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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Evacuations: Filling Gaps in Available Shelters

SUMMARY

Jurisdictions planning for mass evacuations must ensure that sufficient shelter spaces exist to house potential evacuees. Designated evacuees and other persons who self-evacuate create great demand for shelter spaces. Jurisdictions should survey existing schools, universities, and other publicly owned buildings for potential use as shelters.

DESCRIPTION

During 1992's Hurricane Andrew, an inadequate number of shelter spaces in Florida caused problems for state officials and evacuees. According to the Governor's Disaster Planning and Response Review Committee Final Report on Hurricane Andrew, there was a pre-storm deficit of 118,000 needed shelter spaces. The Committee estimated that the post-storm deficit was larger because Hurricane Andrew's severity led more people to self-evacuate than with prior storms.

The Committee acknowledged that Florida's shelter deficit could not be immediately alleviated. It recommended that the state launch a comprehensive program to close the gap in shelter spaces within five years and improve the overall sheltering program.

The Report recommended that the state "[s]urvey existing schools, universities, community colleges, and other state, municipal and county owned public buildings to identify those that are appropriately designed and located to serve as shelters." The state should select the most appropriate of these facilities and retrofit them with hurricane shutters and other enhancements necessary for emergency sheltering.

CITATION

Florida Governor's Disaster Planning and Response Review Committee. *Final Report: Hurricane Andrew*. January 1993. (<http://floridadisaster.org/dem/files/lewisr.pdf>)

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