

# Hearing on FEMA Preparedness in 2007 and Beyond

## Chairman Waxman's Opening Statement

Today the Committee is holding its second day of hearings on the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Less than two weeks ago, the Committee examined the agency's response to reports of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers on the Gulf Coast. Our hearing revealed an inexcusable indifference within FEMA to the suffering of displaced hurricane victims living in contaminated trailers.

As good oversight should, the hearing also served as a catalyst for reform. FEMA announced that it would reverse its policy and begin testing occupied trailers for dangerous levels of formaldehyde.

Today's hearing will focus on FEMA's preparedness going forward. We will take a broader look at the agency and ask whether the federal government is better prepared now for natural disasters than it was when Hurricane Katrina struck.

These hearings are part of a series of hearings in this Committee on how to make government work. The goal of these hearings is to spotlight deficiencies in government and restore public confidence in key government agencies.

FEMA used to be widely admired for its effectiveness. But as Hurricane Katrina showed, cronyism, underfunding, and lack of leadership turned FEMA into the most ridiculed agency in government.

The question we will ask in today's hearing is a simple one: Has FEMA restored its capacity to serve the public effectively in times of crisis?

I would like to thank two members in particular for their work on this hearing. Ranking Member Davis requested this hearing and worked closely with us in selecting the witnesses and organizing the hearing. As the Chair of the House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina in the last Congress, he looked in detail at what went wrong at FEMA. His expertise and perspective will benefit all Committee members.

I also want to thank the Chair of our Domestic Policy Subcommittee, Dennis Kucinich, for his leadership. Oversight of FEMA falls within his jurisdiction, and he and his staff have devoted many hours to examining FEMA and preparing for today's hearing.

We have two distinguished panels of witnesses today, and I look forward to their testimony on the important issue of FEMA's preparedness.