be, Cynthia McKinney is ignoring them.

The former Georgia Congresswoman, known for her outspokenness on hot political issues, is the presidential nominee of the Green Party, and she was in Austin earlier this month, soliciting support for her up-the-mountain campaign.

McKinney spoke to listeners of KAZI-FM's talk show, "The Wake-Up Call," telling listeners that both the Democrats and the Republicans want to feed the people



Former Georgia congresswoman Cynthia McKinney recently announced that she is running for the presidency.

to the war machine. She said people's values are ignored by the major parties and opportunities for advancement are being exported instead of cultivated here at home. McKinney spoke with Nokoa News by phone fol-

lowing the radio broadcast.

"The Green Party has a primary process. I have had a long relationship with members of the Green Party. Their members supported my first campaign in 1992. Think about economic justice, pub-

lic policy for people who have been left out, healthcare — these are all concerns I share with members of the Green Party," she said.

McKinney, who served in Congress as a Democrat, quit the party in September.

"Being green, feeling green, but not being a Green. The structure of politics doesn't fit my values, so you have to find where your values do fit," she said.

In the radio interview, McKinney said she was on the ballot in four or five states. She says that she won't stop there.

"My goal is to be on 51 ballot lines, including the District of Columbia. In Texas our petition drive needs to collect 45,000 valid signatures from registered voters for my name to appear on the ballot. Nationally our goal is to get over 5 percent of the vote. McKinney is

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