

# critics hope new FEMA is as good as the old

**ORY REISS**  
gton Bureau

WASHINGTON - The names crossed a wall at the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Tuesday with Ana and ended with Henri. Isabel, the hurricane churning off the East Coast, was next in line for a black mark that would show it had passed, too.

Isabel's mark on the East Coast, however, was the question on the minds of dozens of people in the FEMA Emergency Operations Center as they revved up for the next storm - arranging the transfer of disaster response teams from Denver to elsewhere and alerting urban search-and-rescue teams to get ready. Isabel could become FEMA's biggest challenge since it became part of the Department of Homeland Security. That move has worried many coastal officials who worry about preparedness and recovery from natural disasters. It is will be a test case for the opportunity, I believe, to make that we forge a continued strong relationship with FEMA," said Rep. McIntyre, D-N.C., who represents the hurricane-prone southeast part of his state.

McIntyre voted to keep FEMA out of the department. But McIntyre, like many people who shared his concern, said FEMA so far has behaved well. Since being folded into the Department of Homeland Security this spring, FEMA has demonstrated the recovery of debris from the space shuttle Columbia and the harrowing days responding to the aftermath of midwestern storms.

"We've proven the mission is the same," said Michael Brown, under secretary of emergency preparedness and response for Homeland Security, as the emergency operations center began its work on Isabel.

Isabel, which had weakened to a Category 2 storm Tuesday from a Category 5, represents the biggest threat FEMA has faced under new leadership, said William Conner, chief of the agency's incident response section.

Meeting Tuesday morning that said was the first of its kind at the Department of Homeland Security. Army Tom Ridge face to face with 15 officials from states along the Atlantic Ocean. Ridge, flanked by press secretaries, FEMA personal officials from the Coast Guard and other divisions, sat at a horse-

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shoe table and consulted with state emergency officials appearing by video on two large television screens.

"This is highly unusual," Clark said. "This is the new FEMA."

The new FEMA has been reorganized, but officials say it will be better than before. Those who depend on the agency to help them get back on their feet, however, will be the judges of that later.

"It may be a bit of a bellwether for the Department of Homeland Security in the overall coordination of efforts," said Brian Usher, head of an FEMA committee.

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a competing priorities

under FEMA. Members of Congress didn't want to distract FEMA officials from Isabel by summoning them to Capitol Hill on Tuesday, but some were prepared to ask tough questions.

For example, a year ago communities hit by a storm like Isabel would get millions on top of their disaster

recovery money for strengthening problem infrastructure against the next disaster. This year, however, Congress cut those hazard mitigation grants in half, from 15 percent of total recovery money to 7.5 percent.



Bush had requested that change well as an increase in grants for post-disaster preparation, arguing it made more sense to prevent damage than to respond to it. But communities complain big storms, earthquakes and other disasters expose problems that they won't be able to fix with a scale-back post-disaster grant program.

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## Restoring Natural Resources After Oil Spills



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### Trustees Release Draft Regional Restoration Plan to Restore Injured Resources

State of Louisiana and Federal natural resource trustees are soliciting public comments on a draft Regional Restoration Plan to restore natural resources injured by oil spills. This draft Region 2 Plan is the first of nine regional plans to be developed under the statewide Louisiana Regional Restoration Planning Program.

The State of Louisiana, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and U.S. Department of the Interior have developed a statewide program to expedite restoration of injured resources and reduce the cost of Natural Resource Damage Assessments—the process by which trustee agencies assess and restore resources injured by oil spills.

Region 2 encompasses all or part of the following parishes: Ascension, Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, and St. John the Baptist. The draft Plan describes the affected environment, biological resources, and associated habitat types, as well as the natural resources/services that are likely to be injured by an incident, appropriate restoration types for each of the potentially injured resources/services, and available restoration projects that have been identified to date. Another key feature of the draft Region 2 Plan is the determination of a representative unit cost to restore predominant habitat types in the region as part of a cash settlement. The proposed predominant habitat types in Region 2 are coastal herbaceous wetlands, oyster reefs, and coastal-forested wetlands.

For more information and/or to receive a copy of the draft Plan, please visit [www.darp.noaa.gov](http://www.darp.noaa.gov) or contact one of the following individuals:

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The draft Region 2 Plan will be released on or before September 23, 2003. Written comments should be submitted to William Conner by October 23, 2003, at the address listed above.