U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

FEMA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **October 3, 2003**
Contact: David Passey NR: R6-03-129
(940) 898-5287

LESSONS LEARNED ON HURRICANE LILI ANNIVERSARY

One-year ago today, residents of some South Louisiana communities were recovering from Tropical Storm Isidore. Many others evacuated their communities because Hurricane Lili, at one point a Category 4 hurricane with wind gusts over 155 mph, was making landfall.

Today, we know that Isidore and Lili caused more than $1 billion damage to insured properties and led to FEMA/State disaster assistance of more than $235 million. Flood insurance losses for these storms totaled nearly $118 million. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army and other volunteer organizations served more than 1.5 million meals and snacks in the aftermath of the storms.

Lili was the first hurricane to make landfall in the United States in three years. Between Hurricane Irene in 1999 and 2002, FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service and state and local emergency management officials conducted evacuation studies, developed an evacuation information system, updated storm surge models and refined emergency plans.

In the past year, FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service and state and local emergency officials have collaborated to conduct a post-storm analysis of Hurricane Lili and Tropical Storm Isidore. The study looks at evacuation, emergency sheltering, actual storm surge heights and the effectiveness of public information efforts. The assessment is based on data analysis, interviews with state and local officials and a behavioral survey of more than 1,800 randomly selected residents in Texas counties and Louisiana parishes.

More than 500,000 residents of Louisiana and Texas were advised to evacuate threatened areas in advance of Hurricane Lili's landfall. The assessment's behavioral surveys indicate that 40-56 percent of advised residents heeded evacuation recommendations. While 83 evacuation shelters were opened, housing 18,000 people, the assessment found that more than 90 percent of the evacuating population found safety by staying with family, friends or in hotels.

In the middle of an active hurricane season, the preliminary assessment offers several important recommendations or lessons learned.

- Improved hurricane forecasting and new technologies, combined with increased news media coverage has improved notification and increased knowledge of individual storm threats. However, emergency officials express concern that with increased information, residents

may discount local evacuation recommendations. Officials' fear that some coastal residents may wait too long to safely evacuate approaching storms.

- Government, volunteer organizations and the news media need to expand public awareness information materials. Materials should target vulnerable segments of the population such as residents who live in manufactured housing. Manufactured homes comprised two-thirds of structures destroyed by Hurricane Lili.

- Federal and state agencies continue to evaluate evacuation routes. More "real time" traffic counters that feed data to traffic information systems are recommended. Such systems aid transportation and law enforcement officials to manage evacuation traffic flow.

- Many coastal buildings are highly vulnerable to storm surge and flooding. The assessment recommends that government and insurance companies promote mitigation methods that increase safety and reduce property damage.

As atmospheric scientists and hurricane researchers forecast increased hurricane activity in the United States for the next few decades, residents of Louisiana and Texas remember Hurricane Lili. The preliminary post-storm assessment offers preparedness, planning and response recommendations to coastal states and communities throughout the United States.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's mission within DHS is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and to effectively manage the federal response and recovery efforts for any national incident. To help meet this mission, FEMA oversees the National Flood Insurance Program, the U.S. Fire Administration and Citizen Corps.

###

HURRICANE LILI RECOVERY:

Hurricane Lili Damage Still Plagues Acadiana (Baton Rouge Advocate – LA)

Baton Rouge Advocate (LA)
By Angela Simoneaux
October 3, 2003

LAFAYETTE -- One year ago today, Acadiana suffered the intrusion of an unwanted guest when Hurricane Lili plowed onshore.

Although most of the debris is gone and much of the damage is repaired, there are people with tarps over their roofs and tree carcasses in their yards.

Dana Brignac of the United Way of Acadiana estimated she has about 100 open cases related to Hurricane Lili. The Unmet Needs committee, a group of nonprofit and social service agencies that formed shortly after the storm, still is meeting, she said.

"We're still reviewing cases for people who do not have repairs to their homes completed," Brignac said. "We continue to find senior citizens, disabled folks, people with special needs and a lot of single working mothers who are just trying to do the best that they can, who have no money in the budget; if they can afford to buy materials, (they) can't hire labor."

Acadiana looks deceptively recovered, Brignac said.

"You can ride by the front of a house, and it may look OK. The debris, the trees are gone. But if you ride around the back, you will see a lot of dismal situations that are going on," she said. "Black mold continues to be an issue. We are really still out there getting people back on their feet."

Volunteers still are coming to Louisiana, and more are needed, said Sarah Schoeffler of United Methodist Disaster Recovery. Nearly 1,000 volunteers have worked more than 30,000 hours to assist in the recovery, Schoeffler said.

More teams are coming in January, but volunteers are needed now to help people who have holes in their roofs, she said. No special skills are needed, but those who know how to do roofing, sheet-rocking, ceiling tiles, flooring and painting are welcome.

Work days are scheduled for Oct. 11, Nov. 15, Dec. 6, Jan. 24, Feb. 21, March 20, April 24 and May 8. To volunteer, call Schoeffler at 337-234-1177 or e-mail larecovery@bellsouth.net.

Schoeffler estimated that people from about 15 states have come to Louisiana to help out. When asked why people would travel across the country to help someone they do not know, she laughed.

"It's the church. What are we called to be other than servants?" she said. "These people are out on the mission, and it's a blessing to them as much as it is to the people who get their homes fixed."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency estimates that Lili and Tropical Storm Isidore, which hit Louisiana just a week prior to Lili's arrival, inflicted more than $1 billion in damage to insured properties, said FEMA spokesman David Passey.

The agency paid local governments and residents more than $235 million in disaster assistance. More than $118 million in flood insurance claims were paid, said Passey, who works in FEMA's regional office in Denton, Texas.

The Small Business Administration, which provides low-interest loans to individuals and businesses to repair damages, approved more than 4,200 loans for a total of more than $51 million, said Michael Lampton, public affairs officer for the agency.

The Red Cross opened 55 shelters in five states for Isidore, which 2,300 evacuees used, said Larry Rockwell of the American Red Cross's Washington D.C. disaster public affairs office. For Lili, 17,000 evacuees were sheltered in 85 locations in Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi.

More than 1.3 million meals and snacks were served during the recovery, he said. Red Cross mental health workers made more than 10,000 contacts.

In all, 6,342 Red Cross relief workers were mobilized, and more than $14 million was spent in the agency's response, Rockwell said.

After the storm hit on a Thursday morning, 49 parishes declared a state of emergency. More than 900,000 people lived in the areas where evacuations were called; nearly 17,000 fled to shelters.

Within hours of landfall, nearly 450,000 people were without power; by the time the storm passed, that number had hit more than 500,000.

It could have been worse.

While Lili approached the Gulf Coast on Oct. 2, 2002, it was a Category 4 storm, with winds of 140 mph and more. Hurricane Andrew was a Category 3 in 1992.

At that strength the storm surge could reach 10 feet to 20 feet and spread inland as far as 25 miles across low-lying coastal Louisiana.

But overnight, Lili hit cooler waters -- compliments of Isidore -- and although it still was a Category 4 just hours before landfall, by the time Lili barreled on shore Oct. 3, 2002, it had diminished to a powerful Category 2 storm.

That was good news, but FEMA officials worry that every time residents dodge a bullet such as that, they become more complacent.

FEMA is working on its post-storm assessment, which attempts to record the lessons that should be learned from Lili, Passey said.

FEMA's estimates are that 40 to 55 percent of the people told to evacuate actually left, Passey said.

"We're concerned about that. We went through a spell of hurricanes not making landfall, and we've had several -- Lili, Claudette, Isabel -- die out at the last minute," Passey said. "If people think, 'Oh, it will die out,' then those who should have heeded the evacuation notice won't evacuate. Our primary message is this: If you want to save your life, you need to heed the advice of local officials. If they recommend you evacuate, then do it. It's nothing more complicated than that."

Passey said many residents keep track of storms via the Internet and television weather programs, and that is good. But people must realize that local officials have many more resources at their disposal when they make the decision to order an evacuation.

"They have all those resources of the Internet and the Weather Channel, plus all the resources of the Hurricane Center, the National Weather Service, all the tools that we've put together as a team," Passey said. "Their decision on evacuation is not just an educated guess, it's a very well-informed decision."