

News from the

**U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



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***INVESTIGATION REVEALS ABSENCE OF EVACUATION PLANS
FOR ELDERLY IN TIMES OF DISASTER, ENZI SAYS***

Washington, D.C. – A three-month investigation, prompted by the hurricane disasters that ravaged the Gulf Coast last summer, has revealed a general, nationwide absence of disaster evacuation plans designed specifically for the elderly, Senator Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee said today in a letter to state and federal officials.

Releasing a newly-prepared Committee report examining the need to protect the elderly in future disasters, Enzi said while plans exist with regard to nursing homes and hospitals, those plans typically seek to shelter rather than evacuate the elderly. The report found that many state and local governments do not have detailed evacuation plans for the elderly, and the federal government has no clear outlined responsibility for evacuating the elderly, unless a disaster is declared by the President upon request by a state governor.

“The findings of the HELP Committee’s Oversight and Investigations office highlight the need to create a coordinated emergency response plan that is proactive, rather than reactive, to keep our elderly citizens safe from harm and meet their unique needs,” Enzi said. “I am pleased that the White House Conference on Aging has also recognized this need and included it as one of their top priorities for this year.”

“With less than four months until the start of the next hurricane season, it is essential that state and local governments, in cooperation with the federal government, develop a coordinated response to ensure evacuation of the elderly is carried out effectively,” Enzi added. “Sadly, individuals over the age of 60 accounted for 73 percent of Hurricane Katrina-related deaths in the New Orleans area. We must do our best to see to it that this never happens again, and that our most vulnerable citizens are protected.”

The committee report, which Enzi released Thursday, recommended that officials take the following actions to protect the elderly in future disasters:

- Develop a coordinated response for the evacuation of the elderly;
- Create a tracking system to locate and identify elderly victims during a disaster; and,
- Establish a clear delineation of responsibility during times of disaster at the federal, state, local and institutional level with regard to evacuation of the elderly.

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