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http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/07/cbsnews_investigates/main3469283.shtml

FEMA Protecting Itself, But Not Evacuees?

CBS News Obtains Emails Indicating Agency Prohibits Its Own Staff From Entering Toxic Trailers

*(CBS) There are still 50,000 families along the Gulf Coast living in travel trailers given to them by FEMA. Six months ago [we began investigating](#) reports of toxic formaldehyde fumes making some of those people sick. And as **Chief Investigative Reporter Armen Keteyian** reports, FEMA has done more to cover their own backs than help the people in the trailers. Many of the trailers are loaded with toxic formaldehyde fumes and people are still getting sick.*

CBS News has learned that while telling the residents of its trailers that it is still working on the formaldehyde problem, it appears it *prohibits* its own staff from even briefly stepping inside trailers once residents have moved out.

We obtained these exclusive emails that show the reason why: It is just too dangerous, **Keteyian** reports.

In an Oct 19 email, a worker asks if there is “any safety reason you know of that says we can’t go into a [deactivated or previously used] trailer quickly to shut a vent.”

The response from the director of the Baton Rouge office, Jon Byrd, said, “the issue is formaldehyde.”

Then, on Oct. 22, this final answer from FEMA's head of safety in Washington, David Chawaga: "Please reinforce ... FEMA employees do not enter stored TTs until further notice..."

“They are telling their employees it’s too dangerous to go into the trailers, yet we're letting people continue to live in these trailers with excess formaldehyde levels,” said Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif.

FEMA today told CBS News there was no directive against going inside the trailers,

claiming the emails don't apply to trailers people had lived in but instead to 70,000 units now sealed in storage.

In July the [head of the agency told Congress](#) he was working quickly to deal with the toxic formaldehyde issue.

“FEMA and the CDC are scheduled to begin Phase One of a study in the Gulf Coast within the next few weeks,” said FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison.

Now FEMA says the study has been halted - not a single trailer tested.

The stated reason: the agency says it needs to identify "action levels for responding to the results."

In other words, when FEMA finds high levels of the toxic fumes, the agency still doesn't know what to do about it.