

# CDC Releases Results of Formaldehyde Level Tests

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## CDC Newsroom

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## Press Release

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### *FEMA To Expedite Relocation Of Residents From Temporary Housing Units*

(NEW ORLEANS) — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released today preliminary results from recent testing that found higher than typical indoor exposure levels of formaldehyde in travel trailers and mobile homes used as emergency housing in the Gulf Coast Region.

"These findings support FEMA's continued focus on finding permanent housing for everyone who has been living in travel trailers and mobile homes since the hurricanes," said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding. "The levels in many of these trailers and mobile homes are higher than would be expected indoors. Since these levels were found in December and January, and we know that higher temperatures can cause formaldehyde levels to go up, we think it's wise for people to be relocated before the hot weather arrives in summer. We also think that it would be beneficial for people who are displaying symptoms as well as households with children, elderly persons, or occupants with chronic respiratory illnesses to receive priority consideration for alternate housing."

"As a result of preliminary findings FEMA will be taking additional actions to provide for the safety and well being of the residents of these travel trailers by finding them alternative housing," said FEMA Administrator David Paulison. "FEMA is leaning forward and will continue to act and provide information to our residents in an expedited manner."

CDC's preliminary evaluation of a scientifically established random sample of 519 travel trailers and mobile homes tested between Dec. 21, 2007 and Jan. 23, 2008 showed average levels of formaldehyde in all units of about 77 parts per billion (ppb). Long-term exposure to levels in this range can be linked to an increased risk of cancer, and as levels rise above this range, there can also be a risk of respiratory illness. These levels are higher than expected in indoor air, where levels are commonly in the range of 10-20 ppb. Levels measured ranged from 3 ppb to 590 ppb.

CDC has public health officials on-hand in the Gulf Coast to provide subject matter expertise and advice. On Thursday, February 21, members of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and FEMA representatives will begin the process of hand-delivering to occupants who participated in the study a letter with their individual test results.

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These teams will answer residents' health questions and help occupants understand their housing options. Public availability sessions to explain the overall test results are planned for Louisiana trailer residents the week of February 25 and for Mississippi trailer residents the week of March 3.

FEMA is taking additional steps to expedite the relocation of residents from manufactured housing to apartments or other alternative housing including hotels, motels, and "Katrina cottages." The priority in relocation will be those occupants expressing a health concern and those most susceptible to health risk such as the elderly, households with young children and those with respiratory challenges.

FEMA previously announced a plan to close all group sites and relocate residents by June 1 of this year and will continue this activity as part of our ongoing efforts. FEMA has already moved 105,445 households out of temporary housing units as residents return home or move into long-term housing solutions. During the week of February 6, 2008, 983 households moved out of temporary housing and FEMA continues to move between 800 and 1000 households out, on average, per week.

CDC and FEMA recommend that Gulf Coast families living in travel trailers and mobile homes spend as much time outdoors in fresh air as possible. Residents should open windows to let fresh air in whenever possible, and try to maintain the temperature inside their travel trailers or mobile homes at the lowest comfortable level. Higher temperatures can cause greater release of formaldehyde. Persons who have health concerns are encouraged to see a doctor or another medical professional.

The two agencies have established toll-free hotlines. FEMA employees are available to discuss housing concerns at 1-866-562-2381, or TTY 1-800-462-7585. CDC specialists will respond to health-related concerns at 1-800- CDC-INFO.

The indoor air quality assessment is one of several actions CDC has initiated to assist FEMA in protecting the health of temporary housing residents. The other public health activities include:

- Reconvening a panel of experts to identify and advise on health issues that could be associated with long-term residence in temporary housing units, such as travel trailers.

- Assessing formaldehyde levels across different models and types of unoccupied trailers to identify the factors that reduce or heighten those levels. This assessment also involves identifying cost-effective ways to reduce or lower formaldehyde levels and concentrations in temporary housing environments
- Plans for a long-term study of children who resided in FEMA trailers and mobile homes in Mississippi and Louisiana.



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES