

Three months after devastation of Hurricane Ida, thousands In Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana remain without permanent housing

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It's now been over 90 days since Hurricane Ida made landfall in southern Louisiana. That storm, which hit on the 16th anniversary of Katrina, caused some 33 deaths in the state and at least 80 deaths nationwide as the storm moved across the Northeastern US.

Thousands were left without homes in several towns across southern Louisiana, especially in hard hit Terrebonne Parish. Just outside downtown Houma, an encampment of FEMA trailers, temporary housing units provided by the federal and state governments to shelter those who lost their homes in the storm, is still full after months and hundreds more are still without permanent housing.

The demand for trailers has far exceeded the current availability. Hundreds of people are currently awaiting temporary housing in Houma where units are slowly being added by FEMA to the campsite on Scott Street where nearly 200 people are already being housed.

"We are 90 days [since landfall] now and people don't have homes. That's unacceptable," parish president Gordon Dove told WWL.

According to Dove nearly half of the homes in Terrebonne Parish received roof damage with the state government providing 625 temporary housing trailers and FEMA sending in only about 15. "We believe we will need 2600 when its all said and done," Dove noted.

Melissa Champagne had her home destroyed by Ida and was awaiting shelter aid as of late October. "I'm staying at my cousin's house right now, with my two kids and my mother," Champagne told Eyewitness News (WWL). She had applied weeks earlier for a temporary trailer with no results after months without a home of her own. "We can't even find rental places," Champagne explained, "There's nothing available."

The director of planning and zoning for Terrebonne Parish, Chris Pulask told WWL that getting people into these temporary homes should take about 7-10 days but has taken much longer in the aftermath of Ida due to lack of local contractors and the bureaucratic red tape from FEMA. "That's sort of the frustrating part that we have going on right now," Pulaski noted. "At the end of the day there are federal guidelines to follow and steps to follow because that's how FEMA requires and operates."

David Livas was also still awaiting a housing assignment as of late October after months of staying with friends. "If it wouldn't have been for her, letting me stay with her, I don't know where I would be right now," Lavis told WWL, "People ain't got nowhere to go."

As of now Terrebonne Parish has only two temporary housing facilities. As the need for more housing continues to grow in the area, parish officials say, there will be plans for more facilities to be built in multiple parishes with Houma being used as a staging area for FEMA trailers and housing camps.

Ethel Dardar from Pointe-aux-Chenes, an unincorporated area of Terrebonne Parish, told the *Houma Courier* that FEMA officials investigated her deeply damaged home and property only to deny her a housing trailer weeks later citing the fact that her home was in a flood zone. She appealed this decision and was eventually granted a trailer that she has yet to receive.

Dardar was given a woefully inadequate \$14,000 in relief aid by FEMA to cover damages to her home. "It is not near enough," Dardar said.

Of the over 600 trailer units FEMA deployed to the region, parish officials claim that only about 369 are

occupied as the process for approval and assignment has been dreadfully slow.

Lafourche Parish president Archie Chaisson spoke to the *Courier* about the frustrations and difficulties in coordinating state housing programs with federal programs. “Both programs have been really slow,” Chaisson said. “We continue to bang their head against the wall trying to get them to move these programs faster and acquire more units and work out the issues whether it be energy or utilities to try to get things hooked up faster and licensed in faster.”

Alongside the housing crisis, levee officials are working to repair \$5 million in floodgate damage from the storm. For the most part parishes rely almost entirely on state funds to maintain levees and floodgates.

According to officials the flooding was barely contained, “Had Ida made landfall farther west we would’ve had major overtopping,” Terrebonne Parish Levee District executive director Reggie Dupre reported. The parish levee system was pummeled during the storm by wind speeds up to 180 mph according to monitors.



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