

Ike emergency housing ends

By Harvey Rice | January 31, 2012 | Updated: January 31, 2012 8:45pm

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Photo By Johnny Hanson/Houston Chronicle

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LEFT PHOTO: John Ned Rose, 66, assess the damage in front of his home near the corner of 54th and M on Galveston Island as Hurricane Ike hit on Galveston Island Saturday, Sept. 13, 2008. Rose said he had water up to his waist in his home. "I've never seen it like this," the life-long resident said. RIGHT PHOTO: Theophilis August waves to a neighbor near his home on the corner of 54th and M on Galveston Island a year after Hurricane Ike caused a storm surge that flooded the neighborhood Galveston Island Saturday, Aug. 27 2009. "We left," August said of leaving the island before the hurricane hit. "We had gas so we left." August said the flood waters affected everyone's home in the neighborhood. Photo: Johnny Hanson, Houston Chronicle

GALVESTON - A federal rental assistance program for victims of hurricanes Ike and Gustav that ended Tuesday provided housing for about 17,500 families, leaving aid groups grateful but critical of how some victims were treated.

About 3,500 families remain on the Disaster Housing Assistance Program-Ike, known as DHAP, and they will be transferred to the **Housing Choice Voucher** program, known as Section 8, according to the **U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department**.

"With any government program, sometimes you are going to end up with some bureaucracy," HUD spokeswoman **Donna White** said. "We want to walk away with lessons learned. Is the department listening? Yes."

The DHAP programs are administered by the housing authorities in Galveston, Houston and Harris County.

"I think people would have suffered tremendously without the DHAP program," said **Kenna Bush**, United Way of Galveston executive director. The United Way headed the **Galveston Recovery Fund**, which helped rebuild damaged or destroyed homes after Hurricane Ike struck Sept. 13, 2008.

Some families hurting

The end of DHAP may leave some victims in difficulty, Bush said, because they have been relying on DHAP for housing while a separate program rebuilt their homes.

The city of Galveston and Galveston County each received more than \$100 million in community development block grants to rebuild hurricane damaged homes for low-income families. More than three years after the storm, the city has rebuilt a handful of homes and some families are depending on DHAP while they wait, Bush said. White said eligibility requirements for the voucher program are stricter so whether all DHAP recipients will qualify is uncertain.

"I think that there were certain paperwork problems throughout, but they were probably a relatively small portion of the overall program," said **Lewis Kinard**, supervising attorney at **Lone Star Legal Aid**.

Complaints received by Lone Star included applying the wrong rules to the DHAP program and failing to allow disabled applicants to fax documents to the housing authority administering the program, Kinard said. In one case a disabled woman was taken off the program because she had no way to get documents to the agency, he said.

Agency's late payments

The most common complaint was late DHAP payments to landlords, which in several cases led to evictions, Kinard said.

Lone Star has fielded about 100 complaints since Ike, but Kinard said that typically many people with valid complaints don't call.

"At least we are grateful we have a federal and state government that are willing to assist these individuals during natural disasters," said **Joe Compian**, spokesman for Gulf Coast Interfaith. "Having said that, was the system 100 percent successful? No."

Compian said DHAP put storm victims in houses they couldn't afford. The program requires a DHAP recipient to make increasingly larger rent payments with the goal of weaning them from the program.

