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## Lack of FEMA data slows relief

By Mimi Hall, USA TODAY

Relief groups trying to help Hurricane Katrina evacuees find new homes and reunite with families say they have been stymied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's failure to provide information about evacuees.

"It's scandalous," said Sheila Crowley of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. "Congress should have hearings about the lack of information that's available."

Crowley said her organization has been trying for weeks to get information that FEMA collected on how many people were displaced from low-income housing and where they are living. She said the group needs the information to "understand the various situations that evacuees find themselves in."

FEMA spokeswoman Nicol Andrews said she couldn't explain why at least three relief groups didn't get the data. She said FEMA is "happy to share" the information, except with groups trying to profit from the evacuees.

Most groups that have complained are non-profits. Others that requested but didn't immediately receive the data were the government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

The complaints have sparked the latest wave of discontent against the beleaguered disaster-relief agency. Since Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, FEMA has been widely assailed for its response.

PICO National Network, a coalition of 1,000 churches, including 100 in New Orleans, also has been trying to collect information about evacuees' whereabouts to help pastors find parishioners and help them contact relatives and friends.

"It's critical that we rebuild all these social networks," PICO's Gordon Whitman said.

Many of the groups are seeking updates to data that FEMA had given USA TODAY. On Sept. 29, the newspaper published a map showing that tens of thousands of evacuees were scattered across 18,700 ZIP codes in all 50 states.

Douglas Culkin of the National Apartment Association said he wants the information so his association can determine how much apartment stock is available in towns and cities where evacuees are staying. At an Oct. 17 meeting with FEMA officials in Washington, D.C., Culkin said, he was told someone would get him the information.

He still doesn't have it. "It's unconscionable," Culkin said.

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