Secretary's Message

A Brief Word From DEQ Secretary Mike D. McDaniel, Ph.D.

It has been well over a year since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated coastal Louisiana. Because of the magnitude and complexity of the cleanup activities, recovery from this unprecedented natural disaster has been very challenging and arduous. But, thanks to the efforts of legions of very dedicated people, substantial progress has been made.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Corps of Engineers (COE), Coast Guard, and local government agencies have worked in a coordinated effort to assure environmentally safe cleanup and disposal of the unprecedented quantities and diversity of debris left by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This debris mission team has faced and overcome challenges no one could have imagined. It has been a remarkable effort of proportions never seen before. Here is what has been accomplished by the debris mission team in a little over a year.

• Initially, more than 400 sites throughout coastal Louisiana were reviewed by DEQ and approved by local governments for the staging, burning, chipping, grinding and disposal of storm debris. To date, site closeouts have been performed at approximately 200 sites.

Cleanup crews recycle white goods - Gentilly Landfill in Orleans Parish

• More than 50 million cubic yards of debris have been picked up from roadways, curbs, and yards and disposed of. As of this date, the debris mission for the Hurricane Rita impacted areas of the state is essentially complete. The debris mission for the Katrina impacted areas is about 70 percent complete. The current challenge is the demolition and proper disposal of nearly 30,000 flood and storm-damaged structures that have been identified in the greater New Orleans area.

• Almost 100% of green waste (such as trees and limbs) has been recycled (e.g. ground for mulch, composting, erosion control, landfill cover, or used for fuel to generate power).

• Approximately 1 million white goods (refrigerators, freezers, stoves, etc) have been collected for recycling and more than 50,000 pounds of refrigerant have been recovered for recycling.

• Around 250,000 small engines have been collected for recycling.

• About 600,000 e-goods (electronic devices) have been collected for recycling.

• Largely through the efforts of insurance companies and LDEQ contractors, approximately 350,000 automobiles and 60,000 vessels are being picked up and ultimately recycled.

• More than 20 million pounds of hazardous materials have been collected and disposed of safely.

• About 65,000 pounds of explosives (ammunition, fireworks, and flares) have been collected and disposed of properly.

• Around 4 million orphan containers (drums, barrels, carboys, etc.) have been collected and recycled or disposed of appropriately.

• Collection of debris such as tanks and oil field equipment blown into the marshes was done with sensitivity to minimize impacts to the marshes.

• Landfills used for disposal of construction and demolition wastes are subject to extraordinary levels of surveillance to intercept any hazardous materials that may inadvertently end up in the waste stream.

• Demolitions of structures are carefully managed to minimize potential releases of hazardous materials to the environment.

I would like to personally thank our DEQ employees and those of our partner agencies that have worked so hard in the cleanup and recovery efforts and to commend them for their extraordinary accomplishments.

Mike D. McDaniel

Mike D. McDaniel, Ph.D.
Secretary, DEQ