

Hopkins experts help ID Katrina victims

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Johns Hopkins University experts are joining efforts to identify more than 70 bodies of Hurricane Katrina victims.

Last year's massive hurricane killed more than 1,200 people in Louisiana and Mississippi. About 2,000 people are still missing.

Using experience gained in DNA analysis of human remains after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Hopkins epidemiologists and genetic counselors are helping Louisiana state officials with the complex task of collecting data on family history.

"Both disasters -- the attack on the World Trade Center and Hurricane Katrina -- have challenged the nation's abilities to handle mass-fatality identification beyond anything ever experienced before," said Joan Bailey-Wilson, an adjunct professor at Hopkins and statistical geneticist. She sits on a panel, along with Hopkins' Elizabeth Pugh, a genetic epidemiologist, to assist in identifying Katrina's victims.

Both women also served in a similar manner after the World Trade Center attacks five years ago.

Pugh notes genetic testing is now made easier by commercially available computer software programs to analyze DNA results. These programs can statistically match any individual with genetic material from the same person or with that of family members using as few as 16 unique genetic markers.

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