

The Times-Picayune

3800 HOWARD AVENUE, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70125-1429 · TELEPHONE (504) 826-3300

Mark Schleifstein
The Times-Picayune
3800 Howard Ave.
New Orleans LA 70125
504-826-3327

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Jeff Ovall
Senior FOIA Specialist
Office of Chief Counsel

Dear Jeff,

I received your note asking whether I'm interested in continuing to have my FOIA request responded to, and the answer is YES.

As I said in my original letter (attached) -- in which I requested EXPEDITED REVIEW -- information we have been attempting to get from your agency is important to our readers:

"The public has an urgent need for information about the immediate response efforts for Katrina and Rita because the risk of future storms of equal or greater intensity remains a concern in the New Orleans area and in other parts of the nation, both during the last two months of this hurricane season and in future hurricane seasons.

This also falls under the life-threatening need for information provision of the FOIA. The delayed disclosure of information necessary to improve future initial responses to hurricanes could threaten the life and physical safety of people living in the New Orleans area."

Nothing has changed. As I sit in New Orleans almost 15 months after Hurricane Katrina flooded 80 percent of my community, killing more than 1,500 people, the New Orleans area still is not protected by levees capable of withstanding a catastrophic hurricane. Thus, the lessons that may be learned from the initial response to Katrina by your agency may assist the public in determining whether it is safe enough for them to remain in or return to their homes in this area -- or for that matter, whether other coastal communities' conceptions of safety are adequate.

I don't understand, by the way, why my request has been placed on the list of 226 FOIA cases on your non-expedited queue. An explanation -- in addition to a tally of how many expedited and non-expedited requests actually have been fulfilled -- also would be appreciated.

Thanks,

Mark Schleifstein
Staff writer

C.C.: Joe Davis, chair, Society of Environmental Journalists First Amendment Committee.