



February 15, 2006

WILLIAM J. BROWN  
VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHEAST AREA OPERATIONS

GEORGE L. LOPEZ  
VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHWEST AREA OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Postal Service Actions to Safeguard Employees From  
Hurricane Katrina (Report Number HM-AR-06-002)

This report presents the results of our self-initiated review of U.S. Postal Service actions to safeguard employees from Hurricane Katrina (Katrina) (Project Number 06YG015HM000). Our objective was to determine whether employees were safeguarded prior to the landfall of Katrina.

The President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency tasked the Inspectors General community with assuring appropriate oversight of financial and procurement processes and operations regarding Katrina activities. As a result, the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) established a task force comprised of auditors and investigators to review the Postal Service's Katrina activities. This report is the first of two the OIG Human Capital Team will issue on actions to safeguard employees. This report addresses the Postal Service's actions to safeguard employees before Katrina made landfall in the four districts affected: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida. The second report will address Postal Service actions taken to safeguard employees once Katrina made landfall.

We concluded the Postal Service took appropriate actions as described in the Integrated Emergency Management Plans (IEMPs) and supplemental hurricane plans related to effective notification to employees prior to Katrina's landfall. We also found the Postal Service identified lessons learned from other hurricanes, which helped them to safeguard employees prior to Katrina's landfall. As a result, Postal Service employees were safeguarded and there were no reported injuries to employees prior to Katrina's landfall. We commend the Postal Service for its efforts, which exemplify that the safety and health of Postal Service employees is of the utmost concern to management.

Although we had no recommendations for management, they provided comments. The Southeast Area vice president stated the report accurately presents the significant steps taken to safeguard employees. The vice president also said the report offers the Southeast Area an opportunity to reflect further on the actions that were taken during this challenging and difficult time. Further, the vice president stated that, as the Southeast Area plans for the upcoming hurricane season, they are incorporating the lessons learned as captured in the report, as well as the results from the Postal Service's After Action Reviews and other planning meetings.

The Southwest Area vice president also stated the OIG report was accurate and that he noted the New Orleans American Postal Workers Union (APWU) president was not personally contacted regarding the efforts to safeguard employees prior to hurricanes. He said management has corrected this procedure for future hurricanes/events. Management's comments have been incorporated into the report and are included in their entirety in Appendix E.

## **Background**

### IEMP and Supplemental Hurricane Plans

The Postal Service IEMP is a comprehensive plan used to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from domestic emergencies that occur on Postal Service sites. The IEMP consolidates facility stand-alone plans, which include the Continuity of Operations Plan, Crisis Management Plan, Emergency Action Plan, and emergency-specific plans. The IEMP also establishes emergency management teams and defines team roles and responsibilities. The IEMP identifies the phases and stages of an emergency response and responsibilities of the Emergency Management Team (EMT)<sup>1</sup> during each phase and stage. In addition, the IEMP identifies the public service addresses related to hurricanes (such as warnings and watches).

The Postal Service hurricane plans and guides are emergency-specific plans facility, district, and/or area operations use. The purpose of these plans is to provide procedures and protocols to follow for the protection of Postal Service personnel, their families, and all property and equipment of the Postal Service. The plans also provide for the safe curtailment of Postal Service operations and evacuation of employees on- and off-duty, as well as safeguarding the mail, facilities, and vehicles. Some plans include the phases of a hurricane alert and the procedures to follow during all phases.

### Definition of a Hurricane

A hurricane is an intense tropical weather system with winds reaching a constant speed of 74 miles per hour (mph) or more. Hurricanes can produce widespread torrential rains followed by floods and excessive rain can trigger landslides, mudslides, and flash

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<sup>1</sup> EMT members include the emergency manager, safety officer, liaison officer, emergency operations section chief, logistics section chief, and information officer.

flooding. Hurricane season in the U.S. is from June through November, while the peak hurricane season is from mid-August to late October.

Hurricane Categories

The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale is a 1-5 rating based on a hurricane's present intensity. The scale is used to give an estimate of the potential property damage and flooding expected along the coast from a hurricane landfall. Wind speed is the determining factor in the scale, as storm surge values are highly dependent on the slope of the continental shelf and the shape of the coastline in the landfall region. The five classes of hurricanes are shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale**

Category	Winds – mph	Damage
1	74 to 95	Minimal: Damage to signs, unanchored mobile homes, trees, and power lines. There may be some coastal flooding. Central pressure will be 28.94 inches or more and will be accompanied by a 4- to 5-foot storm surge of water.
2	96 to 110	Moderate: Damage to larger signs, roofs, doors, windows, mobile homes, small boats, and trees. There may be some flooding. Central pressure 28.50 to 28.93 inches accompanied by a storm surge of 6 to 8 feet of water.
3	111 to 130	Extensive: Damage to buildings, walls, mobile homes, and trees. Flooding may wash away smaller coastal structures. Flooding inland of 8 miles or more. Central pressure 27.91 to 28.49 inches accompanied by a storm surge of 9 to 12 feet of water.
4	131 to 155	Extreme: Almost total destruction of doors and windows. There will be some wall and roof failure. There will be major damage to lower floors of oceanfront buildings. Evacuations up to 6 miles inland. Central pressure 27.17 to 27.90 inches accompanied by a storm surge of 13 to 18 feet of water.
5	155 or more	Catastrophic: Buildings, roofs, and structures are destroyed. Flooding up to 10 miles inland and evacuation of area needed. Central pressure 27.17 inches or less accompanied by a storm surge of 18 feet or higher of water.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce Natural Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshs.shtml>).

Hurricane Katrina Timeline

Katrina created a tragedy that left hundreds of thousands of people without power, water, or a way to communicate. It materialized into a Category 5 storm that affected and caused damage in four states: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The following is a timeline of events/actions from the inception of Katrina to her landfall in Alabama and Mississippi.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event/Action</u>
August 23, 2005 (Tuesday)	The U.S. National Hurricane Center issued a statement saying tropical depression twelve had formed over the southeastern Bahamas.
August 24, 2005 (Wednesday)	Tropical depression twelve was upgraded to Tropical Storm Katrina.
August 25, 2005 (Thursday)	Katrina made its first landfall in Florida as a Category 1 hurricane.
August 26, 2005 (Friday)	The eye of Katrina was located offshore of southwestern Florida over the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 50 miles northeast of Key West, and was still classified as a Category 1 hurricane.
August 27, 2005 (Saturday)	Katrina reached Category 3 intensity and moved closer to the state of Louisiana.
August 28, 2005 (Sunday)	Katrina reached Category 4 intensity at 12:40 a.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT).
August 28, 2005 (Sunday)	Katrina reached Category 5 intensity at 7:00 a.m. CDT.
August 29, 2005 (Monday)	Katrina made a second landfall at 6:10 a.m. CDT as a Category 4 storm near Buras, Louisiana, with winds near 145 mph.
August 29, 2005 (Monday)	Katrina made a third landfall near Pearlington, Mississippi, at 10:00 a.m. CDT as a Category 3 hurricane, with winds up to 125 mph. Another set of storms and hurricane winds stretched from near Biloxi, Mississippi, to the western most barrier islands along the state line of Alabama <sup>2</sup> and Mississippi.

Source: Wikipedia website ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_Hurricane\\_Katrina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Hurricane_Katrina)), November 15, 2005.

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<sup>2</sup> Weather Underground article titled *Hurricane Katrina – Cat 4 Hitting Gulfport/Biloxi Now*, August 29 – 10:05 CDT ([www.wunderground.com/blog/SteveGregory/comment.html](http://www.wunderground.com/blog/SteveGregory/comment.html)).

Postal Service Districts in the Path of Katrina

Katrina was predicted to significantly impact hundreds of Postal Service facilities and thousands of employees in four districts in the Southeast and Southwest Areas of Postal Service Operations. The numbers of facilities and employees in the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida Districts are shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: Total Numbers of Facilities and Employees in the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida Districts**

Postal Service		Numbers	
Area Operation	District	Employees *	Facilities **
Southeast	Alabama	8,106	693
Southeast	North Florida	6,522	332
Southeast	Mississippi	5,064	508
Southwest	Louisiana	8,230	639
<b>Total</b>		<b>27,922</b>	<b>2,172</b>

\* Source: Web-Enabled Enterprise Information System as of January 3, 2006.

\*\* Source: Southeast and Southwest facility postal Blue Pages as of January 3, 2006.

**Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

We conducted our review in the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida Districts at the largest, hardest hit facility<sup>3</sup> in each district. We discuss our objective, scope, and methodology in detail in Appendix B.

**Prior Audit Coverage**

We discuss our prior audit coverage in detail in Appendix C.

<sup>3</sup> The facilities we reviewed were the Gulfport Processing and Distribution Facility (P&DF); the Mobile, Alabama, Main Post Office (MPO); the New Orleans Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC); and the Pensacola P&DC.

## Audit Results

We concluded the Postal Service took appropriate actions as described in the IEMPs and supplemental hurricane plans related to effective notifications to employees prior to Katrina's landfall. We also found the Postal Service identified lessons learned from other hurricanes, which helped them to safeguard employees prior to Katrina's landfall. As a result, Postal Service employees were safeguarded and there were no reported injuries to employees prior to Katrina's landfall. We commend the Postal Service for its efforts, which exemplify that the safety and health of Postal Service employees is of the utmost concern to management.

### Employees Were Safeguarded

Prior to Katrina making landfall, Postal Service facilities in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida Districts safeguarded employees from Katrina by instructing them on actions to take regarding Katrina. They used notification mediums such as the national emergency hotline number, local emergency numbers, public media outlets, and internal safety talks.

The Postal Service relied primarily on its toll-free national emergency hotline number (1-888-363-7462) to inform employees how to stay connected during Katrina. When employees called the number, they were prompted to enter the first three digits of the ZIP Code where they worked. A voice recording provided them information about facility closings, changes in reporting times, and other workplace information specific to their district. The districts were responsible for updating the messages specific to their district.<sup>4</sup>

Also, the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida District managers conducted teleconferences with facility officials to evaluate the need to shutdown facilities and established messages for the national emergency hotline number. The district managers also instructed emergency personnel to inform employees to continue to monitor the emergency hotline and in some districts reminded employees that liberal leave<sup>5</sup> was in effect. In addition, the district emergency managers sent instructions to the district leadership teams and the EMT based on information they obtained from NOAA. For example, the Mississippi District Emergency Preparedness manager sent an advisory on August 28, 2005, which discussed Katrina's category level, wind speed, position, cities the storm would affect, and the timeframes for the storm in those cities.

The Southeast Area acting manager, Operations Program Support, told us the North Florida District used three weather sites to obtain information.<sup>6</sup> He also said the State of

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<sup>4</sup> On December 13, 2005, the OIG audit team called the toll-free number and entered the first three digits of a Mississippi ZIP Code. The voice recording provided updated information regarding the status of facilities in the ZIP Code area and other workplace information.

<sup>5</sup> Liberal leave allows employees to take annual leave without prior authorization from their supervisor.

<sup>6</sup> The three websites were [www.crownweather.com](http://www.crownweather.com), [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com), and [www.nrlmry.navy.mil](http://www.nrlmry.navy.mil).

Florida Emergency Operations Center (EOC) website, [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org), was monitored<sup>7</sup> for information.

The Mobile MPO management notified employees 72 hours before Katrina made landfall in Alabama on August 28, 2005. The Gulfport P&DF and the New Orleans P&DC management notified employees at least 96 hours before the hurricane made landfall on August 29, 2005. Also, plant management at the Gulfport P&DF, the Mobile MPO, and the New Orleans P&DC shut down all operations approximately 24 hours before Katrina made landfall. There were 166 employees in the Gulfport P&DF, 55 in the Mobile MPO, and approximately 1,300 in the New Orleans P&DC who were released from work or told not to report to work before Katrina made landfall. (For a timeline of actions at the New Orleans P&DC, see Appendix D.)

The APWU president for Mobile, Alabama, stated the Alabama District notified employees about Katrina through the national hotline number and local television stations. However, he stated the district did not inform him about their efforts to safeguard employees prior to Katrina's landfall. The APWU local president for New Orleans, Louisiana, stated he thought the Postal Service did a fantastic job of communicating with employees before, during, and after Katrina. However, he stated Louisiana District officials did not contact him prior to Katrina concerning the district's efforts to safeguard employees prior to Katrina's landfall.<sup>8</sup> The Mississippi National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) president stated he was not aware of any concerns about safeguarding employees prior to Katrina's landfall. In addition, the NPMHU state representative for Mississippi stated the Postal Service notified employees in their district prior to Katrina about the status of Postal Service facilities through the local television and radio stations.

### Employees' Concerns

Two employees in the Mississippi District expressed concerns to the OIG<sup>9</sup> that some employees were not safeguarded from Katrina on August 29, 2005, and their lives were put in danger. One of these employees was a local area APWU president who stated the Postal Service notified employees by way of the national emergency hotline number to report to work, even though Katrina had made landfall. The APWU president said the hotline message told employees in one ZIP Code area to report to work up until at least 2:00 p.m., even though Katrina had made landfall around 6:00 a.m. The president also said after 2:00 p.m. the message stated, "all circuits are currently busy." The other employee contends that while emergency management and law enforcement were advising everyone to seek shelter in this ZIP Code area, the Postal Service was mandating that its employees report for work.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Southeast Area acting manager, Operations Program Support, the Florida EOC website provided information on mandatory evacuations and current updates on the storm and emergency response.

<sup>8</sup> See the Corrective Action section for the Southwest Area Manager of Operations' response to us regarding how the area will communicate with the APWU local president in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Letters were also written to Senator Thad Cochran and Congressman Gene Taylor.

According to the Mississippi District Human Resources manager, they made the decision to open or close certain facilities/offices in Mississippi ZIP Code areas as early as possible on August 28 and August 29, 2005. The manager said they based decisions on Katrina weather reports and phone calls to the local and state emergency management offices and local law enforcement offices. The manager also said that, although some facilities remained open and management asked employees to report to work, if employees called and requested leave because they could not make it or asked to leave work, management approved their requests to meet the needs of their individual situations.

The manager also told us that as August 29, 2005, progressed, it became evident Katrina was going to be worse than expected and that some facility managers called the district office advising that Katrina was adversely affecting their facility and they were going to close down and send employees home. The manager said the district manager concurred in every instance with local facility managers regarding the closing of their facilities.

Postal Service policy<sup>10</sup> states emergency managers should evaluate the need to shutdown or evacuate the building based on information they receive from the radio public service addresses and information provided by the NOAA. Policy also states emergency managers should instruct employees to proceed to another installation or go home. In addition, it states the safety officer should conduct a safety talk regarding the appropriate hurricane safety procedures.

Additionally, Postal Service supplemental hurricane<sup>11</sup> plans and booklets instruct employees to listen to local radio stations for information concerning the emergency and follow instructions that pertain to "Postal Employees" only. These plans and booklets also state the Postal Service should notify employees of conditions in person, via the telephone message line, employee/emergency hotline, or public media outlets.

The Postal Service's decision to open and close certain facilities in the Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi Districts represented appropriate action as described in the IEMP and supplemental hurricane plans. In addition, allowing employees to take leave ensured they were able to make choices about what was best for them given where they lived and worked and the unpredictable path of Katrina. We believe the Postal Service took the appropriate action in this case.

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<sup>10</sup> IEMP, Production Version 1.2, Installations and Districts, Annex 2D: Hurricanes, March 2004.

<sup>11</sup> The plans we reviewed were the *U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Alabama District Hurricane Plan and Standard Operating Procedures*, June 1, 2005; *USPS North Florida Hurricane Emergency Management Plan*, 2005; *Louisiana District Hurricane Guide*, 2005; *Gulfport P&DF Hurricane Preparedness Plan for USPS Southeast Area Offices 395 and 396*, 2004/2005; and the *Southeast Area Hurricane/Tropical Storm Procedure*, June 1, 2005. The booklets we reviewed are the *USPS Mobile Alabama, Hurricane Preparedness Information*, June through November 2004; and the *USPS North Florida District, Hurricane Preparedness Information*, June through November. Management initially finalized and mailed the *USPS North Florida District, Hurricane Preparedness Information* to employees in May 2005.

## Corrective Action

The Southeast and Southwest Area vice presidents told us one area they can always improve on is communications. They said on November 3, 2005, the Southwest Area and headquarters' Office of Emergency Preparedness hosted a Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Lessons Learned/After Action Review Meeting. According to the Southeast Area acting manager, Operations Program Support, the Southeast Area participated in the meeting.

The Southwest Area vice president said another meeting is tentatively set for March 14-15, 2006, in Dallas, Texas. The purpose of this meeting is to follow-up on the gaps identified at the previous meeting and to prepare for the next hurricane season. Involvement of both planning and operational personnel will ensure they develop and implement a coordinated set of operations, plans, and procedures for response readiness and continuity of Postal Service operations. Planning and operational personnel will consist of individuals who were involved in the hurricane response and recovery efforts and/or subject matter experts in the functional areas listed below:

- Business Service Network
- Delivery Programs
- Facilities Service Office
- Human Resources
- Maintenance
- Public Affairs & Communication
- Security
- Category Management Center
- Distribution Networks
- Finance
- In-Plant Support
- Marketing
- Safety

The Southwest Area vice president also told us it was important to know that the local APWU president in New Orleans was concerned that he was not contacted personally prior to Katrina concerning the district's efforts to safeguard employees prior to landfall. He told us that management has since corrected the procedure for notifying the president prior to the arrival of a hurricane.

According to the Southeast Area acting manager, Operations Program Support, on October 20, 2005, the Southeast Area manager, Operations Support, convened an After Action Review, which included key Southeast Area employees involved in hurricane preparedness and response and recovery actions. The acting manager told us the Southeast Area manager, Emergency Preparedness, facilitated the review. The purpose of the review was to assess the Southeast Area's preparation, response, and recovery from the hurricanes that occurred in late August 2005 and early September 2005. According to the acting manager, they provided copies<sup>12</sup> of the After Action Review to headquarters, Emergency Preparedness, and the Southeast Area manager, Emergency Preparedness, used the review results during his November 3, 2005, presentation at the After Action Review meeting in Dallas, Texas.

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<sup>12</sup> A copy of the After Action Review was also provided to the OIG.

### Lessons Learned on Notifying/Safeguarding Employees

One Postal Service official told us they learned one lesson from Katrina and three other officials implemented lessons during Katrina that they learned from Hurricanes Dennis<sup>13</sup> and Ivan.<sup>14</sup> The New Orleans P&DC senior plant manager told us they learned from Katrina to increase the frequency of information sharing to ensure points-of-contact and addresses for employees are kept up to date. The North Florida District manager, Emergency Preparedness, told us he learned from Hurricane Dennis to notify employees about impending hurricanes earlier and to update the employee hotline more often. The Mobile MPO postmaster said they learned from Hurricane Ivan to notify employees of Katrina days before her landfall. The Alabama District Emergency Preparedness manager told us they learned from Hurricane Ivan to let each facility make decisions about what is best for its employees. For example, the Alabama District Office is located in Birmingham, Alabama, 257 miles inland from Mobile. Mobile, however, is located approximately 144 miles east of New Orleans, Louisiana. Since Mobile was in the immediate path of Katrina, its position made the officials in Mobile the more appropriate decision makers.

The Alabama District Emergency Preparedness manager told us they shared lessons learned from hurricanes during service talks and cluster meeting presentations and via the district's website. The Alabama District Operations Programs support manager stated after the EOC<sup>15</sup> closes, the EMT meets to discuss lessons learned to determine how they can better support operations managers. The North Florida District Emergency Preparedness manager stated they shared lessons learned by using postings, stand-up/service talks, teleconferences, and e-mails, which are communicated throughout the district. They also solicit input from employees and management. The Southeast Area Emergency Preparedness manager meets with all the districts in the Southeast Area to discuss lessons learned. These lessons are shared with all districts in the Southeast Area and are added to emergency plans, service talks, and postings.

The Postal Service's supplemental hurricane plans facilitated the safeguarding of employees. The plans contained specific instructions on what management and emergency personnel should do, who to contact, and what and when precautions should be taken in the event of a hurricane. As a result, employees were safeguarded from Katrina. The OIG's comprehensive report on the Postal Service's Emergency Preparedness – Hurricane Katrina will assess the adequacy of these plans and the IEMP.

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<sup>13</sup> Hurricane Dennis affected Florida and Alabama as a Category 3 storm on July 10, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Hurricane Ivan came ashore in Alabama on September 16, 2004, as a Category 3 storm and later affected Florida, Louisiana, and Texas as a tropical storm.

<sup>15</sup> The EOC is the physical location that serves as the Postal Service's single focal point for the management of information, decision-making, and resource support/allocation during the entire disaster management and recovery process.

**Management's Comments**

Although we had no recommendations for management, they provided comments. The Southeast Area vice president stated the report accurately presents the significant steps they took to safeguard employees. The vice president also said the report offers the Southeast Area an opportunity to reflect further on the actions taken during this challenging and difficult time. Further, the vice president stated that, as the Southeast Area plans for the upcoming hurricane season, they are incorporating the lessons learned as captured in the report, as well as the results from the Postal Service's After Action Reviews and other planning meetings.

The Southwest Area vice president also stated the OIG report is accurate. Finally, he noted the New Orleans APWU president was not personally contacted regarding the efforts to safeguard employees prior to hurricanes, and that management has corrected this procedure for future hurricanes/events. Management's comments have been incorporated into the report and appear in their entirety in Appendix E.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Chris Nicoloff, director, Human Capital, or me at (703) 248-2300.

E-Signed by Mary Demory   
VERIFY authenticity with Approve!

Mary W. Demory  
Deputy Assistant Inspector General  
for Headquarters Operations

Attachments

cc: Douglas A. Tulino  
John R. Mularski  
James A. Daily  
Mary A. Richards  
Anthony J. Ruda  
Harold L. Swinton  
Samuel M. Pulcrano  
Steven R. Phelps

## APPENDIX A. ABBREVIATIONS

APWU	American Postal Workers Union
CDT	Central Daylight Time
ELM	Employee and Labor Relations Manual
EMT	Emergency Management Team
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IEMP	Integrated Emergency Management Plan
mph	Miles Per Hour
MPO	Main Post Office
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
NPMHU	National Postal Mail Handlers Union
OIG	U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General
P&DC	Processing and Distribution Center
P&DF	Processing and Distribution Facility
USPS	U.S. Postal Service

## APPENDIX B. OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our overall objective was to determine whether employees were safeguarded prior to the landfall of Katrina.

We reviewed the actions taken to safeguard employees before Katrina made landfall in late August 2005. We conducted our review in the Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Florida Districts at the largest, hardest hit facility in each district. These facilities are the Gulfport P&DF, the Mobile MPO, the New Orleans P&DC, and the Pensacola P&DC. In addition, we reviewed OIG hotline complaints and congressional inquiries from two employees in the Mississippi District. We also coordinated with Postal Service Headquarters representatives to determine the number of employees and facilities impacted per district.

We interviewed district officials and facility representatives to determine management actions taken to safeguard employees, obtain timelines, and determine lessons learned from Katrina and prior hurricanes regarding safeguarding employees. We obtained the hurricane plans implemented before Katrina for the districts and facilities we reviewed. We reviewed the IEMP and supplemental hurricane plans to assess whether the plans described actions to safeguard employees from Katrina. However, we did not review the extent to which the plans in their entirety complied with the IEMP. We will address that in the OIG's comprehensive report on the Postal Service's Emergency Preparedness - Hurricane Katrina.

In addition, we reviewed the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual* (ELM) and other guidance as applicable. We interviewed local union representatives<sup>16</sup> to assess their knowledge of emergency preparedness policies, procedures, and practices related to issues that occurred before Katrina. We also interviewed Postal Service officials and management at headquarters and the area levels to get their perspectives on Katrina.

### Tests of Internal Controls

We performed tests of internal controls on the Postal Service's toll-free national emergency hotline number (1-888-363-7462). We entered the first three digits of a Mississippi ZIP Code and obtained updated information regarding the status of facilities and other workplace information for the Mississippi District. We also reviewed the information the emergency managers used to notify employees of Katrina, which was based on information provided by the NOAA. In addition, we reviewed supplemental hurricane plans and booklets for the four districts and facilities selected to ensure the plans and booklets included the emergency facility contact names, public media outlets' names and numbers, and local or national emergency hotline numbers that management and emergency personnel should use.

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<sup>16</sup>The union representatives were the APWU president for Mobile, Alabama; the APWU local president for New Orleans, Louisiana; the NPMHU state president for Mississippi; and the state representative for Mississippi. These were the unions that filed grievances for employees related to the aftermath of the Katrina and not prior to Katrina.

We conducted this audit from November 2005 through February 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management officials and included their comments where appropriate.

## APPENDIX C. PRIOR AUDIT COVERAGE

We identified the following prior audits relative to notifying and safeguarding employees from Katrina.

*Hurricane Katrina, Providing Oversight of the Nation's Preparedness, Response, and Recovery and Activities* (Report Number GAO-05-1053T, dated September 28, 2005).

The report stated past Government Accountability Office (GAO) work noted government programs relating to preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina needed improvement. It further stated past work on telecommunications issues found that first responders are challenged by a lack of interoperable emergency communications. Past work on preparedness identified improvements needed in a number of areas including efforts related to natural disasters and all hazards; planning preparedness efforts; setting goals and measures; providing training, exercise, evaluations, and lessons learned to first responders; and flood control and protection. The GAO did not issue any findings.

*Audit of Postal Inspection Service's Emergency Preparedness* (Report Number SA-AR-05-001, dated January 5, 2005). The report presents the results of the OIG's audit on emergency preparedness. It stated the IEMP was established on January 13, 2004, in response to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5.<sup>17</sup> The IEMP is one plan for the Postal Service to mitigate, prepare, respond, and recover from any natural disaster or man-made hazard. The IEMP establishes a standardized emergency management process that has incorporated Postal Service incident-specific and planning efforts into a single comprehensive document that will serve as the core guide for emergency management. Under the IEMP, the Postal Inspection Service will function as a liaison with both Postal Service and external law enforcement officials during an emergency and as incident commander for certain emergencies involving a criminal investigation. The report stated the Postal Inspection Service was involved in developing the Postal Service IEMP. It stated the EMTs and the Postal Inspection Service have taken action to improve external outreach with local first responders, public health agencies, and law enforcement. However, it also stated the Postal Inspection Service's current emergency plans need revision. It stated application of emergency preparedness guidance may not be consistent from Postal Inspection Service division-to-division and incident-to-incident because of the many contingency plans that currently exist. It stated a comprehensive IEMP would incorporate all the emergency plans.

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<sup>17</sup> Under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5, all federal departments and agencies, including the Postal Service and Postal Inspection Service, are required to adopt a comprehensive plan addressing all hazards.

## APPENDIX D. TIMELINE OF ACTIONS AT THE NEW ORLEANS P&DC

The following timeline describes the New Orleans P&DC management actions taken to safeguard employees before Katrina made landfall:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event/Action</u>
August 24, 2005 (Wednesday)	Katrina entered the Gulf of Mexico as a Category 1 storm. The New Orleans P&DC activated the EOC which met once or twice a day with the district manager and postmasters. The EOC began advertising the emergency telephone numbers in the Postal Service NEWSBREAK <sup>18</sup> and informed employees about liberal leave.
August 25 – 26, 2005 (Thursday and Friday)	P&DC management held teleconferences with the district manager, plant managers, and other emergency personnel to discuss actions that should be taken to safeguard employees and facilities.
August 27, 2005 (Saturday)	The district manager and senior plant manager continued to hold teleconferences and decided operations would be shut down the next day. Late that night, they began the process of shutting down equipment and locking doors in the P&DC.
August 28, 2005 (Sunday)	The P&DC management shut down completely at 10 a.m. The P&DC management started advertising emergency phone numbers on the radio and television. The P&DC management also utilized the last known address and sent out letters to employees based on information from human resources.
August 29, 2005 (Monday)	The district manager and the EMT met in Alexandria, Louisiana, and reestablished the EOC. They continued to advertise the toll-free emergency hotline number (1-888-363-7462) on radio, television, and newspapers. They issued administrative leave <sup>19</sup> to all employees. Katrina made landfall and they decided to implement actions described in the IEMPs.

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<sup>18</sup> A Postal Service "NEWSBREAK" is a one-page announcement used to report the status of emergencies. It is sent via e-mail or facsimile or printed and posted on bulletin boards.

<sup>19</sup> ELM 17.11, Section 519.1, dated July 7, 2005, defines administrative leave as "an absence from duty authorized by appropriate Postal Service officials without charge to annual or sick leave and without loss of pay."

## APPENDIX E. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

GEORGE L. LOPEZ  
VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHWEST AREA OPERATIONS



January 24, 2006

KIM H. STROUD  
DIRECTOR, AUDIT REPORTING  
1735 NORTH LYNN STREET  
ARLINGTON VA 22209-2020

After reviewing the draft, I believe that the OIG is correct in what is written. It has been noted that the New Orleans local APWU President was not personally contacted and that procedure has been corrected for future hurricanes/events.

Also, the second meeting (After Action Review) will be held March 14-15, 2006. A letter will be issued shortly with all of the particulars. We believe all other statements are correct and need no further comment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George L. Lopez".

George L. Lopez

PO Box 224748  
DALLAS TX 75222-4748  
214-819-8650  
FAX: 214-905-9227

WILLIAM J. BROWN  
VICE PRESIDENT, AREA OPERATIONS  
SOUTHERN AREA



January 26, 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: Kim H. Stroud  
Director, Audit Reporting  
1735 North Lynn Street  
Arlington, VA 22209-2020

SUBJECT: OIG Discussion Draft to AVP (Hurricane Katrina)

I appreciate the opportunity to review the draft report Postal Service Actions to Safeguard Employees from Hurricane Katrina. The report presents correctly the significant steps that were taken to safeguard employees. In addition, the report offers us an opportunity to reflect further on the actions that were taken during this challenging and difficult time. As we plan for the upcoming hurricane season, we are incorporating the lessons learned as captured in the report, as well as the results from our After Action Reviews and other planning meetings.

We have no other comments and, again, appreciate the opportunity to review the report.

  
William J. Brown

295 N. HUNTERS BLVD  
MARTIN, TN 38466-0100  
901-727-7933  
Fax: 901-747-7149