

FEMA sets new limits for formaldehyde levels in trailers for disaster victims The Associated Press April 11, 2008 Friday 8:38 PM GMT

Copyright 2008 Associated Press
All Rights Reserved
The Associated Press

April 11, 2008 Friday 8:38 PM GMT

SECTION: BUSINESS NEWS

LENGTH: 529 words

HEADLINE: FEMA sets new limits for **formaldehyde** levels in trailers for disaster victims

BYLINE: By BEN EVANS, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

After resisting for years, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is setting strict new limits on **formaldehyde** levels in the mobile homes it buys for disaster victims.

Responding to safety concerns, the agency said Friday it will take "extraordinary precautions" by buying trailers with **formaldehyde** emissions comparable to that of conventional housing. The requirement will start with a new three-year contract to purchase up to 3,300 units and a smaller contract for units intended for disabled residents.

Some will be available for this year's hurricane season.

"I guess it's better late than never," said Lindsay Huckabee, a Hurricane Katrina victim who says her family suffered from chronic health problems while living in FEMA trailers in Kiln, Miss., for more than two years. "I am glad they are acknowledging it's a problem ... at least the people in the next disaster won't have to go through the same thing."

Formaldehyde is a preservative commonly used in building materials. Prolonged exposure can lead to breathing problems and is also believed to cause cancer.

Complaints began popping up shortly after hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, with residents of FEMA-issued trailers reporting frequent headaches, nosebleeds and other ailments.

Critics say FEMA was slow to respond, particularly as families remained in trailers for extended periods.

FEMA insisted the trailers were safe. But after coming under increasing pressure and legal threats, the agency enlisted the help of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help test them.

The CDC initially said last year that, with proper ventilation, **formaldehyde** levels were safe in the short term. But earlier this year, the CDC and FEMA released additional testing showing that the trailers had **formaldehyde** levels that were, on average, about five times higher than in most modern homes.

Both agencies began urging residents to move out of the trailers some 34,000 of which remain occupied by Gulf Coast victims of Katrina and Rita.

FEMA officials have emphasized that there is no national standard for **formaldehyde** levels in homes, giving them little guidance to base decisions.

But FEMA Administrator David Paulison said the agency would base its new requirement on what the CDC has said is the indoor average for a modern home, establishing a limit of 16 parts per billion.

"Until such a time as there is a consensus standard, we will take extraordinary precautions," Paulison said in a press release.

Agency spokeswoman Mary Margaret Walker said the **formaldehyde** reductions are relatively easy to achieve by removing certain fibers, insulation and other components that generate high readings.

"It hasn't been a very hard fix," she said.

She said FEMA will continue to use thousands of previously purchased trailers except for the smallest "travel trailers." But each unit will be tested and the results will be provided to states and residents so they can decide whether to accept them.

Recent tests on 32 trailers set aside for tornado victims in Arkansas showed that three had **formaldehyde** levels above 77 parts per billion considered high enough to raise residents' risk of cancer and respiratory illness.

LOAD-DATE: April 12, 2008

Source: [Legal > / . . . / > News, All \(English, Full Text\)](#) 

Terms: **formaldehyde and date geq (04/05/2008)** ([Edit Search](#) | [Suggest Terms for My Search](#))

View: Full

Date/Time: Saturday, April 12, 2008 - 12:14 PM EDT