

FEMA trailers for storm victims in harm's way?

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KILN, Miss.

On a satellite snapshot of this tiny town is a cluster of red dots that looks ominous to scientists like Joe Swaykos.

The dots represent 132 trailers set up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for people whose homes were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The trailers are crammed into a one-square-mile neighborhood, and most of them are along the banks of the Jourdan River in Kiln, Miss.

Those homes and the people living in them could be in real danger if another hurricane strikes the Gulf Coast, said Swaykos, director of the University of Southern Mississippi's Center of Higher Learning, situated at NASA's Stennis Space Center.

"If the Jourdan River rises above flood stage, forget about it," he said. "It's going to be a real mess."

Swaykos and his Stennis colleagues mapped the location of FEMA trailers using space-age technology and old-fashioned legwork. It is one of several projects they are working on to help local officials get ready for the start of the next hurricane season June 1.

Knowing where the FEMA trailers are could be useful if there is a hurricane evacuation.

But the mapping has not gone as well as Swaykos had hoped. His office asked FEMA for a complete list of where more than 35,000 trailers and mobile homes in Mississippi are situated.



AP PHOTO

The home of Dan Stansbury stands on the shore of the Jourdan River in Kiln, Miss. But like most of his neighbors, Stansbury lives in a trailer while he works on repairing the flood damage to his home caused by Hurricane Katrina.

FEMA declined to share the data, citing privacy concerns.

"We try to work with them as best as we can, to allow them to contribute to the recovery process, but paramount to us is the privacy of individuals," FEMA spokeswoman Mary Hudak said.

Swaykos and his colleagues are puzzled by FEMA's refusal to cooperate.

"We don't care who's in the trailers. Just tell us where they are," said Jim Matthews, head of a mapping laboratory at the Center of Higher Learning.

Ultimately, Matthews created the map of the Kiln neighborhood without FEMA's help. He spent a recent morning there, recording the coordinates of the trailers he saw. Back at the lab, he plotted

the data on a photo with red dots.

In addition to the flood danger to the trailers is the risk that a hurricane will turn the homes into dangerous projectiles.

"Those things are going to be missiles going through the air," said Harrison County Emergency Management Director Joseph Spraggins.

Also, Swaykos fears many trailer residents will try to haul their homes to a safer place if a hurricane threatens. And that could clog evacuation routes.

"We're not necessarily forecasting anything," Swaykos said. "We're not trying to point fingers at any organization. We just want to have everybody involved in solving these problems to be working from the same picture."

Miners back to work at Sago

By VICKIE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLMANSVILLE, W.Va.

Two and a half months after an explosion trapped and killed 12 men inside the Sago Mine, their colleagues headed back underground Wednesday and restarted the coal-mining operation once again.

The explosion caught the first crews returning to work after the New Year's holiday Jan. 2. Only one man survived.

Although they cannot fully explain what happened, International Coal Group Inc. officials said Tuesday they believe electricity from above — likely a lightning strike — found some conduit into the earth and sparked methane gas that had accumulated in a sealed-off chamber.

It was unpredictable and highly unusual and ordinarily hard to prove, said CEO Ben Hatfield.

The explosion killed one miner immediately and trapped the crew about 260 feet underground

for more than 41 hours. By the time rescue teams reached them, all but one had perished in the poisoned air.

The lone survivor, Randal L. McCloy Jr., was well enough Tuesday to leave his rehabilitation hospital for a short trip home to Simpson, W.Va.

He has movement in most of his body and is learning to speak again, though doctors say it may be three to six months before he is able to carry on a normal conversation.

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