

On July 19, 2007, the Committee held a hearing on formaldehyde levels in FEMA trailers provided to displaced evacuees from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The hearing revealed that FEMA officials in Washington had ignored multiple warnings about high formaldehyde exposures in FEMA trailers because testing “would imply FEMA’s ownership of the issue.”

The hearing and the Committee’s ongoing investigation has led to multiple reforms. At the hearing, FEMA Administrator David Paulison announced that FEMA would ask the Centers for Disease Control to conduct comprehensive testing of the air quality of the trailers. Shortly after the hearing, FEMA also announced that it would discontinue deploying travel trailers for use by displaced disaster victims and would stop selling surplus units to the public.

In December 2007, Congress directed in a consolidated appropriations measure that FEMA work with the CDC to complete the testing and develop policies concerning families remaining in FEMA issued trailers. In February 2008, CDC announced the test results, which confirmed high levels of formaldehyde in trailers. On February 14, FEMA announced that it would immediately begin relocating those families living in trailers with high levels of formaldehyde.

On July 9, 2008, the Committee held a second hearing to examine the role and responsibility of the trailer manufacturers. This hearing revealed that the major manufacturer of FEMA trailers was aware of the high formaldehyde levels as early as March 2006, but failed to warn the occupants of the trailers or advise FEMA of its findings.