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Hurricane Response:

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2 Far From the Texas Coast, Hurricane Harvey Hits Oil Refiners

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-18/far-from-the-texas-coast-hurricane-harvey-hits-oil-refiners-j7qrx1p8

Three weeks after Hurricane Harvey ravaged the massive fuel-making industry along the Texas coast, the region's recovery from storm damage is starting to disrupt plans for crucial maintenance at refineries thousands of miles away from the flood zones. Harvey knocked out almost one-quarter of U.S. refining capacity in late August, sending gasoline and diesel prices soaring. The storm hit a few weeks before most of the nation's fuel makers were set to begin seasonal shutdowns. Demand usually slows at this time of year, so it's a good time to make repairs and install new equipment at plants that typically run all day every day.

3 Texas education chief making his mark in Harvey crisis

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Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath's office became more of a triage unit than a traditional education office once Hurricane Harvey hit. Which school districts did the hurricane mow over? How bad is the flooding? Are schools that were either wrecked or flooded safe enough for class? Are children safe enough to be able go to school?

4 Hey, Texplainer: How is FEMA distributing money to areas hit by Harvey?

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5 Study Finds FEMA Flood Maps Missed 75% Of Houston Flood Damage Claims Between 1999 And 2009

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6 These stark photos show the charred remains of the Texas chemical fire that ignited after Harvey, Washington Post, 9/19/17

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7 13 In car-centric Houston, low-income residents struggle after Harvey ruined their vehicles, Texas Tribune, 9/19/17

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People in Cedar Creek are fighting a proposed waste transfer station a private company wants to build in their community. A waste transfer station collects garbage from surrounding communities. That waste is then compacted and reloaded onto larger trucks which transfer it to a landfill.

9 $117,691 in Solid Waste Related Grant Funding Available for East Texas Region, Gilmre Mirror, 9/19/17

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Scott Pruitt Visits San Jacinto Waste Pits Post-Harvey, Promises EPA Decision By October

BY **DIANNA WRAY**

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017 AT 7 A.M.

Scott Pruitt says the EPA will reach a decision on the San Jacinto Waste Pits by October 14, but he didn't give any hints as to what that decision will be.

Image from the EPA

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During his visit to Texas last week, Environmental Protection Agency head Scott Pruitt promised the EPA would arrive at a permanent solution for the San Jacinto Waste Pits before the football rivalry game between the University of Texas and Oklahoma University on October 14.

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The San Jacinto Waste Pits have sat on the banks of the San Jacinto River, packed full of dioxin and other toxic substances from a local paper mill, for more than 40 years. In 2011, the EPA came up with its first fix for the pits – agency workers stuck a temporary armored cap on top of the site to keep the contents from spilling into the river and the rest of the surrounding area.

But Hurricane Harvey once again underscored how fragile the situation with the waste pits really is – the pits have been known to leak, as we've recently noted – and why it is decidedly time for the federal agency to finally land on a long-term solution for the pits. (Hint: Because they are full of toxic sludge held in by a temporary cap and could leak and cause all kinds of devastation if the perfect storm were to roll up at just the wrong time.)

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Jackie Young, founder of the San Jacinto River Coalition and director of the Texas Health and Environmental Co-alliance, and Scott Young, with the Galveston Bay Foundation, were on hand to meet Pruitt when he rolled up to the site, the *Baytown Sun* reports.

Pruitt said he is determined the EPA will deal quickly with the "ongoing risk and the crushing anxiety felt by thousands of Texans that live near the San Jacinto Waste Pits," a sentiment that sounds good but may not mean much depending on how the San Jacinto Waste Pits ultimately weathered Hurricane Harvey. The EPA had divers in the water inspecting the site all week, including while Pruitt was visiting, and it remains unclear how the site, which is partially submerged in the San

Jacinto River and packed full of dioxin, a known carcinogen, actually came through the storm without a breach.

After all, if the waste pits came through the storm just fine as is, that could be a good argument for leaving them there in perpetuity. However, that's not the solution Young and others who have lived near the pits for years are pushing for.

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It's still unclear how the San Jacinto Waste Pits weathered Hurricane Harvey

Image from the EPA

Many of those living in the area are hoping that the EPA opts to move forward with its own proposed remedy for the waste pits, an $87 million plan to remove the bulk of the existing cap and more than 152,000 cubic yards of contaminated crud stored beneath that cap at the northern leg of the site, the part that dips into the San Jacinto River. It will take more than a year and a

half to finish the removal, which will end with more than 13,000 truckloads of toxic waste from the old paper mill tucked away at another facility.

If the EPA decides to go this route, that is.

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Houston Texans vs. Arizona Cardinals
Sun., Nov. 19, 12:00pm TICKETS

Rice Owls Football vs. North Texas
Sat., Nov. 25, 12:00pm TICKETS

Houston Texans vs. San Francisco 49ers
Sun., Dec. 10, 12:00pm TICKETS

Houston Texans vs. Pittsburgh Steelers
Mon., Dec. 25, 3:30pm TICKETS

There's a lot in favor of removing the waste. For one thing, while EPA Region Six officials have not been clear about what actually happened to the waste pits during the hurricane, the statements issued so far imply that the pits did not come through unscathed. The agency was working on repairing the armored layer of the cap and still figuring out if the waste pits will require more repairs, a question that remains open until the diving team has completed its inspection, according to an agency release.

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After his stop at San Jacinto – a visit that was rather difficult to make since the road leading to the waste pits washed out entirely in some sections while the entire area surrounding the waste pits looked as if it had been struck by a bomb – Pruitt moved on with the U.S. Coast Guard to take a flyover tour of the other Superfund sites believed to be affected by Hurricane Harvey, including Patrick Bayou, U.S. Oil Recovery, the Highlands Acid Pits, French Unlimited, Brio Refining and Dixie Oil Processors, according to the *Baytown Sun*. Of course, officially none of these sites have been at all hit by Harvey or the resulting floodwaters. Obviously, Pruitt was just checking them out since he was in the area.

Dianna Wray, a nationally award-winning journalist, is a staff writer at the Houston Press. Born and raised in Houston, she writes about everything from NASA to oil to horse races.

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Far From the Texas Coast, Hurricane Harvey Hits Oil Refiners

By **Jessica Summers** and **Barbara J Powell**
September 18, 2017, 6:00 PM CDT
Updated on September 19, 2017, 5:04 AM CDT

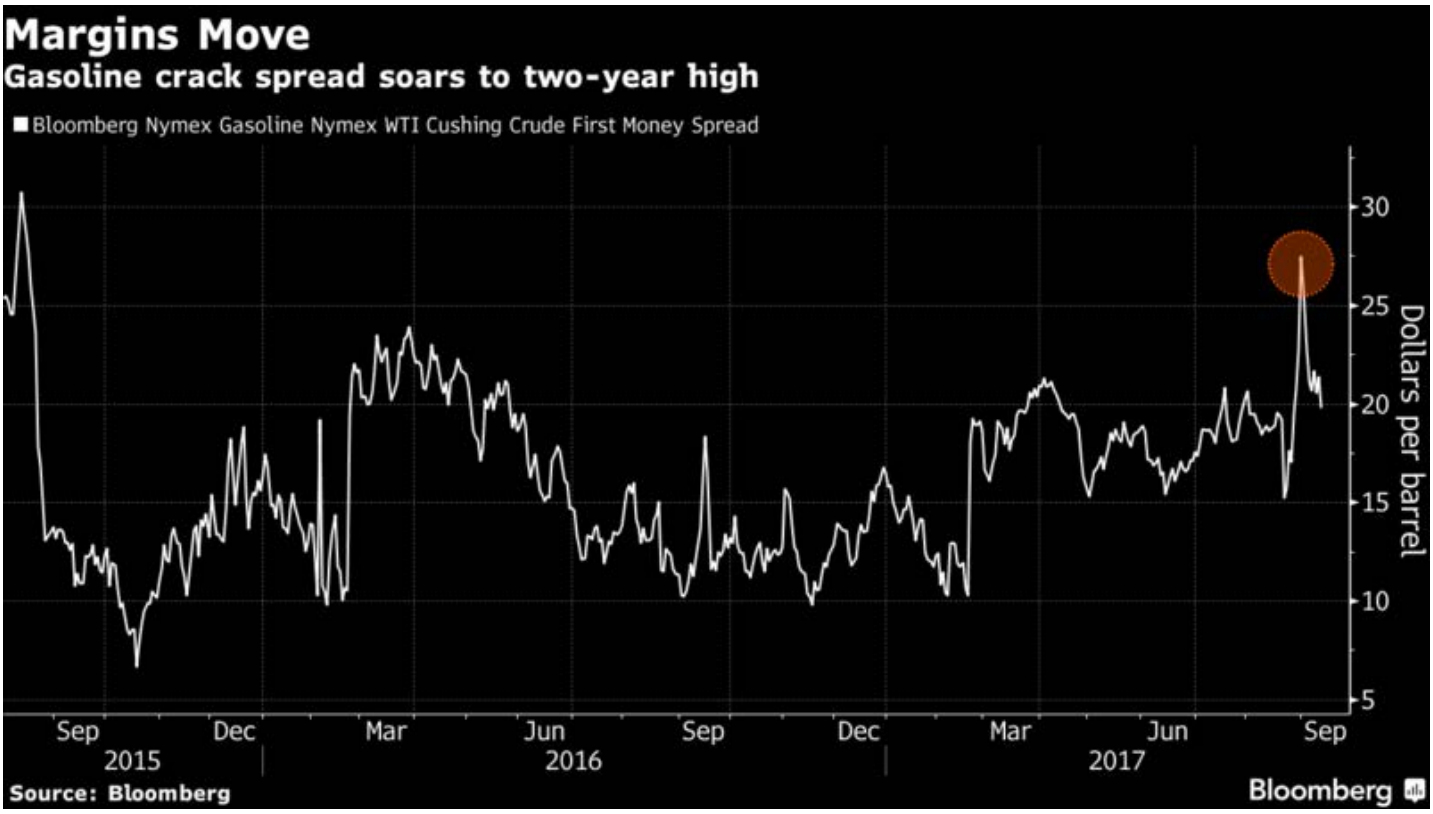
- Exxon, Phillips 66, Marathon among refiners delaying work
- Lack of manpower, higher margins among reasons for postponing

Floodwater surrounds oil refinery storage tanks in Texas City, Texas on Aug. 30. *Photographer: Luke Sharrett/Bloomberg*

Three weeks after Hurricane Harvey ravaged the massive fuel-making industry along the Texas coast, the region's recovery from storm damage is starting to disrupt plans for crucial maintenance at refineries thousands of miles away from the flood zones.

Harvey knocked out almost one-quarter of U.S. refining capacity in late August, sending gasoline and diesel prices soaring. The storm hit a few weeks before most of the nation's fuel makers were set to begin seasonal shutdowns. Demand usually slows at this time of year, so it's a good time to make repairs and install new equipment at plants that typically run all day every day.

But at least 13 refineries from Louisiana to Montana with a combined 3.27 million barrels a day have delayed maintenance for weeks or months, according to company statements and people familiar with the situation. Some are churning out more fuel to take advantage of strong margins, while others simply don't have the personnel because workers were dispatched to help repair and restart storm-hit facilities along the Gulf of Mexico.



"Any plant that has the option of pushing back the work is probably going to do so," Robert Campbell, head of oil-products analysis at Energy Aspects Ltd. in New York, said by telephone. "You have really good margins. There would be concerns about some of the skilled trades, some of the services required."

The largest U.S. refinery, owned by Motiva Enterprises LLC in Port Arthur, Texas, is said to have pushed back maintenance on a crude unit to April from September, while Exxon Mobil Corp. said it delayed work at three refineries to divert workers to Texas, where it's trying to restart its Beaumont and Baytown plants.

Harvey swept through the Gulf Coast, making landfall on Aug. 25 and leading to widespread closures of refineries, including Motiva's, with about 605,000 barrels a day of capacity.

While refiners such as Valero Energy Corp., Citgo Petroleum Corp. and Flint Hills Resources LLC were able to quickly restart plants in the Corpus Christi, Texas, area shortly after Harvey rolled through, Motiva Port Arthur, Total SA Port Arthur and Exxon Beaumont are among those still working to reach normal operations. At one point during the hurricane, at least 17 refineries either shut or operated at reduced rates.

Read more about Harvey's impact on refining margins here <https://www.bloomberg.com/gadfly/articles/2017-08-30/hurricane-harvey-and-oil-refining-stocks-cold-flawed-logic>

The gasoline crack spread, a rough measure of the profit from refining crude into gasoline, jumped to the highest level in two years in late August. Profit margins for refineries in the Midwest using Bakken crude from North Dakota more than doubled, as did margins for plants along the Gulf Coast that process crude from offshore Louisiana.

Gasoline for October delivery fell 0.2 percent to $1.6658 a gallon on the New York Mercantile Exchange at 10:48 a.m. London time on Tuesday. The crack spread narrowed 2.7 percent to about $19.63 a barrel.

“If you’re a refiner in the Midwest and you are unaffected, you’re probably going to want to keep churning out product to take advantage of the high margins," Bill O’Grady, chief market strategist at Confluence Investment Management in St. Louis, said by telephone. "The trouble is, at some point you’ve got to shut everything down and clean it up.”

Shifting Maintenance

Marathon Petroleum Corp. is postponing the start of maintenance at its Garyville refinery in Louisiana by about two weeks to October to make up for lost production from its Galveston Bay and Texas City plants, which had shut due to the hurricane. Exxon said it’s delaying turnarounds at facilities from Louisiana to Montana.

Phillips 66’s Sweeny refinery in Texas is moving maintenance to February that was set to start this month. The plant resumed normal operations Sept. 13 after the storm last month. Other Texas plants shifting maintenance include Valero’s McKee refinery and Andeavor’s El Paso plant.

Some refineries in the Midwest have altered their plans. HollyFrontier Corp. delayed a turnaround at its Tulsa West plant in Oklahoma to the first quarter of next year from September, and October work at its Woods Cross site near Salt Lake City for two weeks. Citgo’s Lemont plant that serves the Chicago-area market also pushed back its September maintenance.

While there is a risk of more breakdowns the longer refiners delay maintenance, these delays aren’t likely to cause huge problems, according to O’Grady.

“Most likely, the refineries that are delaying maintenance will be fine," he said. "We’ll just see a bigger maintenance season in March."

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Texas education chief making his mark in Harvey crisis

Morath praised for managing disaster; testing questions remain

By Andrea Zelinski | September 18, 2017 | Updated: September 18, 2017 11:34pm

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Photo: Jason Hoekema, MBO

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath keeps in contact with local officials.

AUSTIN - Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath's office became more of a triage unit than a traditional education office once Hurricane Harvey hit.

Which school districts did the hurricane mow over? How bad is the flooding? Are schools that were either wrecked or flooded safe enough for class? Are children safe enough to be able go to school?

The mission: help school districts across the state recover from the horrific storm and flooding as quickly as possible with all the resources the state can provide.

Morath and the Texas Education Agency are normally focused on understanding the intricacies of state testing and accountability, among other education issues like looking for ways to improve teacher quality and review charter schools. But after torrential downpours flooded major arteries in Houston and winds lashed communities throughout the region, it became a mad scramble of emergency management as 52 schools remain shuttered in southeast Texas and hundreds more need repair.

In the days and weeks since the storm, Morath and his team, including several regional directors from across the state, sought to get a handle on the damages to school districts - reports that would come in waves, first from the Corpus Christi area, then Houston and Beaumont as the storm moved slowly toward Louisiana.

While figuring out how those repairs would be paid for after federal funds are exhausted, and how to provide extra support and services, Morath was touching base with superintendents about the state of their schools, with many reporting back that they had to open the doors of their schools to become emergency shelters or sharing stories of their local teachers, including one who was rescued from a roof.

The new challenge for Morath is making sure students ensnared by the storm don't lose a year of learning as they try to piece things back together.

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"The last thing that we want to do is take this one-time event that was fairly disruptive and then make it something that becomes a lifetime challenge in terms of reducing the learning experience that our kiddos have," Morath said.

The lanky, bespectacled tech geek now 20 months into his tenure as the state's education commissioner, added: "As of right now, the obligation to make sure we teach kids to read, write and do math is the same as it was before the storm."

Most students back in school

Three weeks after Harvey wreaked havoc across southeast Texas, almost all students have returned to class in their district or another school.

Morath, who took command of the post overseeing the education of 5.3 million students in January of 2016, came to the job without a background in teaching but with an expertise in software and an infatuation with data. He had led Minute Menu Systems, a software company that helped streamline a federal child nutrition program and also served as chairman of self-titled Morath Investments, managing a small portfolio of

TRANSLATOR

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investments.

What he hadn't done much of was teach.

"I was terrible at it," he admitted to about 100 people at a teacher of the year award luncheon last week about this short stint teaching computer science for a semester at the high school he graduated from. "Especially when I reflect on it now, I feel terrible for my students."

That didn't stop the short-term computer science teacher from winning two elections to the Dallas Independent School Board, where he pushed unsuccessfully to turn the district into a "home-rule charter" that would have allowed officials to disregard several education mandates.

While self-deprecating about his own classroom skills, he's now responsible for one of the largest group of school districts and schools in the nation, a task made that much more complicated by Hurricane Harvey.

"When you lose your classroom, you lose your life," said Suzanne McCall, a teachers' coach in Lubbock who spent more than two decades teaching fourth grade and doubles as president of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association. "We've got people who are still in shock. You've got people who are crying. You've got people who are like, 'We were spared, we're unscathed, how can we help?' "

Roughly one-fourth of all students - or 1.4 million Texas public schoolchildren - live in counties declared disaster areas. Some displaced families have moved - temporarily or permanently - to places like San Antonio, Austin and Dallas and enrolled their students there.

Morath expects to decide how else the state can help school districts pay to fix the damage and catch back up to speed in the next two weeks. There are ways the department can front school districts money for the number of students schools were likely to have before the storm hit, even if hundreds or thousands have sought refuge in other areas of the state.

Testing issues

A key decision for Morath this year is how to evaluate student test scores.

Always a numbers guy, Morath said he has no plans to delay the state's flagship standardized spring exams, but added he's made no final decisions.

But he said he and the TEA will everything "within our power" to provide support for those school districts, and particularly schools whose students already struggle academically.

Educators have pushed back against Morath's focus on standardized tests, saying it forces them to focus on preparing students to pass an exam that may not reflect the strengths or knowledge of the child.

"When he came in, we had exceptionally low expectations," said Monty Exter, a lobbyist for the Association of Texas Professional Educators, which believes standardized testing in Texas makes up "too big a piece of the education puzzle."

But Exter said even critics can respect that the commissioner wants the test to be better, wants to use objective data, use it to drive decisions and had sought out stakeholder engagement, including regular meetings with education groups.

"One of the other undisputable things is that Morath is wicked smart," said Exter. "And he really, really cares about kids and public education. Those things are pretty clear."

It seems too soon for Morath to make a decision about standardized testing that is scheduled for the spring, Exter said, adding students need more time to settle in their schools before Morath decides whether it would be useful for students to take the test.

More than nine out of 10 students at Houston Independent School District expected to attend already-open schools have returned, said Richard Carranza, the district's superintendent, who expects some of those who haven't returned to eventually come back.

Carranza wants the TEA to have a "realistic conversation about the accountability expectations," codewords for how much those test scores should reward or punish schools and districts. Already, a Texas House committee has been tasked to find ways to ensure districts' test scores don't penalize districts hurt by Harvey.

"We have some kids that have lost a lot of instructional time. We have some kids that have been through trauma," said Carranza. "That student may come back to school, but you're really going to subject them to an accountability system that's going to mark them a certain way? I think there has to be that conversation, and that comes next."

'Multiple pots on the fire'

Meanwhile, Morath continues to wade through the most immediate needs for Harvey-affected schools.

Some students are attending class in portable trailers, others moved to neighboring schools. What was once nearly daily meetings on Harvey recovery have shifted to once or twice a week while touching base daily with district superintendents.

"Throughout this event, they've been fantastic," said Carranza. "They have multiple pots on the fire. They have always taken our call. They have always been honest with us - 'yes, we know what we're going to do,' 'no, we're still working through it.' So that's all we need. We need straight answers. So they've been really good to work with through this crisis."

Jacob Carpenter contributed to this report.

Andrea Zelinski

Houston Chronicle
Reporter, Austin Bureau

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Hey, Texplainer: How is FEMA distributing money to areas hit by Harvey?

> Following Harvey, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott requested money from the federal government, which has sent nearly $1 billion since the federal disaster declaration issued by President Donald Trump on Aug. 25.

BY **ALEX SAMUELS** SEPT. 19, 2017 8 HOURS AGO

Floodwaters threaten the Grand Vista neighborhood in Richmond on Aug. 28, 2017. Residents were forced to evacuate due rising water from the Brazos River.
Pu Ying Huang for The Texas Tribune

Hey, Texplainer: How much aid has the federal government sent Texas for Hurricane Harvey recovery, and how is the Federal Emergency Management

Agency distributing that money?

It's been several weeks since Harvey slammed the Texas Coast and left Houston — the nation's fourth-largest city — grappling with unprecedented flooding. State officials put the latest death toll at 82, though it may take weeks to determine the exact number of fatalities.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott requested money from the federal government, which has sent more than $1 billion since the federal disaster declaration issued by President Donald Trump on Aug. 25, according to Melaney Rodriguez, a member of Americorps-FEMA Corps, a partnership between The Corporation for National and Community Service and FEMA that helps with disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

FEMA has given the state $364.2 million in individual assistance (funding for individuals and households affected by Harvey) and $181 million for public assistance (money given to cities, counties and municipalities).

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Several federal officials have said there's no telling how long they'll be in the state offering aid or how much money Texas will need for Harvey relief efforts. Abbott has predicted that Texas will need more than $180 billion in federal aid — $60 billion more than what was needed after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"We're going to be here as long as we're needed," said Deanna Frazier, a FEMA spokeswoman. "Right now, we have 5,400 FEMA workers here in Texas helping to get money to the people of Houston and the cities, counties and municipalities to help recover from Harvey."

Here's a breakdown of how FEMA money is allocated:

Individual assistance for Harvey survivors

As of Friday afternoon, 743,676 people had applied for FEMA assistance post-Harvey. Thus far, 288,084 have been approved, a total that's expected to increase.

When someone registers for FEMA assistance, they have to meet certain eligibility criteria, such as being from one of the counties in Abbott's disaster declaration for Harvey.

The immediate assistance Harvey survivors can apply for through FEMA includes:

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- Housing and rental assistance to help people pay rent at another location while they're displaced
- Other Needs Assistance, which includes the agency's Transitional Shelter Assistance that gives housing vouchers so evacuees can temporarily stay at hotels across the state, or its Critical Needs Assistance program, which provides $500 grants for items such as food, water and diapers

Public assistance for cities hit by Harvey

The second way FEMA aid is dispersed is through its public assistance program to help cities, counties and municipalities that may need help rebuilding infrastructure such as bridges, pump stations and roads after Harvey.

As of Thursday, $181 million has been dedicated to Texas, Frazier said.

The money can be used to pay for debris removal, she said, adding, "All of the efforts that cities, counties and municipalities put into safety and life saving measures are also included in that amount."

Any emergency protective measures that cities, counties and municipalities took prior to Harvey's landfall — such as building levees to stop floodwaters — is repaid by FEMA in full. Local entities can also receive federal reimbursement for up to 90 percent of any disaster-related costs incurred during and after the storm — through a separate program.

Usually, FEMA's cost-share is 75 percent, but the amount was increased to 90 percent because of the catastrophic nature of the storm. Local cities and counties are responsible for paying the remaining 10 percent.

Since each project has to be completed before the city, county or municipality can apply for reimbursement, some may not see that money for several months.

The bottom line: Those eligible for individual assistance through FEMA — whether for grant money or housing assistance — will get aid immediately. Any emergency protective measures that cities, counties and municipalities took prior to Harvey's landfall is repaid by FEMA in full. But the roughly $1 billion

committed for Harvey relief thus far is just a small fraction of the expected need on the Gulf Coast.

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Study Finds FEMA Flood Maps Missed 75% Of Houston Flood Damage Claims Between 1999 And 2009

Trevor Nace, CONTRIBUTOR

FULL BIO

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Marcus Yam/Getty Images

Flooding along Interstate 10 in Houston as a result of Harvey

A recent study found that FEMA failed to capture 75 percent of flood damages within their flood maps between 1999 and 2009. The FEMA flood maps are the primary source for how the government and insurance companies evaluate flood risk and insurance premiums. There are collectively trillions of dollars worth of property that rely on these maps being accurate.

The study, conducted by Rice University and Texas A&M University in Galveston, analyzed flood claims between the years of 1999 and 2009 during which there were five major floods. Each of these five floods did not meet the 100-year flood criteria and thus the FEMA flood maps which are based on 100-year floods should have been sufficient to cover Houston residents.

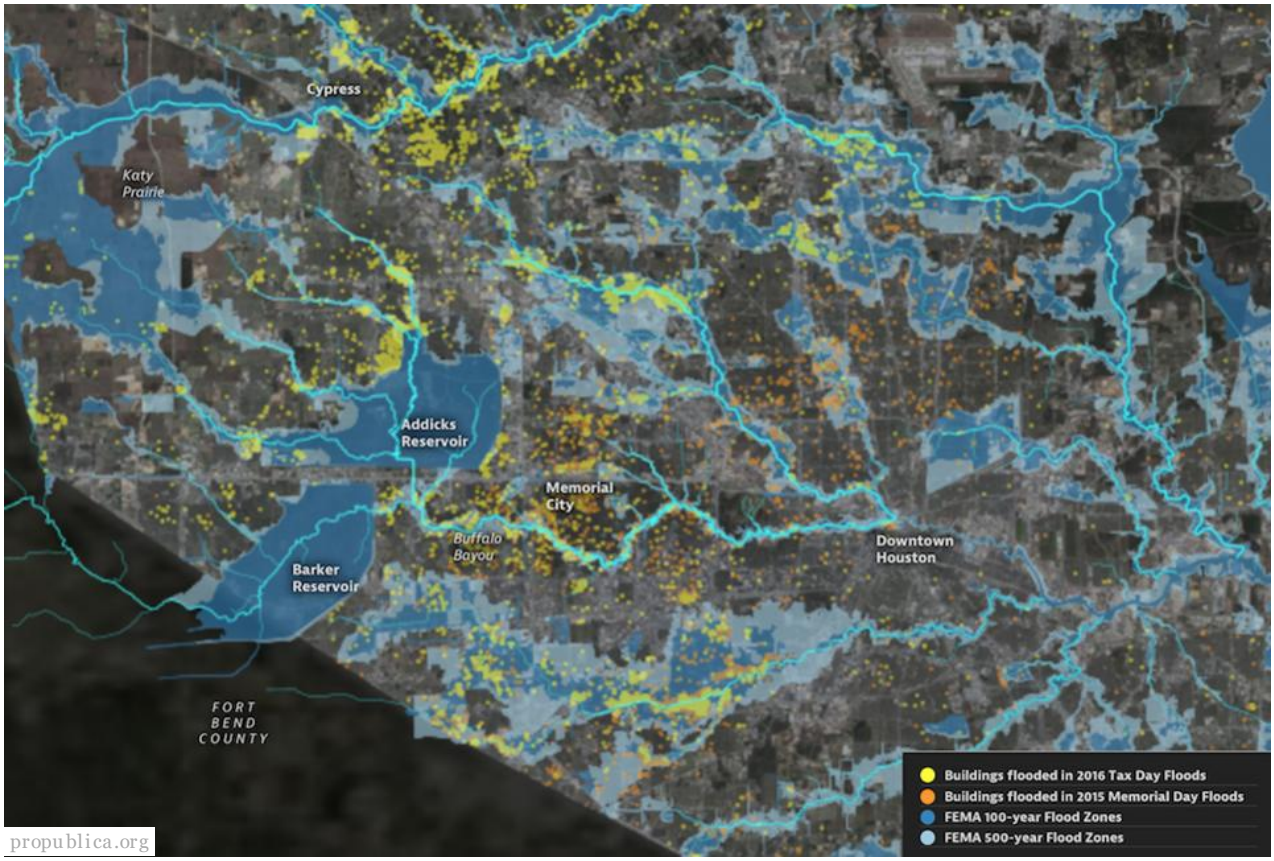
Unfortunately, 75 percent of flood damages caused by these five floods were not within FEMA's 100-year flood maps. The study was published just days before Harvey struck Houston causing devastating flooding throughout the city and many other cities across coastal Texas and Louisiana.

What went wrong? Why were the maps significantly different from reality in these five storms?

The study analyzed Hurricane Ike in 2008, Tropical Storms Erin and Allison in 2007 and 2001, respectively, and two unnamed rainstorms that resulted in flooding in 2006 and 2009. They compared these rain events to what hydrologists call a 100-year flood, meaning that a flood of that magnitude has a 1 percent or 1 in 100 chance of occurring. All five of the aforementioned flooding events did not meet the 100-year flood threshold.

Generally, FEMA models flood events by determining the amount of water required to flood rivers and streams and once flooded where that water will eventually go. However, this type of modeling can be limiting in low-lying areas such as Houston. First, imagine a town at the base of a broad mountain. If there was heavy rain on the mountain, FEMA's models would do a good job at predicting the amount of water that is likely to flow down the mountain and flood rivers and streams within the mountain town. That is, of course, if there is no significant avulsion of the rivers (where rivers abandon their current path for a new path during flood events).

In the second scenario picture heavy rainfall in a low-lying city with waterways throughout the city. In this scenario, the FEMA model doesn't do a great job at predicting where the water will go as the models are primarily used for overflow of rivers and streams. Flooding in low-lying areas can cause water to flow in practically any direction and is not dependent on the overflow of waterways.



Buildings flooded during Houston's 2016 Tax Day floods and 2015 Memorial day floods compared to FEMA's 100 and 500-year flood zones.

A second limitation of FEMA's flood models is the granularity within the model compared to a complex landscape such as Houston. The models will typically classify whole neighborhoods or groups of neighborhoods with the same land use (green space, forest, concrete parking lot, etc.) and soil type (sand, silt, clay, etc.). This means the model is limited in predicting localized flood events within a specific neighborhood.

These two important limitations of FEMA's models make creating a 100-year flood map a difficult task. This is not to say the men and women of FEMA aren't experts at what they do and invaluable in their work. However, the task of modeling flood zones within a city like Houston requires a more complex, detailed, and innovative computational model. These models exist and it's time to start employing them in difficult to model areas like Houston.

As with many catastrophic disasters, we come out of them realizing the limitations of our tools and systems of protection. It's a similar lesson to the levee breaches from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and a call for better and more robust protection against the inevitable next natural disaster.

Trevor Nace is a geologist, Forbes contributor, founder of Science Trends, and adventurer. Follow his journey @trevornace. Contact Trevor at

trevornace[at]gmail.com

The Washington Post

Energy and Environment

These stark photos show the charred remains of the Texas chemical fire that ignited after Harvey

By Steven Mufson and Brady Dennis September 19 at 6:00 AM

The U.S. Chemical Safety Board on Monday released stark photos of the scorched remains of containers at the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Tex., that burned in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

Two of the photos show the skeletal remains of three shipping-size containers covered with ash near the edge of the Arkema facility. Another shows a container burned beyond recognition in front of a charred warehouse.

The fires and explosions ignited after the Arkema plant lost power and when its backup diesel generators failed in flooding that reached six feet in depth. The plant had stored chemical compounds known as organic peroxides, which explode or burst into flames if they are not refrigerated.

A CSB spokeswoman, Hillary Cohen, also said Monday that the plant's multiple diesel generators had been placed on concrete pads that varied slightly, but which were roughly two feet high, not nearly enough to survive the unusual flooding.

During the accident at Arkema, people were told to stay at least 1.5 miles from the plant. The company evacuated its employees and then it was a matter of waiting helplessly as the chemicals warmed up. The fires sent towering black smoke high in the air; it could be seen for miles around.

A team of CSB investigators has been on the Arkema site for two weeks, and the agency expects the team to continue its investigation for several more weeks. The board has been documenting the site with photos, and collecting samples and evidence. The team has conducted interviews with Arkema employees and is working to construct a timeline of the events before the fires and explosions.

Days after the fires, a group of first responders who had been assigned to monitor the 1.5-mile perimeter of the evacuation area around the Arkema chemical plant sued the company, claiming that they had been unprepared for the wave of smoke that had left them vomiting and gasping for air in the middle of the road.

In their lawsuit, the responders allege that the plant owner, Arkema, downplayed the dangers of exposure to the fire and failed to adequately warn responders to move farther away from the fumes after the first of nine trailers full of volatile organic peroxide caught fire. Emergency personnel who arrived on scene allegedly also became ill, in a scene that the lawsuit describes as "nothing less than chaos."

In recent days, others have joined the lawsuit, including some local residents affected after Arkema intentionally ignited the remaining containers of chemicals on Sept. 3, sending additional plumes of smoke that were visible for miles.

"Debris fell all around (well outside the arbitrary perimeter) on people, their homes, their yards, their animals, their property, and their children," lawyers argued in a recent petition, adding more plaintiffs to the case. "More people became exposed to the fumes, and those that had been previously exposed were still trying to recover from the physical limitations they suffered days prior."

Read more:

In scathing lawsuit, first responders describe vomiting, gasping at Texas chemical plant fire

Chemical companies have already released 1 million pounds of extra air pollutants, thanks to Harvey

In Texas chemical-plant fire, failure of backup measures raises new fears

In Irma's wake, millions of gallons of sewage and wastewater are bubbling up across Florida

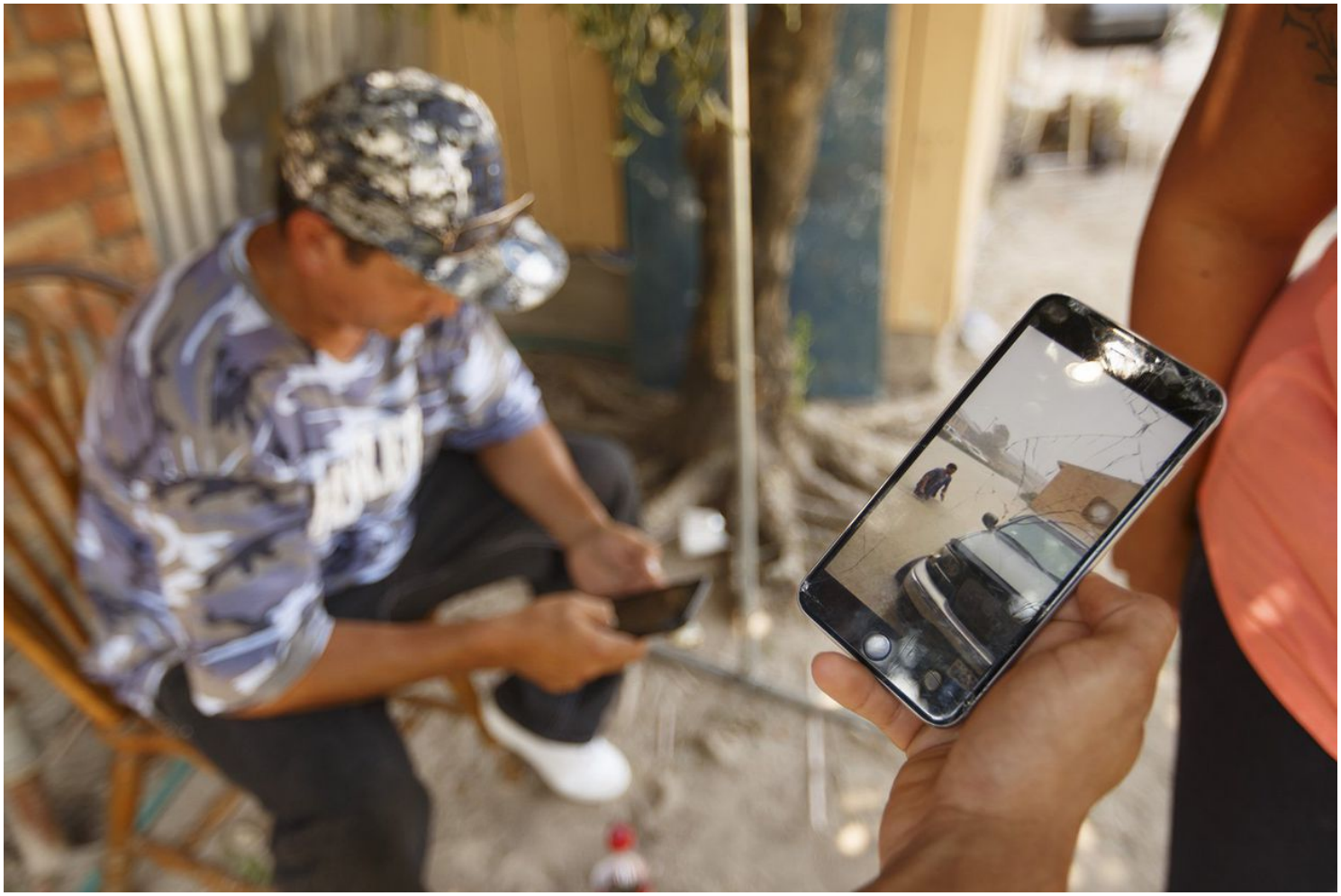
Steven Mufson covers energy and other financial matters. Since joining The Post, he has covered the White House, China, economic policy and diplomacy. Follow @StevenMufson. Follow @StevenMufson

Brady Dennis is a national reporter for The Washington Post, focusing on the environment and public health issues. Follow @brady_dennis

In car-centric Houston, low-income residents struggle after Harvey ruined their vehicles

> In addition to replacing clothes and finding new places to live, many in southeast Texas must repair vehicles or buy new cars. But not being able to get to work for more than three weeks makes that a challenge.

BY **BRANDON FORMBY** SEPT. 19, 2017 8 HOURS AGO



Daniel Gonzalez, who freelances for a remodeling company and can't get to work because his car flooded during Hurricane Harvey, shows a video of his flooded vehicle in Houston on Sept. 14, 2017.
Michael Stravato for The Texas Tribune

HOUSTON — Daniel Gonzalez stood next to his father under the shade of a tree at the Imperial Oaks apartment complex last week and offered fallow glances at the parking lot

where the men's two immobile vehicles sat.

The 18-year-old and his dad used to pay the bills by working as day laborers at various construction jobs. But ever since Hurricane Harvey dumped more than 50 inches of rain on parts of this city, flooding their parking lot and rendering their cars useless, they're now unable to get to work. That's left them spending their days in a monotonous, hopeless holding pattern that's stretched on for weeks.

"I don't have nothing to do," Gonzalez said. "I don't have work. I don't have a car."

Gonzalez is among tens of thousands of southeast Texans whose vehicles were damaged or totaled when the worst rainfall event in American history flooded streets, houses and entire neighborhoods.

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In car-centric Houston, low-income residents struggle after Harvey ruined their vehicl...

Like thousands of other people in this battered region, they only carried the minimum amount of auto insurance required by Texas law. But those liability policies don't cover flood damage.

And for people like Gonzalez, his dad and scores of neighbors who live paycheck to paycheck in a city that was built around cars, the lack of a vehicle is compounding the already daunting task of getting life back on track. That's especially true in far-flung, low-income neighborhoods like Greenspoint, where Gonzalez and his family live in northeast Houston.

"Your public transportation, your commuting options are awful," said Andrea French, executive director of the Houston area's Transportation Advocacy Group. "So you just have to sit and wait."

Daniel Gonzalez, who lives in an apartment in the Greenspoint area of Houston, cleans a floor mat from his flooded car on Sept. 14, 2017. Michael Stravato for The Texas Tribune

Estimates of how many vehicles were damaged or totaled during Harvey vary widely. The Insurance Council of Texas estimates that 250,000 cars were impacted along the Gulf Coast, and more than 90,000 of those vehicles were either uninsured or didn't have policies that cover flood damage.

The wide swath of property damage sent insurance companies, rental car outlets and car dealerships scrambling to respond to a sudden spike in demand for loaner and replacement vehicles.

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But for folks making low wages, dealing with federal assistance applications and finding temporary housing is compounded by an inability to get to and from work and earn a paycheck when they need it the most. Many who lost vehicles also lost furniture, clothes and rental housing.

Develron Walker hasn't been able to get to work at the Bill Clair Family Mortuary in South Central Houston since Harvey hit. His 2011 Nissan Armada was parked at a friend's house in Kashmere Gardens in northeast Houston while he was out of town during the storm. He returned to Houston to find it totaled.

Walker was still making payments on the vehicle and thinks he carried enough insurance to pay off what he owes and break even. But that leaves him with no money or trade-in vehicle to put a down payment on a replacement.

What's worse for him is that the SUV served as the shuttle for congregation members of the Towers of Hope church, where he's a pastor. With the church's roof and ceiling damaged and no transportation for many of the congregants, services haven't been held since the rains came the last weekend in August.

In between dealing with insurance claims and emergency management paperwork, Walker now relies on friends for rides and small amounts of cash to get him through days that he said are shrouded in uncertainty from one minute to the next.

"Once that minute is up, you're right back to square one and you're looking for something to help you for the next minute," he said.

Gonzalez knows the feeling. For meals, he and his extended family rely on the Red Cross, churches or whatever various nonprofits happen to send to their Greenspoint apartment complex each day. They're also battling the apartment complex management over their security deposits and September rent payments, which they want back so they can live somewhere else while their units are being repaired after being inundated with feet of water.

A friend who is a mechanic told Gonzalez it will take $2,500 to fix his sedan. That's more than three months' worth of rent. Gonzalez said he thinks it will take three or four months to save enough money to repair or replace the vehicle. And that's if he can find a way to get to and from construction jobs to earn anything.

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"I gotta think what I'm gonna do," he said as his wife and other relatives milled around the building, holding babies and watching kids play. "A lot of families lost everything. The best thing is we didn't lose the family."

Disclosure: The Insurance Council of Texas has been a financial supporter of The Texas Tribune. A complete list of Tribune donors and sponsors is available here.

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Cedar Creek community hopes to stop proposed waste transfer station

Cedar Creek community hopes to stop proposed waste transfer station

By: Jennifer Kendall (mailto:jennifer.kendall@foxtv.com?body=http://www.fox7austin.com/news/local-news/cedar-creek-community-hopes-to-stop-proposed-waste-transfer-station?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=fox7austin)

POSTED: SEP 18 2017 09:28PM CDT
VIDEO POSTED: SEP 18 2017 09:24PM CDT
UPDATED: SEP 18 2017 09:29PM CDT

BASTROP, Texas - People in Cedar Creek are fighting a proposed waste transfer station a private company wants to build in their community.

A waste transfer station collects garbage from surrounding communities. That waste is then compacted and reloaded onto larger trucks which transfer it to a landfill.

UC Berkeley investigating campus officer's ticketing of hot dog

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is currently considering the application by LEALCO. The station would be located on State Highway 21 just north of the intersection with FM 812.

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"It's a problem waiting to happen," said James Hodnett who lives near the site.

The TCEQ is considering granting a permit to waste company LEALCO, which submitted an application proposing a new waste transfer site in Cedar Creek.

"You're looking at having a waste disposal site that's just been stuck in your backyard and it got our attention pretty quick," Hodnett said.

James said Cedar Creek is already growing faster than State Highway 71 can handle.

"Add t f various size and speed trying to negotiate in and out of that already bottlen odnett.

Anothe vironment. The proposed site is located in the Cedar Creek waters inate drinking water there.

"Just th ent seems pretty questionable on why you would put something that's going to potentially have very hazardous materials brought to it," Hodnett said.

Ada, OK: This Brilliant Company Is Disrupting A $200 Billion Industry

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Several neighbors in Cedar Creek have formed a committee to communicate their concerns with TCEQ.

"Our bottom line, I think with everyone, is keeping a catastrophe from happening," said Steve Chamberlain who is also fighting the proposed transfer station.

While people in the area know some sort of waste management is necessary, they believe there are better placement options that haven't been considered.

"Until we come up with a garbageless society, we've got to have these stations. However, they don't need to be placed where they put the community at risk; with the traffic problems and the flooding problems, it's going to put the community at risk," Chamberlain said.

Monday, TCEQ held the last public comment hearing on the issue.

Neighbors would like to see a traffic study and an environmental impact study done on the site before TCEQ considers granting a permit

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$117,691 in Solid Waste Related Grant Funding Available for East Texas Region

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Kilgore, TX, September 18, 2017: Local governments and special districts have the opportunity to receive grant funds from the East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). To support regional waste minimization efforts in ETCOG's fourteen (14) county region, the solid waste program is accepting applications for its annual Municipal Solid Waste grant funds.

Grant funding requests must be in support of the goals and objectives of the ETCOG Regional Solid Waste Management Plan. Eligible public entities that may apply for funds are: 1) Cities; 2) Counties; 3) Public Schools and School Districts (excluding universities and other post-secondary educational institutions); and 4) General and Special Law Districts created as political subdivisions of the state, with the authority and responsibility for water quality protection or municipal solid waste management, including river authorities. The approximate expected total amount of funding is $117,691.

Eligible project categories are: 1) Local Enforcement- This category consists of projects which contribute to the prevention of illegal dumping. These projects may include programs to investigate illegal dumping problems, educate the public on illegal dumping laws, and prosecute violators. These programs may also include activities such as monitoring collection and transport through a manifest system to enforce laws pertaining to the illegal disposal of liquid wastes; 2) Source Reduction and Recycling; 3) Citizen's Collection Stations and "Small" Registered Transfer Stations; 4) Educational and Training Projects- Educational components are encouraged under the other categories in order to better ensure public participation in projects; those educational components should be funded as part of those projects and not separately under this category. This category may include "stand-alone" educational projects dealing with a variety of solid waste management topics; 5) Community Cleanup Events; 6) Technical Studies; 7) Household Hazardous Waste Management; and 8) Local Solid Waste Management Plans.

Please contact Julie Burnfield at (903) 218-6436 for the following forms: Request for Applications (RFA) and a FY 2018 application form. The forms are also available online at www.etcog.org.

ETCOG will also hold a pre-application workshop for applicants to assist in filling out the application,on Thursday September 28th at 10:00 AM at 3800 Stone Rd., Kilgore. This

workshop is only mandatory for first time grant applicants. The deadline for application submittal is Friday, October 20th by 5:00 PM.

Solid Waste Management Plan
The purpose of the Plan is to provide guidelines for current and future solid waste management to local governments in the region. The State requires that the Regional Plan give preference, to the maximum extent economically and technologically feasible, to the hierarchy of management methods for solid waste, from the most preferred to the lease preferred:

- Source reduction and minimization of waste
- Reuse or recycling of waste
- Treatment to destroy or reprocess waste for energy or resource recovery; and
- Land disposal

About ETCOG
The East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) is a voluntary association of counties, cities, school districts and special districts within the fourteen-county East Texas region. ETCOG assists local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit and coordinating for sound regional development. Established in 1970, ETCOG, either directly, or through its contractors, provides programs and services for East Texas seniors, employers, and job seekers. ETCOG and its contractors also build the 9-1-1 emergency call delivery system, provide peace officer training and homeland security planning services, deliver rural transportation services, business finance programs, and environmental grant funding for the region.

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US EPA eases rules for Texas fuel storage facilities hit by Harvey

Washington (Platts)--18 Sep 2017 543 pm EDT/2143 GMT

The US Environmental Protection Agency has eased several rules for gasoline storage facilities and bulk fuel terminals in Texas that were affected by Hurricane Harvey.

The agency late Friday issued "no action assurance" letters waiving the rules through September 22.

EPA said it would not take enforcement action against:

- Tanker trucks for certain standards of the Clean Air Act related to tank tightness and registration.
- Gasoline storage tank emissions during "roof landings" caused by low supplies at refineries.
- Bulk fuel terminals that cannot operate devices to capture or recover certain air pollutants.

"Under EPA's no action assurance letters, the facilities must continue to exercise good air pollution control practices and comply with all other federal, state and local environmental laws," the agency said.

--Meghan Gordon, meghan.gordon@spglobal.com

--Edited by Dan Lalor, daniel.lalor@spglobal.com

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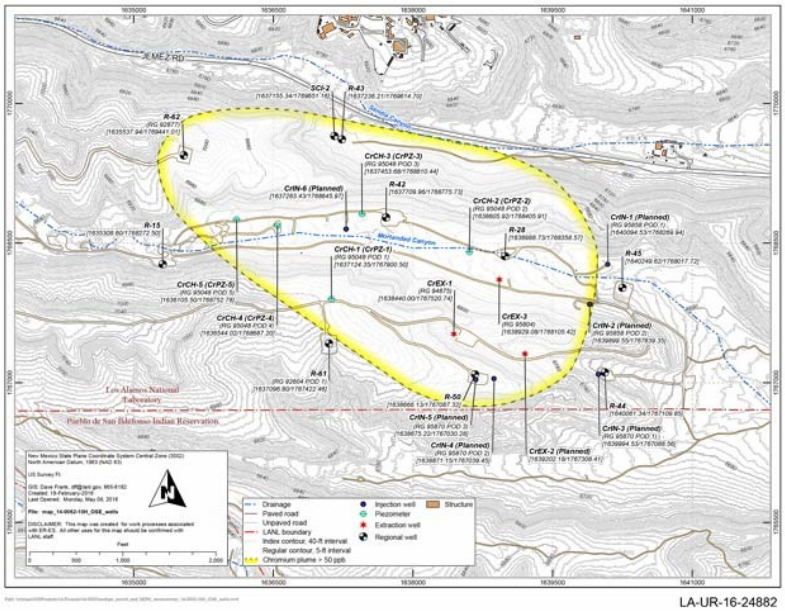
Spreading plume of chemicals threatens aquifer

LANL working to stop cancer-causing mixture from advancing to tribal land



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Readings taken by the lab July 16 and 17, and recorded in the public online database Intellus New Mexico, found the CrIN-6 well had levels of chromium ranging from between 247 and 262 micrograms per liter.

MAP COURTESY OF U.S. DEPT. OF ENERGY - ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT CONSOLIDATED BUSINESS CENTER

Posted Monday, September 18, 2017 4:12 pm

By Rebecca Moss
The New Mexican

For more than a decade, a vast, mile-wide, below-ground plume of cancer-causing chemicals has encroached on the regional aquifer that rests below Los Alamos National Laboratory. The lab has said it is working to contain the contamination and prevent it from entering tribal land or further polluting a water supply relied on by residents from Los Alamos to Albuquerque.

A lab spokesman said he was unable to respond to questions about the plume by deadline but would have a response Monday.

The well in question, labeled CrIN-6 in lab documents, was drilled in early 2017 to serve as an "injection" well. Workers would use it to pump out contaminated water, treat the water and then pump the clean water back underground. A cleanup plan for the plume of contamination says roughly 230 million gallons should be "pumped and treated" each year.

In 2016, John Keiling, director of the state Environment Department's Hazardous Waste Bureau, told the lab to move the new well farther from the plume, and not near the edge or within the center of it, which the lab originally proposed.

"Injection of treated groundwater at this location will likely induce downward and lateral spreading of high concentrations of hexavalent chromium and other contaminants," he wrote.

Allison Majure, a spokeswoman for the New Mexico Environment Department, also did not respond to questions Friday about the water contamination.

Water sampling from the wells within and surrounding the plume indicate a high number of chemicals and radioactive elements, but the most troubling threat to human health has been the high concentration ofhexavalent chromium, a known carcinogen targeting the liver, skin, eyes and kidneys, according to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

Readings taken by the lab July 16 and 17, and recorded in the public online database Intellus New Mexico, found the CrIN-6 well had levels of chromium ranging from between 247 and 262 micrograms per liter.

There are different kinds of chromium, but hexavalent chromium, or chromium 6, is the most toxic.

The state says total chromium cannot exceed 50 migrograms per liter or 50 parts per billion. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allows 100 micrograms per liter. But a number of scientists and legal advocates say the limit for hexavalent chromium should be much lower. The chemical was the subject of a class-action lawsuit in California that was the inspiration for the 2000 feature film Erin Brockovich.

California's legal limit is 10 parts per billion. And in 2011, the California Office of Health Hazard Assessment set a "health goal," which is not legally enforceable, saying utilities should limit the amount of hexavalent chromium in drinking water to less than 0.02 parts per billion. At that rate, one person out of a million would get cancer over a lifetime, according to a study conducted by the National Toxicology Program.

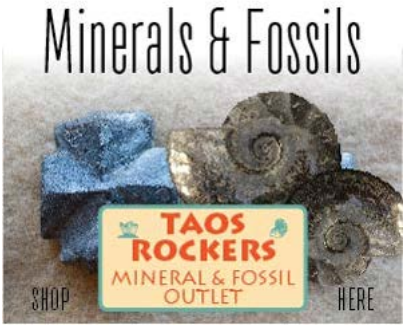
Roughly 90 percent of New Mexico residents rely on groundwater as drinking water.

The Los Alamos Municipal Water System has 4.45 parts per billion of hexavalent chromium in its water, according to data collected by New Mexico and the EPA, and published in a database by the Environmental Working Group, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit that has advocated for stricter drinking water standards.

While its level of hexavalent chromium is still significantly below the state limit, Los Alamos has roughly six times more of the substance in its water supply than the national average.

Most of the wells on the outside perimeter of the Los Alamos plume, with the exception of CrIN-6, have a chromium level ranging between 4 and 11 parts per billion. But within the plume, levels are significantly higher. One well inside the plume had more than 1,000 parts per billion of chromium in 2013, and as of July 28, it still had alarmingly high levels, detected at 793 micrograms per liter, according to data pulled by The New Mexican from Intellus New Mexico.

A map published by the lab in May shows the kidney-shaped plume pushing up against the boundary of San Ildefonso Pueblo property, but not encroaching on it. In May, 4.7 parts per billion of chromium were detected in the only sampling well on San Ildefonso land, which is south of the plume.



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The plume is the result of negligent waste disposal at the lab dating back to the 1950s. For two decades, ending in 1972, lab workers routinely dumped water from cooling towers down into Sandia Canyon. But because the water was first pumped through the pipes of an old power plant, it was contaminated by significant amounts of hexavalent chromium, which is added to alloy steel to prevent corrosion. An estimated 160,000 pounds of hexavalent chromium was released between 1957 and 1972, the Department of Energy said.

From Sandia Canyon, the water traveled several miles into Mortandad Canyon and seeped into the earth, pooling into an underground plume of contamination discovered by the lab in 2005. Two years later, the lab paid the Environment Department more than $250,000 as a result of the contamination for levels ofchromium detected at eight times the state's groundwater standard.

About 1,000 feet below ground, the plume of hexavalent chromium in the groundwater was measured at a mile long, a half-mile wide, and 100 feet thick as of 2014.

The lab has said it will treat the plume by pumping and treating contaminated water, as well as injecting a molasses mixture into wells, which reacts with the hexavalent chromium, changing it into a less toxic form ofthe element, chromium 3.

This is expected to cost more than $180 million and require ongoing treatment until 2048, according to a 2016 report.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico, which first discovered the high levels of chromium in CrIV-6, called the plume a serious threat to New Mexico's water resource.

"The remediation is turning out to be this decadeslong, or longer process, of investigating exactly where the plume is," said Scott Kovac, director of operations and research for Nuclear Watch. "The geology under Los Alamos is so complicated, anybody that says they know what's happening under there is taking liberties."

Kovac said the high levels of chromium indicate the plume may be growing more rapidly than the lab anticipated and may result in higher costs, as well as a longer time frame, to clean up the widespread pollution.

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"It is easy for data to get buried and never see the light of day in the Lab's contamination database," he added in a statement. "LANL should proactively keep the public continuously informed of important new developments."

Contact Rebecca Moss at 505-986-3011 or rmoss@sfnewmexican.com (rmoss@sfnewmexican.com).

Keywords

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(https://4tw2.com/path/lp.php?trvid=10512&trvx=c465f231&lM=A17I&TT=T09&utm_source=taboola&utm_medium=referral&SID=taosnews&TID=Ci9mN2ZlZTdlMi1kN2M5LTQ3ZTEtOTU3MC1jNmE4M2NjMzRmYTQtdHVjdGJhYzhlNBlUYXBvcnRhbWVkaWFsdG

The must-have spy device every car owner needs to possess

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Tempo Weekly Events

SAT 23 **Taos Farmers Market**
Taos Plaza | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **Qi Gong with Beth Searcy, LMT**
Taos Whole Health | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **Tai Chi Everyday 9 am**
Kit Carson Park | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **TCA Exhibits: Paper, Paper Paper**
The Encore Gallery... | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **Ballet Core Fit**
Sundance Studios N... | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **KTAOS Solar Volleyball League**
KTAOS Solar Center | Taos, NM

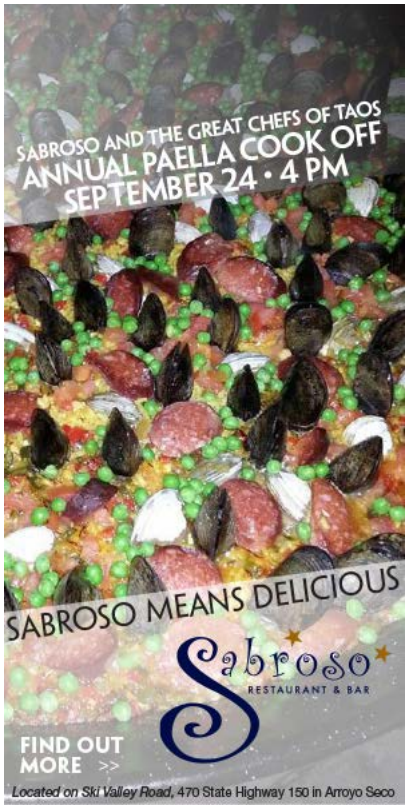
TUE 19 **Open mic hosted by Bittersweet Hi…**
Black Mesa Winery ... | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **TCA Exhibits at The Taos Inn: Mark …**
The Historic Taos ... | Taos, NM

TUE 19 **Glen Roth**
Adobe Bar at the T... | Taos, NM

TUE 19 WED 20 THU 21 FRI 22 SAT 23 SUN 24

See all events Add your event



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