

**Hello to all of you at home, from Renea Addington, FF1/EMT and Heather Moore, FF/First Responder, from Riddle Fire Department.**

We are currently stationed at L.B. Landry High School, in New Orleans, La; assisting FEMA with their efforts to get aid to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Here is an update of what's going on here...

We are part of the Fire Service cadre' that is assisting with the disaster recovery center, in the Algiers district of New Orleans. Our jobs here are to first and foremost, to lend an open and caring ear to these poor people, as they have nothing... their beautiful city is in ruins, television does not even begin to touch what the actual devastation appears as here. It is very hot and muggy, water is scarce, food is MRE's, which is better than what the victims have had. The 82nd Airborne is here with us to protect us as well as what's left of this devastated area, however they are leaving on Wednesday and the California National Guard will be deploying here to take their place.

How strange and eerie to see heavily armed military folks patrolling the streets, not only in humvees, but also in blackhawk helicopters that fly over us constantly, 24 hours a day. There are a few places around here where we are, in Algiers that have power. We are the lucky ones as even though our conditions are a bit austere, we still have the luxury of having cots to sleep on, we can heat our food as well as the Red Cross is here and there is a fire-base camp 4 blocks from here. We are with other Fire Department from all over the United States... literally representing coast to coast. As you all have heard, there is another hurricane on its way. The people here were allowed to start returning home, depending on the districts that they live in, this week and businesses were allowed to reopen, if possible... however, with the hurricane being imminently headed towards this area, the poor people were stopped, as of yesterday from continuing to be allowed to come home. There is voluntary evacuation in place for those that have already returned, for today. Mandatory evacuation of the residents is tomorrow, Wednesday 21st. There is one evacuation pick-up point in the heart of New Orleans, and the other is going to be here, in the soccer field across the street, from where we are. We cannot personally fathom the idea of what these poor people are going to be thinking, as they have already been severely traumatized in all aspects of their lives. We are honored and proud to have been picked by FEMA to come and to assist these poor people... we will have stories to tell and we have pictures

to share, like you would not believe, as we are literally working face to face with these folks. Our job is actually to sit down, one on one with these people and to introduce ourselves and to listen to their stories and then to help figure out what they need and how to go about getting it... think about this... can you imagine, because this is true...

A young woman came in, sat down and spoke with one of us, her eyes welled up with tears and she lost her breath, she then sighed and began speaking of how she had gone to her grandmother's home to help her to get her belongings together for evacuating... as I sit here on FEMA's computer and write to you... our hearts are heavy... but here is her story... As she arrived at her grandmother's home, the winds were picking up and the rains were pouring so hard that it hurt and felt like it was cutting her skin. The power was out, the streets were darkened and as everyone so far has described to us, their ears were hurting from the pressure build up outside. The noise was like a freight train and very loud. All of a sudden after she had gone into her grandmother's home, there was a great loud crashing noise and the water came rushing in and there was so much noise that you couldn't even hear the person next to you screaming. The furniture had been pushed around and she and her grandmother fell as they attempted to get up their stairs to a higher area. The water kept raising and eventually they had to go into their attic, as a last resort for safety. There was a vent up there and so the young woman was able to break it free, and she and her grandmother climbed outside the attic and up onto the roof of the house for safety. The young lady then stopped talking and looked right at each of us as she spoke of her ordeal and then went on to tell us that as she got onto the roof of the house, she turned and reached to help her grandmother up. Just as she had gotten to the eave of the house, they lost hold of each others life-saving grip...the last thing that this young woman remembered, was the sounds from her grandmother screaming in horror as she was carried away in the water that was rushing by and full of heavy floating objects. Her grandmother's body has yet to be recovered.

As I (Renea Addington) sit here and write this to you... I have cried again, it is from sadness for this young woman's grandmother, but yet in pride that I am honored to be the person that was able to assist this woman with the beginning of healing, from her horrific ordeal...

We sit for 12 hours a day and listen to story after story, like the one that I have shared with you. The citizens here look to fire/ems people to help bring them comfort during a fire or ems situation. They have been through a disaster that will take years to overcome, financially and more importantly emotionally... Please do me a favor today... please look to your work partners, regardless of who they are, or what agency that they are with... and let them know that you would be there, side by side with them, without judgment ... in a time of need. Hug your families and let them and your friends know that you love and care for them very much. Be proud of what you do and who you are... These people are so comforted when they come here to this place for assistance, they are confused and somewhat disoriented and disheveled, but they find immediate comfort from the hearts of the people that answer the call of emergencies. Take care you all, I will write as I can.

Lt. Renea Addington, FF1/EMT-B  
Riddle Fire Department