

Jeffords Hurricane Katrina recovery package

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Sen. James Jeffords and some Democratic colleagues have introduced a bill that they say would help coordinate the rebuilding along the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Dubbed the Gulf Coast Infrastructure Redevelopment and Recovery Act of 2005, it would establish a task force to coordinate and distribute funding for redevelopment.

It would manage the efforts of such agencies as the Federal Highway Administration, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Economic Development Authority, the Delta Regional Authority, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Grants would be established and several studies would be prepared to update emergency response plans, resolve inadequacies and identify vulnerabilities, Jeffords' staff said.

The Army Corps of Engineers would be required to prepare a comprehensive approach to rebuilding in the region.

The Senate would appropriate \$200 million to the Economic Development Authority and the Delta Regional Authority. The EPA would have to plan for sampling to detect hazardous substances and industrial chemicals that may threaten human health or the environment.

Jeffords introduced the bill along with the Democrats on the Environment and Public Works Committee, where he is the ranking member. He said the legislation was necessary because the Federal Emergency Management Agency had responded poorly.

"FEMA has shown itself to be ineffective, in my opinion, largely due to the bureaucracy of the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA's lack of independence," said Jeffords, who opposed dissolving FEMA into the new department in 2002.

"The federal aid provided for Katrina must be coordinated in a wise, targeted manner, and this bill will go a long way in doing that," Jeffords said. "In the rush to clean up after Katrina, we must also make sure that public health and the environment are not overlooked."

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