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General Services Administration Federal Facilities Affected by Hurricane Katrina

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Summary

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf coast on August 29, 2005, causing widespread flooding and significant property and infrastructure damage to federal facilities in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The General Services Administration (GSA) is the federal government's primary federal real property and asset management agency, with 11 regional offices that oversee GSA owned and leased federal buildings and courthouses. Twelve federal facilities have been closed because of Hurricane Katrina in GSA's Southeast Region 4, which includes Alabama and Mississippi. In GSA's Greater Southwest Region 7, all federal facilities in the New Orleans, Louisiana, area are closed until further notice. While not all GSA owned and leased facilities suffered major structural damage, there is no supporting critical infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity, or accessible roads. More than 30 GSA technical and building specialists are conducting building inspections to assess when or if federal facilities in these areas may be reopened. GSA is using trailers and obtaining emergency 180 day leases in surrounding areas to relocate federal tenants. GSA owned courthouse facilities in New Orleans, LA, and Gulfport, MS, have temporarily relocated¹ to Houston, TX, Houma, LA, and Jackson, MS. Senate bill S. 1708, the Emergency Lease Requirements Act of 2005, would amend current law to authorize the GSA Administrator to enter into emergency lease agreements for up to five years following a major disaster. This report will be updated as additional information is received.

Introduction and Background

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf coast on August 29, 2005, causing significant property and infrastructure damage to GSA owned and leased federal buildings and courthouses in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, necessitating the eventual relocation

¹ Public Law 109-63 (119 Stat. 1993), the Judiciary Emergency Special Sessions Act of 2005, authorizes any federal court of appeals, or district or bankruptcy court to hold special sessions outside its judicial circuit at any place within the United States in the event of emergency conditions when no location within the circuit is reasonably available.

of as many as 40,000 federal employees representing all major federal agencies.² The General Services Administration (GSA), through its Public Buildings Service (PBS), is the primary federal real property and asset management agency, with 11 regional offices that oversee GSA owned and leased federal buildings and courthouses. GSA is also responsible for the design and construction of federal courthouses within GSA's 11 regional districts. GSA's Southeast Region 4 includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Tennessee. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 17 federal facilities were closed in Alabama and Mississippi.³ As of September 13, 2005, five federal facilities have reopened, and employees from seven other closed buildings have been temporarily relocated elsewhere (see **Table 1**). The states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas comprise GSA's Greater Southwest Region 7. All federal facilities in the affected New Orleans, LA, area are closed indefinitely (see **Table 2**). While there is no specific information available from GSA as to the particular assignment or relocation status of each federal facility in the New Orleans area, GSA officials in Region 7 are leasing temporary office space in the Baton Rouge, LA area for federal tenants.⁴

Current Situation

While not all GSA owned and leased facilities suffered major structural damage in the affected areas, there is no supporting critical infrastructure, such as water, electricity, sewage systems, or even accessible roads to reach the federal facilities. There are also related environmental concerns that might affect the health and safety of federal employees in the affected areas. More than 30 GSA technical and building specialists are conducting building inspections to assess when or if federal facilities may be reopened. GSA is using trailers and obtaining emergency 180 day leases in surrounding areas to provide temporary office space.⁵ A related problem is that many federal employees were forced to evacuate to areas located away from federal facilities when their homes were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Federal Buildings. In order to accommodate workers who formerly resided and worked in New Orleans, and relocated to Baton Rouge, GSA is leasing temporary office space in this general area. According to GSA regional specialists, it has been a difficult task to find suitable office space for all of its federal tenants, and that the administration

² Tim Kauffman, "In Katrina's Wake," *Federal Times*, Sept. 5, 2005, p. 1.

³ The information used in this report was obtained from telephone conversations with various GSA regional specialists on Sept. 12, Sept. 16, and Sept. 19, 2005, unless otherwise indicated. According to GSA specialists, additional information will be forthcoming as it becomes available.

⁴ A GSA facility may only house federal tenants from one agency. However, most leased GSA facilities in these affected regions housed federal tenants from several agencies. At this time, GSA has not compiled a listing of the affected federal agency tenants, or the number of federal employees involved.

⁵ 40 U.S.C. § 3307(e) authorizes the GSA Administrator to enter into an emergency lease agreement for not more than 180 days, without prior congressional approval of a lease prospectus. Senate bill S. 1708, the Emergency Lease Requirements Act of 2005, would amend current law to authorize the GSA Administrator to enter into emergency lease agreements for up to five years during a major disaster, without prior congressional approval of a lease prospectus.

has been forced to use leasing and relocation priorities. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, GSA first leased all available office space in Baton Rouge, which was urgently needed by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Leased office space in Baton Rouge has been obtained by GSA for the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration.⁶ GSA recently signed a lease in the Baton Rouge area to house Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service employees formerly located in New Orleans. GSA officials are now leasing available office space in Lafayette, LA, Shreveport, LA, and Jackson, MS, to accommodate other federal tenants. GSA is attempting to complete inspections of administration leased facilities as soon as possible to determine the extent of structural damage. If GSA specialists decide that the leased properties are not fully habitable, the agency will notify landlords that it will terminate its existing leases within 15 days after notification. GSA officials also state that, in many instances, it has been difficult for the agency to locate landlords who have relocated elsewhere. GSA will also determine the extent of damage to buildings it owns, and will notify tenants if they will have to continue with rent payments.

Courthouses. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, two GSA owned federal courthouses, the John Minor Wisdom U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and the Hale Boggs Federal Building and U.S. Federal Courthouse for the Fifth Circuit, were closed in New Orleans. Both courthouses suffered wind damage, broken windows, and roof leaks, but the buildings' structures are intact.⁷ It is unknown when water, electrical power, and communications systems will become available. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit has relocated to the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Houston, TX, for a three-month period, with court business resuming on September 21, 2005.⁸ After that time, courthouse operations may relocate to Baton Rouge, LA, and Lafayette, LA, if GSA can obtain adequate court and office space there. Many judges and court employees lost their homes in the New Orleans area, and temporary housing may be obtained for them in Gonzalez, LA, centrally located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. GSA leased court space in Houma, LA, has been acquired for district court judges and court staff who were formerly located in the Hale Boggs U.S. Federal Courthouse.⁹

The Dan M. Russell, Jr. U.S. Federal Courthouse for the Fifth Circuit, Gulfport, MS, was also closed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Preliminary reports indicate that the building is intact, but has sustained severe water and wind damage. While GSA has

⁶ GSA leases office space to several law enforcement agencies in New Orleans. According to GSA, the names and locations of this leased office space is not included in GSA's public listing of closed facilities for reasons of security.

⁷ Information on the status of the courts was obtained from the Administrative Office of the Courts, Office of Legislative Affairs, on Sept. 16, 2005, and from GSA regional specialists on Sept. 15, 2005.

⁸ 119 Stat. 1993.

⁹ In a Sept. 16, 2005, letter to the President, the Judicial Conference of the United States requested \$65.5 million in emergency supplemental appropriations for the expenses of relocating more than 400 judges and court staff in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. See: *Federal Courts Seek Emergency Funding in Hurricane Katrina's Wake* at [<http://www.uscourts.gov/newsroom/katrina.html>], visited Sept. 22, 2005.

not yet assessed the full extent of damage, it appears that the courthouse will not be operable for several months. Court operations are suspended for 30 days, and the court will relocate in Jackson, MS. Housing will be sought for judges and staff throughout the district who lost their homes because of Hurricane Katrina. A fourth GSA owned courthouse, the John A. Campbell U.S. Federal Courthouse, for the Eleventh Circuit, Mobile, AL, was closed due to damaged mechanical systems; however, both the Southern District of Alabama district and bankruptcy courts have resumed operations in the courthouse.

Table 1 indicates the 12 federal facilities that are closed in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, as of September 13, 2005.

Table 1. Closed Federal Facilities in GSA Region 4, as of September 13, 2005

Name	Location	Leased or Owned	Temporary Relocation	Size (in Square Feet)
Edgewater Office Plaza	Biloxi, MS	Leased	Yes	2,954
Dan M. Russell Jr. US Courthouse	Gulfport, MS	Owned	Yes	190,228
Dan M. Russell Jr. Courthouse Annex	Gulfport, MS	Owned	No	38,062
Oak Lane Pro Center	Gulfport, MS	Leased	No	9,958
Social Security Administration (SSA) Building	Gulfport, MS	Leased	No	16,388
Hancock Bank Plaza	Gulfport, MS	Leased	Yes	2,555
One Government Plaza	Gulfport, MS	Leased	No	15,230
U.S. Dept of Agriculture	Hattiesburg, MS	Leased	Yes	3,940
GM&O Building	Mobile, AL	Leased	Yes	4,978
SSA Building	Moss Point, MS	Leased	No	7,071
Millette Building	Pascagoula, MS	Leased	Yes	1,456
Plaza West	Pascagoula, MS	Leased	Yes	3,224

Source: U.S. General Services Administration, *Government Facilities Status and Information*, September 19, 2005, 4 p.; and information provided by GSA specialists in Region 4, on September 16, 2005.

Table 2 indicates the federal facilities that are closed in Louisiana.

Table 2. Closed Federal Facilities in GSA Region 7

Name	Location	Leased or Owned	Temporary Relocation	Size (in Square Feet)
1 Canal Place Garage	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	Not available
1250 Poydras Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	26,348
1515 Poydras Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	33,046
1555 Poydras Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	9,200
2901 Leon C. Simon	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	137,279
3615 Tulane Avenue	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	21,000
4277 Poche Court West	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	121,909
6700 Plaza Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	2,852
916 N. Peter Street	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	2,139
Bartholomew Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	10,805
Canal Place 1	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	65,340
U.S. Corps of Engineers	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	7,972
East Point Shopping Center	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	6,889
Energy Centre	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	5,552
Fisk Record Center	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	44,813
Freeport McMoran	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	24,173
LaFayette Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	16,627
Murphy Building	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	3,231
Oak Park Shopping Center	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	Not available
Texaco Center	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	7,846
Textron Marine	New Orleans, LA	Leased	Not available	32,045
U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Service Building 1	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	4,206
Building 2	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	2,744
Building 3	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	2,773
Building 4	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	887
Building 13	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	5,443
Building 14	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	444
F.E. Hebert Federal Building	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Not available	217,681
H. Boggs Federal Building/Courthouse	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Yes	598,271
J.M. Wisdom Courthouse	New Orleans, LA	Owned	Yes	180,558

Source: U.S. General Services Administration, *Government Facilities Status and Information*, September 19, 2005, 4 p.; and information provided by GSA specialists in Region 7, on September 19, 2005.