

## **Rice report shows lessons from Hurricane Rita not practiced during Ike**

March 13 2009

A new Rice University report released yesterday, exactly six months after Hurricane Ike slammed the Texas Gulf Coast, suggests that people did not practice the lessons learned from Hurricane Rita.

According to the study, 75 percent of Harris County residents say they would evacuate if a Category 4 <u>hurricane</u> threatened Houston. This is a significant potential increase over the 24 percent of residents who left during the Category 2 Hurricane Ike. It's also a significant increase over the 52 percent of Harris County residents who evacuated in 2005 during the Category 4 <u>Hurricane Rita</u> but found themselves stuck in miles-long <u>traffic jams</u> on highways or stranded as the storm approached.

"Essentially, this study shows that people didn't learn from Hurricane Rita," said the report's co-author Robert Stein, the Lena Gohlman Fox Professor of Political Science at Rice. "Had Hurricane Ike been a severe storm -- a Category 3 or 4 -- more people would have evacuated, and we would have experienced <u>roadway</u> gridlock."

The reports shows that significantly fewer people evacuated during Hurricane Ike than during Hurricane Rita, but a large portion of the population left areas that were not under an evacuation order.

"The timing of evacuations showed no improvement over the experience during Hurricane Rita, when roadways experienced paralyzing gridlock," Stein said. "People evacuating from hurricane Ike all left too late, potentially creating the same conditions that existed during Hurricane



Rita had a larger population evacuated."

The report details the results of surveys that assessed people's experience before, during and after each hurricane's landfall. The surveys were conducted in the weeks immediately after each storm -- Sept. 29-Oct. 3 for the Hurricane Rita survey, and Sept. 23-Oct. 24 for the Hurricane Ike survey.

The report is intended to enable <u>policymakers</u> and leaders to be more effective in getting their constituents to comply with evacuation orders.

The report also found:

• Local television weather reporters were the most-relied-upon source of information for both hurricanes. During Hurricane Ike, the Weather Channel was the second most-relied-upon source.

• In non-evacuation zones during Hurricane Rita, 40 percent of residents evacuated. These "shadow evacuees" were largely responsible for the road congestion. During Hurricane Ike, that number fell to 21 percent.

• Evacuees during Hurricane Ike responded correctly by taking fewer vehicles and slightly more people per vehicle. This was particularly true for people from areas under an evacuation order.

The release of this report coincides with a free public forum at Rice University March 12 featuring Houston Mayor Bill White and Harris County Judge Ed Emmett discussing the leadership challenges they had to overcome to guide Houston through the disaster. "Leadership in Crisis: Guiding Houston through the Storm" will be held from 6 to 7 p.m. in Sewall Hall, Room 301, on the Rice campus, 6100 Main St. Stein and report co-authors Leonardo Dueñas-Osorio, assistant professor in civil and environmental engineering, and Devika Subramanian, professor



of computer science and in electrical and computer engineering, will be available to take questions before and after the event.

Source: Rice University (<u>news</u> : <u>web</u>)

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