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09/17/05 12:39 AM**'Sun-Sentinel': Katrina Only Latest of FEMA Foul-Ups** [Post [293973986](#)]**Category:** News & Opinion (General) **Topic:** Government**Synopsis:****Source:** [Editor & Publisher](#)**Published:** September 16, 2005 **Author:** Mark Fitzgerald**For Education and Discussion Only. Not for Commercial Use.**

CHICAGO

A two-day investigative series that the South Florida Sun-Sentinel will publish starting this Sunday says that the wretched performance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during Hurricane Katrina is the rule rather than the exception for the agency.

The series comes down hard on FEMA from the first graf: "The federal government's mishandling of Hurricane Katrina is just the latest in a series of missteps by a national disaster response system that for years has been fraught with waste and fraud."

FEMA's bungling during Katrina came as no surprise to the Sun-Sentinel, says Editor and Sr. Vice President Earl Mauker.

"We actually called for [Michael Brown's] resignation a year ago," he said, referring to the FEMA head who resigned earlier this week.

The Tribune Co.-owned Fort Lauderdale paper has been on FEMA's case since last year when its computer-assisted investigation turned up massive fraud and waste in the wake of Hurricane Frances. FEMA, the paper found, had paid millions of dollars in claims in Miami-Dade County -- even though the hurricane made landfall 100 miles away.

"It was absolutely incredible. **In Miami, the hurricane never hit, it never came on shore, and we found FEMA paid out \$31 million for a storm that never came ashore,**" Mauker said.

The Sun-Sentinel followed up that revelation with continuing reporting of FEMA waste. The paper says the agency paid for funerals for people whose deaths had nothing to do with the hurricane. It reports that FEMA inspectors receive little training -- and that a shocking number of them have criminal records.

With this coming investigative series -- titled, "FEMA: A Legacy Of Waste -- the newspaper expands its examination far beyond Florida.

"We found the same waste in Detroit, Baton Rouge, Cleveland, Los Angeles," Mauker said. **One example: After a season of wild fires and mudslides in Los Angeles, FEMA paid \$5.2 million in disaster relief to families in Watts, far from the affected areas.**

"There is a huge pattern of low-income urban neighborhoods, when they find out there is a FEMA-declared emergency, they file," sometimes faking damage to collect, Mauker said.

The series **estimates that between 1999 and 2004, FEMA squandered \$400 million in money** spent "for storms that never occurred or for issues that were miles away from" a disaster site, Mauker said.

Sun-Sentinel investigative journalists actually started out looking to track how homeland security funds were being spent for ports and other sensitive areas. "We started looking on the computer, and saw all this federal money going to all these places, and wanted to know why," Mauker said.

"Michael Brown was nothing but defensive" as the newspaper was doing its reporting, Mauker said. "We had to file all kinds of lawsuits."

Reporters overlaid maps of the various storms and disasters with maps of where FEMA money was spent. The newspaper tracked some one million claims, Mauker said.

The series will be available online at www.sun-sentinel.com beginning Sunday, Sept. 18.

Oceanna writes: *"Michael D. Brown was nominated by President George W. Bush as the first Under Secretary of Emergency Preparedness and Response in the newly created Department of Homeland Security in January 2003.*

It took four days to begin a large-scale evacuation of people stranded in the Superdome stadium and to bring in significant amounts of food and water to an American city easily accessible by motorway.

9/1/05 Brown says, "Things are going relatively well."

9/2/05 Bush says, "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job."

Idiots. This country is being run by idiots."

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Washington Monthly
By Kevin Drum

Sept. 1, 05

[CHRONOLOGY](#)....Here's a timeline that outlines the fate of both FEMA and flood control projects in New Orleans under the Bush administration. Read it and weep:

January 2001: Bush appoints Joe Allbaugh, a crony from Texas, as head of FEMA. Allbaugh has no previous experience in disaster management.

April 2001: Budget Director Mitch Daniels announces the Bush administration's goal of privatizing much of FEMA's work. In May, Allbaugh confirms that FEMA will be downsized: "Many are concerned that federal disaster assistance may have evolved into both an oversized entitlement program...." he said. "Expectations of when the federal government should be involved and the degree of involvement may have ballooned beyond what is an appropriate level."

2001: FEMA designates a major hurricane hitting New Orleans as one of the three "likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country."

December 2002: After less than two years at FEMA, Allbaugh announces he is leaving to start up a consulting firm that advises companies seeking to do business in Iraq. He is succeeded by his deputy and former college friend, Michael Brown, who has no previous experience in disaster management and was fired from his previous job for mismanagement.

March 2003: FEMA is downgraded from a cabinet level position and folded into the Department of Homeland Security. Its mission is refocused on fighting acts of terrorism.

2003: Under its new organization chart within DHS, FEMA's preparation and planning functions are reassigned to a new Office of Preparedness and Response. FEMA will henceforth focus only on response and recovery.

Summer 2004: FEMA denies Louisiana's pre-disaster mitigation funding requests. Says Jefferson Parish flood zone manager Tom Rodrigue: "You would think we would get maximum consideration....This is what the grant program called for. We were more than qualified for it."

June 2004: The Army Corps of Engineers budget for levee construction in New Orleans is slashed. Jefferson Parish emergency management chiefs Walter Maestri comments: "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay."

June 2005: Funding for the New Orleans district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is cut by a record \$71.2 million. One of the hardest-hit areas is the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project, which was created after the May 1995 flood to improve drainage in Jefferson, Orleans and St. Tammany parishes.





August 2005: While New Orleans is undergoing a slow motion catastrophe, Bush mugs for the cameras, cuts a cake for John McCain, plays the guitar for Mark Willis, delivers an address about V-J day, and continues with his vacation. When he finally gets around to acknowledging the scope of the unfolding disaster, he delivers only a photo op on Air Force One and a flat, defensive, laundry list speech in the Rose Garden.

So: A crony with no relevant experience was installed as head of FEMA. Mitigation budgets for New Orleans were slashed even though it was known to be one of the top three risks in the country. FEMA was deliberately downsized as part of the Bush administration's conservative agenda to reduce the role of government. After DHS was created, FEMA's preparation and planning functions were taken away.

Actions have consequences. No one could predict that a hurricane the size of Katrina would hit this year, but the slow federal response when it did happen was no accident. It was the result of four years of deliberate Republican policy and budget choices that favor ideology and partisan loyalty at the expense of operational competence. It's the Bush administration in a nutshell.

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Why would they call for Brown's resignation when it is Chertoff who should be hung by his neck until dead?

Why are they playing around the edges?

"Why should we hear about body bags and deaths? Oh, I mean, it's not relevant. So why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that?" Barbara Bush, March 18, 2003.

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"There is a huge pattern of low-income urban neighborhoods, when they find out there is a FEMA-declared emergency, they file," sometimes faking damage to collect, Mauker said.

In low-income urban neighborhoods, home ownership is low. The slumlords are the ones doing the filing.

It's a safe bet to assume equal amounts of incompetence and malice.

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Why would they call for Brown's resignation when it is Chertoff who should be hung by his neck until dead?

The amazing thing about Bush taking responsibility is that it negated a longtime DC tradition: Chertoff should have eaten it, but he didn't. It skipped up the chain.

It's a safe bet to assume equal amounts of incompetence and malice.

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I can't argue with that. Chertoff should go too, from what I see. I suspect there is plenty of blame to go around, and too much for just Brown. Clinton (for all his other foibles) had FEMA better organized, according to folks who work at FEMA and have been talking to CNN (if you trust them).

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Astute point.

Whose head(s) do you think should roll here?

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Bush said he took responsibility, but he's not taking blame from what I can see.

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