

Gov't skirted reports on FEMA trailers

by UPI

NEW ORLEANS -- A congressional committee said emergency management officials downplayed the risk of formaldehyde in trailers for hurricane victims along the U.S. Gulf Coast. The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science and Technology said that officials at the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services eluded scientific review procedures in reporting the dangers of formaldehyde to avoid legal liability, *The Times-Picayune*, a New Orleans newspaper, said Tuesday. "FEMA officials actually hid, manipulated or simply ignored the scientific work and concerns of federal scientists to justify their own policy and legal objectives," committee Chairman Rep. Brad Miller, D-N.C., said. Some hurricane victims complained of various irritating symptoms in 2006 prompting the Sierra Club to conduct air-quality tests, the *Times-Picayune* said. The results of the tests suggested formaldehyde, a "probable human carcinogen," was the likely irritant. A February 2007 Environmental Protection Agency study found formaldehyde levels "were below those expected to produce adverse health effects." A U.S. government health scientist called the report "incomplete and perhaps misleading," telling FEMA attorneys there "is no recognized 'safe levels' of exposure." The House committee said researchers tried to "bypass" the scientist's concerns but FEMA denied in a statement it tried to "suppress" information about the formaldehyde levels.

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