



Our view: Bureaucracy is hindering La. recovery

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Getting all levels of government on the same page is vital to the post-hurricane recovery of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

As of today, three-plus years after Katrina and Rita, that has not happened. Poor communication has caused misconceptions about the scope of the problems, the amount of funding needed to fix them, and the time it will take to do so.

That is the conclusion of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana as stated in the latest GulfGov Report, titled "Three Years after Katrina and Rita, Challenges Remain."

A companion report will be issued by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, which partnered with the council on this research project.

Miscommunication among government agencies has hobbled the recovery process, making a bad situation worse, according to the research council.

Hurricane Katrina should have proven beyond a doubt to all that effective communication is paramount. A detailed response to a hypothetical "Hurricane Pam," prepared a year before Katrina hit, showed precisely what New Orleans needed to do in the event of a Category 5 hurricane. But the plan was never shared and never funded. When Katrina struck in August 2005, the lack of communication and coordination was astounding and tragic.

Since then, the Office of Emergency Preparedness and some law enforcement agencies have collaborated to try to fix the problems. Overall, the report finds, communication is not effective.

Resulting misconceptions about the status of the recovery complicate the process of getting Congress and the public to understand the situation and the level of financial assistance needed. That has worsened the "Katrina fatigue" that lingers in Washington, D.C., and across the nation.

Misconceptions include the belief that federal funding is disbursed as soon as it is allocated and that massive fraud has occurred as Louisiana and other coastal states dig out and rebuild. Neither is true, the report states.

The complications echo what happened when Katrina hit and an "almost complete breakdown of communications ... exacerbated what was already a disaster."

Today, Louisiana and Mississippi are struggling with the devastating effects of two killer hurricanes and the debilitating effects of bureaucratic bungling.

Not much can be done about the path of a hurricane. Communication problems can -- and should -- be fixed.

Read the report at www.la-par.org.