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BPA

~ From the Editor

No Big Easy Answers

As this issue goes to press, our hearts go out to the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced from their homes and to the as yet uncounted individuals who died in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina — perhaps the deadliest, and undoubtedly the costliest, storm in our nation's history.

Katrina, which made landfall near Buras, La., as a Category 4 storm with winds reported at 145 mph, passed directly over the eastern edge of the city of New Orleans. While intense winds ravaged homes from the Gulf Coast all the way to Clarkesville, Tenn., the deadliest outcome of this storm was a massive surge — a tremendous wall of water generated by the tropical cyclone that not only leveled homes within a quarter mile of the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama coasts, but also breached the levees surrounding the low-lying city of New Orleans, allowing the waters of Lake Pontchartrain to fill the city like a bowl and flood nearly all of the city's homes. Despite advanced warning, unfortunate circumstances prevented the evacuation of tens of thousands of New Orleans residents. As of this writing — ten days after the storm struck — rescue efforts to pull citizens out of flooded areas continue and the body count has only just begun. More than 20,000 are still reported missing as we go to press, and local mortuaries have been told to prepare for “up to 40,000 bodies” — figures that, if they prove true, would dwarf the casualty numbers of the previous deadliest hurricane in U.S. history: the Galveston Hurricane of 1900, which killed an estimated 6,000 to 12,000 people.

The number of homes destroyed last week is almost certain to dwarf the losses from any previous U.S. natural disaster, as well. According to reports by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the number of housing units made uninhabitable and permanently beyond repair will more than likely include the majority of the 200,000 homes in the city of New Orleans. This is an unprecedented loss. The number of homes destroyed by Hurricane Andrew in 1992 was estimated at more than 28,000, and the combined effect of Hurricanes Jeanne, Ivan, Frances, and Charley last year resulted in the loss of nearly 27,500 housing units, according to estimates by the American Red Cross.

As the staff of a magazine focused on promoting construction practices aimed at ensuring the safety of occupants, we at *Coastal Contractor* are humbled by the destructive power of this tremendous Gulf Coast storm. We are frustrated that there is little we can do directly to bring aid and comfort to the many victims of Hurricane Katrina. What we can do, however, is provide the best information and support possible to the builders who will soon be faced with the task of rebuilding the homes — and with them the lives — of their friends, neighbors, and employees.



Sincerely,

Clayton DeKorne, Editor

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