

# FEMA Halts Evictions From Trailers in Mississippi

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ATLANTA, June 21 — In yet another change of housing plans for Hurricane Katrina evacuees, the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) has suspended the eviction of 3,000 families who are living in government trailers in [Mississippi](#).

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The move is the latest in a series of announcements and reversals that have caused confusion and occasionally panic among families unable to live in their ruined homes in New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast. For several months, FEMA has repeatedly changed deadlines, sent conflicting letters to applicants, and declared people ineligible for housing assistance for the lack of signatures or failures to appear in person for property inspections.

In Mississippi, 500 of 3,000 planned eviction notices were sent out in late April and early May, giving people 30 days to leave the trailers that the agency had provided. Many families complied.

But now, the agency is trying to contact the recipients of the letters with instructions to disregard them, said a spokesman for the agency, Aaron Walker.

Kathryn James of Pass Christian, Miss., who received an eviction notice in April, said she had grown weary of what she said was the constant backtracking.

"In the beginning," Ms. James said, "they were pretty much helpful. And now it seems that they don't really care."

Ms. James said that after the notice, she received another letter saying she was eligible for rental assistance — although few rental units were available— and still another letter saying that she was eligible for a trailer after all.

In Mississippi, nearly 40,000 families live in FEMA trailers or mobile homes. Agency officials said that in most disasters trailers were used just for long-term shelter, but that after Hurricane Katrina they were also provided for short-term emergency housing, which has looser eligibility requirements.

Since March, the agency has been reviewing evacuees to ensure that they meet the stricter long-term requirements. An evacuee who had insurance that covers interim housing would not be eligible for a trailer or an agency-financed apartment. Nor would a resident whose primary home was not damaged be eligible. Several families said they had been told that they could stay in their trailers for 18 months and did not know that they risked eviction.

An agency official who was granted anonymity because he is a policy expert and not an authorized spokesman, said the difference between emergency and long-term requirements had not been explained, because the agency's experience had been that shell-shocked storm victims could not comprehend such distinctions.

Mr. Walker said halting evictions was not a policy change but a delay for cases to be reviewed.

"We want to make sure that the people who have been determined ineligible are actually ineligible," he said. "So what we're doing is allowing them to stay in their trailers while we go through and dot all the i's and cross the t's to make sure that the case file is absolutely accurate."

Reilly Morse, a senior lawyer at the Mississippi Center for Justice, which helped evacuees fight eviction notices, said the move was a sign that advocates were becoming swifter and more effective at combating a system that sometimes seemed intended to discourage storm victims from obtaining the benefits that they were entitled to.

"But," Mr. Morse added, "it's still just a small piece of a very huge broken system, and it just lumbers on endlessly and leaves people in misery."

Heather Walden, manager of the End of the Rainbow trailer park in D'Iberville, Miss., said she suspected that some families in FEMA trailers did not need or deserve one. But there were others, Ms. Walden said, who were being unfairly evicted.

She was given an eviction notice, Ms. Walden said, because she had failed to provide proof that she had paid rent before the storm. After she was featured on a television report, she was moved into a larger mobile home, she said.

Mr. Walker of FEMA said the review did not indicate that mistakes had been made.

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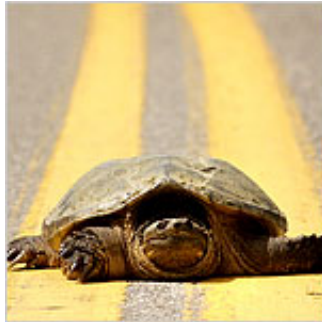
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