

History
of the
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: David J. LeRay

Interviewer: John P. Swann, Ph.D.

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Interview with David LeRay, New Orleans District Office

September 25, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: This is John Swann interviewing David LeRay here in the Metairie Resident Post of the New Orleans District on September 25, 2007, and we're here to talk about FDA's response to Hurricane Katrina.

So, David, before we get started with the hurricane story and FDA's role in it, and your own role in it, let's start by your telling us briefly what your background is and how it is you came to the agency and into the New Orleans District in particular.

DL: Okay. I grew up in central Louisiana, in a small town called Pineville. It's about 200 miles northwest of New Orleans. Grew up there, went to elementary, junior high, high school, and college all in the same town, never left home until 1990, when I came to work for FDA after graduating from college. And I came to work in the New Orleans District Office.

JS: What was your college background?

DL: Louisiana College. It was a major in biology and minor in chemistry, so it was science.

And when I came here to New Orleans -- I'd been in New Orleans a few times; but this was the first time I lived in a big city because the town I was from was small. And I stayed in the New Orleans District for about nine months, and then I transferred to the Lafayette, Louisiana Resident Post in '91 and stayed there about three years, and then I became the seafood specialist for the district, for the New Orleans district, concentrating mostly in inspections in the seafood program area.

And at that time, our director of investigations wanted the specialists back in the District Office, so I had to move back to New Orleans, and I really liked Lafayette. But I moved back to New Orleans toward the end of 1993 and have been here ever since.

Our office was on Elysian Fields near the University of New Orleans until 1999, and then we moved to New Orleans East, to an office out there, which is going toward Slidell, and it's in the eastern part of New Orleans. And we were there from '99 until the hurricane.

My whole time with FDA has been, up until August of 2006, as an investigator specializing in seafood and food inspections. That's probably 90 percent of what I did in my career, the seafood and food inspections.

And in regards to hurricane work, after hurricanes we'd typically go out fairly soon after, within a day or two, to visit regulated industries, particularly food, to see how they fared after the hurricane. If they have to throw away product, we oversee that, and if they have to recondition it. Generally we're there to make sure that damaged, compromised food and food products don't get into commerce, and also to just check the status of the industry. So I've worked, when I was in Lafayette, Hurricane Andrew, which hit Florida, but it also hit Louisiana, around Morgan City.

JS: Do you recall what year that was?

DL: Around 1992, August 26, 1992.

And so we spent about two weeks in the Lafayette area. I was working in Lafayette, but we had people from New Orleans District come to Lafayette, and we spent about two weeks doing our typical disaster surveillance work after Hurricane Andrew.

Then it was relatively quiet for a while, and then in 1998, Hurricane George hit September 28th, because that's my birthday. It hit around Biloxi, so we did the same type of work.

We had a couple tropical storms, and then in 2002, it was a busy year. We had Tropical Storm Frances at the end of September, and then we had Hurricane Lili that hit Lafayette, or south of Lafayette, around Abbeville, Vermilion Bay. Did work there; we were almost two straight weeks working between the two storms.

Then in 2004, Hurricane Ivan hit right at the Alabama-Florida line, and we worked in Alabama. I worked in Alabama for the first week, and then the second week they had us going to Pensacola because Florida District could not get to Pensacola because the Pensacola Bay Bridge broke over I-10. So we could get there from the west, going toward Pensacola, so the New Orleans District worked there. So we spent time, a week or so, in Pensacola.

So I've had a pretty extensive background, before Hurricane Katrina, doing disaster work.

JS: Right. Try to characterize, if you would, what sort of things would we be looking for in the aftermath of a hurricane in seafood industry, the food industry generally, because you said that's where our primary concern is, I suppose because of the possibility of food-borne illness.

DL: Right. And one thing, when I say this, is Hurricane Katrina was different than every other one.

The main issue with the other hurricanes I mentioned, the other disaster surveillance, typically the power is out. It'll be out, depending on the location, a couple days to a week or so, sometimes two weeks, so we're looking to see, did the firm have a generator for their freezers and coolers. If not, there's just a period of time, several days, where it's not good anymore. So if they have to destroy it, we'll supervise the destruction. And it's usually kind of a problem after a hurricane to get waste companies and get to the landfill. So we'll be a part of that.

If there's flooding, we have to check that they segregate product that was submerged from product that was not, and there's very few ways to recondition flooded goods.

And then if there's wind damage, structural damage, did it compromise any of the food?

We also look at the equipment, particularly if there's flooding or the roof blows off and rain came in. They would have to rebuild or clean and to plan after that to clean

it appropriately to make sure that, for example, if there's mud and debris washed in, that it's cleaned, and the facilities cleaned and sanitized properly. So we watch for that.

For other product, let's say drugs, we don't have too many drug manufacturers in this area, but the ones that are here and the warehouses. Some drugs have to be maintained at refrigerated temperatures, other ones at room temperature. And after a hurricane, typically it gets real hot after a hurricane, because they usually occur in August and September, and right after it's hot, it's usually dry.

JS: Dry?

DL: Yes, blue skies and hot and humid after a hurricane. So that can compromise the efficacy of the drugs.

And the few medical device firms we have, we check for the same type of thing, especially for flooding.

JS: In this area, we don't -- there aren't too many drug manufacturers or medical device manufacturers?

DL: Not compared to foods, no, and not compared to other districts' inventory, particularly in this area. They're smaller; they tend to be smaller, nothing really large.

JS: Same with biologics?

DL: Thanks for reminding me.

Biologics, that's in the area. We have quite a few blood banks and plasma centers. And, again, that's usually temperature, with the coolers and the freezers. But usually they're well prepared. They have generators and backup plans and staff there.

A lot of our food manufacturers, when they know a hurricane is coming, particularly the seafood processors on the coast, will take their inventory and move it inland to other public warehouses, the ones that are usually well prepared or have it set up where they have trucks to move the product north, maybe in Mississippi or north Louisiana or even just north of here, north of Lake Pontchartrain. So they usually have a backup plan. For some of the smaller ones or if it catches people by surprise, there's not much they can do.

JS: Sometimes, you said, a firm can recondition its inventory, part of the inventory after a storm. Do we sometimes run into problems, or had that been the case with other storms, where people have tried to recondition something and it doesn't quite work out well?

DL: Right. Typically the problem is with salvagers, where the salvagers come in after a hurricane. A company may make an insurance claim.

I forgot to mention, we also work with the states quite a bit. There's the state food and drug and seafood group that inspects the wholesale manufacturers and warehouses the same as we do, but they also have the retail group. So sometimes after a

hurricane, we're actually at retail facilities also, assisting the states: stores, restaurants. Usually we try to focus on the bigger stores as far as the Food and Drug Administration. But we are working the retail program with them. And that's typically the location where a lot of salvagers come, like a big grocery store or the bigger warehouses. And when the insurance maybe pays off the claim and when the salvagers come in, that's where they want to salvage as much as they can. And I remember that was a problem after Hurricane Andrew. They had a lot of salvagers in that area, and they're trying to take and have as much as they can, because they pay for all the goods, and now they want to keep as much as they can to recondition and sell and discard as little as possible, because whatever they discard, they're losing money.

JS: But if they're going to be reconditioning regulated goods, they have to do this under our supervision? Is that right?

DL: No. It's not mandatory. Practically, you don't have enough people to be at all the sites, so we tend to focus on the major ones and where there's more of a problem.

A lot of the reconditioning can just be wiping off a container that may have a little dirt or mud on it, but it doesn't compromise the integrity of what's in the container. Usually it's more perishable items that can't be salvaged. And sometimes it's questionable. The cooler may have been out for three or four days and the product is partially thawed. You've got to make a decision. They have to make a decision of whether it's safe or not, and you just base it a lot of times on your judgment, what you

know, what you've learned through your career and what's in our investigations operations manual and other guidance manuals.

JS: So, certainly you personally have a lot of experience dealing with the aftermath of a variety of storms: hurricanes, tropical storms.

Now, in August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina had moved initially across Florida, and I think a lot of people were expecting it take a turn to the north and go over the Panhandle of Florida, which is not unusual for hurricanes. But this one was a little bit different. And at the time it moved across and then moved out into the Gulf, I guess there was a time at which FDA started realizing that this is going to be a big potential problem for the agency and for our regulated industry in the area. Walk through a little bit how that happened. When did we start realizing that this storm is going to be different than the other ones, and what kind of preparations did the District Office take in getting ready for the storm?

DL: As far as personally, the week before Hurricane Katrina, I was in Baton Rouge, and I was doing an inspection and also doing a training course for industry at LSU, Louisiana State University. So between inspections and training, that occupied my whole week before Katrina.

And that Friday, which was the last day of the training course, that morning, a couple people had newspapers, the Baton Rouge newspaper, and it showed pictures of Fort Lauderdale and that area where Hurricane Katrina came across the day before, and it

showed, like you mentioned, the track into the Gulf and going north toward the Panhandle.

And this is where my memory gets really vivid. Around noontime, when I went to eat dinner -- I call it dinner, not lunch -- when I went to eat dinner at a restaurant, they had a TV on and they showed the track again going up toward the Panhandle, possibly as a Category 1, nothing major, but enough to cause some damage. And I remember thinking to myself, because the year before, in 2004, hurricanes hit Florida, I said, "Man, the people in Florida are going to get it again, especially on the Panhandle," because I'd been to Pensacola after Ivan, so I was familiar with the area.

And after I ate, I had taken the afternoon off and I went up to my camp, a fishing and hunting camp in North Louisiana, didn't really think about the hurricane again. And Saturday morning I was working around my camp, and close to noon I was talking to one of my neighbors that has a camp by me, and it had been dry, not much rain that summer. And I commented, I said, "It's been pretty dry around here." And I'll never forget his words. He said, "Yeah, but we're fixing to get a lot of rain."

I kind of looked at him funny and said, "What are you talking about, a lot of rain?" And it hit me. "You're not talking about that hurricane, are you?"

He said, "Yeah." He said, "That thing's coming up the mouth of the Mississippi, and it's big!"

"Are you serious?"

He said, "Yeah. That thing is going to hit New Orleans."

So, it was almost noon, so I ate dinner, I listened to the twelve o'clock news, because where I'm at, it's kind of way out there, but I can still get the radio. And I heard

it was true. So that's about four hours from here, and I live in Slidell, which is on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, about 35 miles from here. And so I gathered my stuff, hurried to my parents' house New Roads, which is about 30 miles northwest of Baton Rouge. And that's on my route from here to Baton Rouge, through New Roads, up to my camp in North Louisiana.

So I stopped at their house, talked to my dad, told him, "I'm going back to my house in Slidell and get my stuff," because I'd packed for a week. And I was fortunate. Since I was gone, I had my FDA computer and, doing inspections, I had my FDA camera, a lot of my FDA reference material, so I had a lot of things with me already from work the prior week. But I had just packed for a week.

So I went home, secured my stuff around the house, put things inside, packed clothes, packed important papers, packed other mementos, personal items. Neighbors were doing the same thing up and down the street.

What was fortunate was I made it back a little bit before four o'clock to Slidell, and that was before they started the Contraflow, where all the traffic goes out, so I was able to come in before they had all the traffic going out, so I made it in time.

JS: Because otherwise there would only be . . .

DL: I'd have been detoured and had to go all kind of back roads and ways around to get back. So I just beat the Contraflow and got back to Slidell.

And it was kind of a unique feeling to pack and see neighbors and say, "I wonder what's going to happen after," when we were going to come back, when we were going to see them again, where they're going, because we were talking.

And by late evening I had my stuff packed and in the truck, and I left Slidell about, I'd say a quarter to five in the morning. One of my neighbors was leaving at the same time.

JS: Sunday morning.

DL: Sunday morning, correct. And I went back to my camp. I took back roads, I stayed off the interstate. I actually made it to Natchez, Mississippi, in time -- I'm Catholic -- in time for Mass at 8:30, and went to Mass and went to my camp, and I fished that afternoon, got out fishing, half wondering what was going on.

And the next morning, the hurricane hit. And I don't watch TV much anyway, so I listen to the news. I can catch WWL out of New Orleans. I could catch it that morning and kept up with it a little bit. Kind of compare it to when the terrorist attacks occurred. I never watched all that on TV over and over; I'm not one to just sit there and watch news and be bombarded with all that information.

But initially on the news, it didn't seem that bad in New Orleans. And, of course, at that time, Monday morning, they didn't know the extent of the damage. The levees hadn't breached quite yet. But then later in the day, you started hearing about the levees breaching. And my neighbor who told me about the hurricane that Saturday morning,

every once in a while I'd go visit him, and he had a TV and I'd look at it and see what's going on, but I didn't watch long. But I could see it was getting worse.

So Tuesday morning I got up in my camp and heard the news and started hearing more what was going on, and I knew sooner or later we were going to have to start doing the work we do after a disaster, still not quite realizing the magnitude of it.

So that Tuesday morning, I drove to my parents' house in New Roads.

JS: Where again is New Roads?

DL: It's about 30 miles northwest of Baton Rouge, probably a little over 100 miles from here, 120.

And talked to my dad, again kind of kept up with it but didn't sit there just staring at the TV. In fact, I helped him pick up branches and stuff in his yard because the power had gone out there for a few hours that Monday. And called the Lafayette office and talked to the supervisor there, let him know I was back, let him know I was available to work, that I had all my gear and stuff all ready. And he said, "Well, we're on administrative leave here in New Orleans office. You work in New Orleans office, you're on administrative leave, and you don't have to report to work."

I said, "Okay. I'll call you tomorrow."

By Wednesday, now we know the situation, what the Mississippi Gulf Coast looks like, that the flooding is going on in New Orleans, people are stranded. Then you realize that this is not your typical disaster work that we're going to have.

So I called the state Wednesday, talked to them, and most of their folks in the New Orleans area, they couldn't find them either, and the same with our office. When I called the supervisor in Lafayette, he was telling me he'd heard from so-and-so, but not so-and-so. We're still missing five or six people or whatever the number was we hadn't heard from, and wondering who that is.

JS: That's got to be a great concern, not knowing who -- that your coworkers, some might be dead.

DL: Right. You don't know. Or the family members. You know where some of them live. Some people, I don't really know where they live, whether that was an area that was flooded or not. But you just got that feeling.

But I guess to keep the focus off of that, I wanted to work. So Wednesday I called the state and talked to them, and they were going to go out the next day. So I went to Baton Rouge and met with them.

I called the supervisor in Lafayette and said, "Look, I can't take it any more. I'm not sitting in this house not doing anything when I know there's work to be done."

JS: You mean your FDA supervisor?

DL: Well, he wasn't mine. It was Randy Baxter in Lafayette, a supervisor, because we had to contact management. And my supervisor, I didn't know where she was. She lived in New Orleans and she'd evacuated.

JS: Who was that?

DL: Carolyn White. She's in Atlanta now.

So I told Randy, I said, "I'm going to Baton Rouge Thursday. I'll meet with the state and start coordinating with them what to do."

So that Thursday after the hurricane, I'm at the state. And actually, before I got there . . . In Baton Rouge, the power was out for two or three days also. So I stopped at some of the warehouses and distributors that I knew about, visited them, and some of them had just gotten power on the day before, but they didn't really have too many problems, most of them. But that amount of time, they kept the freezer doors closed, the coolers closed, and they had generators. There wasn't much of a problem.

I'd say I got to the state office about 9:30, and our Baton Rouge office was open too. We have an office in Baton Rouge, have a couple of investigators there, and I talked to them. One was at the office, and one lady that lived in Hammond had evacuated, so there was one lady at the office in Baton Rouge, and I was in communication with her. And she was kind of waiting on instructions on what to do and what we were going to do as an agency.

JS: Before you go on, let me just ask. There were emergency procedures in place for the employees?

DL: Yes. The thing is -- and I guess to back up some now -- because it was

strengthening so fast, from Friday afternoon, Category 1, to a 5 the next day, there wasn't a whole lot of time to prepare. And I keep my emergency procedures at home, and I picked them up when I went back home, and I keep a copy at the office. But there wasn't a whole lot of preparation like there usually is ahead of time, when you have a little more idea that it's coming and that you can prepare and get, for example, a list of the firms that are in the inventory that you can go to that you can carry with you and have ahead of time.

But, again, fortune was that Hurricane Dennis was predicted to hit Alabama in July, and it did, but it wasn't that bad. Again, Dennis hit that same area where Ivan hit, actually. But I actually had saved a CD with that and had it with me, so I did have some of our inventory, plus being familiar with the food and seafood industry in an area I knew where a lot of places were anyway, plus the state had a permanent list when I went there that Thursday, so I was able to work off of it.

So what I started doing that Thursday was to visit the bottled-water manufacturers. We have four of those north of Lake Pontchartrain. They're concentrated in a city called Kentwood, a little small town, and you may have heard of Kentwood Spring Water. That's the biggest one, but they have some other ones. Bottled water is one of the first things that is going to be needed. And that area, even though it is 30 miles north of Lake Pontchartrain, the power was out to just about that whole town, a lot of trees were down. One bottled water place, the biggest one, had just gotten a generator that day to begin operations. They had to get it, I think they got it from Texas. No, Illinois, Illinois. And they were able to start bottling water that Thursday afternoon. In fact, I was there when they started up.

And they were telling me the problems they were having. They had trucks of water sitting in the parking lot to go out, but no diesel to run the trucks. They maybe delivered what they could, but at that time gas was in short supply, and diesel. It was all in short supply, so they didn't have trucks to run to certain areas. Plus they couldn't even get any into New Orleans to start with, but just the outlying areas, including their own town. They were just about out of diesel. So it was a problem for them. And a couple of the smaller ones hadn't even gotten back in operation. They'd ordered generators, but they hadn't come in yet.

But that's what I focused on that first day, was bottled water.

JS: Did you go there on your own, or with other people?

DL: No, individually, just myself, because their local inspectors were all scattered. Eventually they called people from Lafayette, North Louisiana, to come help them that first weekend after Katrina.

But I was the only one for FDA out working in that area, doing disaster work that soon after the hurricane, plus I worked with the state. I coordinated with them where I was going to go so they would know and the couple people they did have coming wouldn't duplicate efforts.

JS: Did I hear you say that there were two FDA inspectors in Baton Rouge, but one of them had evacuated?

DL: Yes.

JS: But there was another one.

DL: There was another one, yeah.

And eventually Baton Rouge became the hub of all activity, so the lady there, Dana Daigle, was the one who was a lot of times on the phone initially. When they were calling to find out what's going on, Dana was the one that was able to tell them, because I'd relay information to Dana and . . .

You know, as I tell the story, you'll see how critical Baton Rouge Resident Post became and how busy it became.

We also have a shellfish specialist there, John Veazey, and he was working with the state also, with the oyster waters. That was part of his duties with that.

But as far as actually going out and visiting, I started that Thursday. I was the first one to go out, after Katrina, in the area. And I figured you just would have to gradually work your way toward New Orleans as you could.

JS: Did you have any inspectional equipment other than your . . .

DL: Yes. I had the camera because I was doing an inspection the week before, so I had everything I needed -- flashlights, measuring tape, anything I needed, I had, the

camera. I was actually prepared. It was kind of serendipity that I was out the week before.

JS: So you had pretty much the kit that you needed to go out and do inspections.

DL: Yes.

And then, that Friday, I got to the Baton Rouge office, I guess it was about 6:30. And I went to get gas, and I had to wait for a gas station to open -- people were in line to get gas -- because I figured I'd be going out the next day. And I called the office in Nashville because at that point we found out that the managers had gone up to Nashville. We were going to be based out of Nashville. We didn't know how long, but Nashville was going to be the hub of operations now.

So I called and spoke with one of the secretaries because she was one of two people there that early, and she told me they wanted everybody in Nashville that used to be in the New Orleans office. And I told her, I said, "Marie, I'm fine here."

I've got to tell you, I was staying between my parents in New Roads, and I have an aunt and uncle in Baton Rouge, so I would kind of spend a night or two with one of them and then a night or two with another one. And when I told her, I said, "I've got a place to stay, I'm fine. I mean, I'm working, I'm working with the state, I'm meeting with the state every day now, and I'm not harmed, I'm fine." I'm single, I don't have children or a wife or anything. My parents are fine. Everything was fine with me, except I hadn't been home yet.

JS: But the bottom line is, you were there working. You were on the ground working in the area.

DL: Yes. So I told her, "I'm fine."

She said, "No, they want everybody here. Mr. Thornburg and the regional director, they want everybody from New Orleans here by the Tuesday after Labor Day."

So I said, "I'm working. I'm doing what I know we need to do. Why do I need to be up there?"

She said, "You'll have to talk to Mr. Thornburg."

"Okay."

So I talked to him later that morning, and he repeated that our regional director, Gary Dykstra, wanted everybody in Nashville that was from New Orleans there on Tuesday. And I know this is going in an oral history, but I was upset because, to me, that was taking me away from working. I want to work. And the other feeling I had was I was abandoning the state because they didn't hardly have anybody, and they were strapped for people, needing people. And their food and drug administrator and their managers said, "Well, we can call your bosses and try to convince them."

I said, "No, don't do that. If I need to be up there, I'll be up there, but I just don't like it because it's just taking time away from what eventually we're going to have to do." And I didn't really want to go because I was fine, I had a place to stay, I was with my family, I was working, doing what I know we needed to do, and I didn't see the point

of having to go up to Nashville at that time. But Mr. Thornburg said, “You need to be up here.” I tried to justify it, but eventually I’m going to do what they tell me.

So that Friday, I did some more surveillance work in the area.

And one thing I’ll mention is that Thursday, when I was at the bottled-water places, people kept asking me, “Where do you live?” and I told them “Slidell.” And they said, “It’s bad over there, huh?”

I said, “That’s what I read in the paper.” That was a Wednesday; I’m showing you that Wednesday paper, the Baton Rouge paper: “Katrina Leaves Slidell a Nightmare.”

So, not knowing what my house is like, people are asking me what happened, and I said, “I haven’t been home yet.”

And they’d say, “How can you work without knowing what happened to your house?”

“What happened, happened. There’s nothing I can do to control it. All I can control is what I’m doing now and working.”

I actually remember people asking me that question a lot when I was up there.

But anyway, that Friday, by that time I realized I could get back to Slidell. The interstate was open. Interstate 12 between Baton Rouge and Slidell actually had opened a couple days before. So I made the decision that Friday to go back to my house in Slidell early that Saturday morning, because if I’m going to be in Nashville for an undetermined amount of time, because they couldn’t tell us how long we’d be up there, I knew I had to get clothes and whatever else, if it was there.

So I spent the night with my aunt and uncle in Baton Rouge, that Friday night, and I left about 5:30 a.m. and drove to Slidell. And it's about 80 miles on Interstate 12 from Baton Rouge to Slidell, and Hammond is the halfway point. And as I got to Hammond -- I'd been up to Hammond to go to Kentwood, because you go on Interstate 12 from Baton Rouge to Hammond, and then you go north on Interstate 55 to Kentwood, so that was the area I'd been in that Thursday, so I knew there were trees down and what it looked like in that area.

As I started getting closer to Slidell, going eastward, I see more and more trees down, but it's not as bad as I thought. Even 10 miles outside of Slidell, it didn't look as bad as I thought it would look. The trees on the side of the interstate are mostly pine trees, and some were kind of leaning, but it wasn't too many of them that were down.

JS: But the roads were open.

DL: Yes. The roads are open, the roads are fine.

And as I turned on Highway 11 to go south into Slidell from the interstate, then I started seeing really a lot of trees down and wires down and signs down and roofs off of a gas station here and there. And as I get closer to my house, going south and then eastward, which is getting close to where the eye hit, it's just getting worse and worse. And the city had the National Guard use bulldozers . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE B

DL: The city of Slidell -- I guess the parish also, Saint Tammany Parish -- had the National Guard clear the roads, so you could pass on the roads, even the smaller roads, because I live in a subdivision and there's a lot of trees in the area, and it's a cul-de-sac, but I could get to my house. But as I got closer and just started seeing big pine trees just crisscrossed all on houses and yards, you see where they bulldozed them out of the way and pushed them in people's yards, and I'm just wondering, what am I going to see when I turn on my street?

And as I turned, I could see -- my house is toward the end of the street -- I could see trees on my neighbors' houses. Just about every one that I could see had a tree on it. And I've got two huge pine trees in my front yard and one in the back, and I'm just hoping they weren't going to crush my house. But as I got closer, I could see those two pine trees up and the one in the back yard, and I said, "They didn't fall." And I knew those were the three I was worried about.

So when I pulled up in front of my house, the house was intact, the roof, nothing was on the roof that I could see from the front, a lot of trees, limbs, debris in the yard, but it was okay. And when I got out of my Explorer and saw that, I got on my knees on the ground and thanked God that my house was fine.

And it wasn't so much the material, or the fact that my house was fine and I didn't lose a material thing like a house or the items inside. Even though I got most of my mementos, there were still some things I wouldn't have wanted to lose. It was mainly the fact that God had blessed me and not had anything happen, and I wasn't going to have to be dealing with insurance. And at that point you didn't really know too much about

FEMA and SBA and everything else that everybody's been going through since. But I knew I'd be able to concentrate on work because I wouldn't have to deal with personal stuff at the house.

I walked around to the back yard, and there was one tree, an oak tree had fallen in the back yard all the way from one corner to, it landed, about six feet of it was on the house. And I went in the carport, got my tools out, just cut that portion off. And then I went inside, and everything just like I left it the week before. The only thing, I had to clean out the refrigerator. And I had taken most of the things out of the refrigerator and freezer. I like to hunt -- I kill deer and squirrels, catch fish, but I don't keep too much of that in my house. My dad cooks, so most of that was at his house already.

But when I'd left that Sunday morning from Slidell before the hurricane, I took just about everything out of the refrigerator and freezer, so there wasn't too much left. But I still had a few things, a couple things in the freezer, couple things in the refrigerator. It had thawed, it was starting to smell, so I cleaned that up.

And then I spent a good bit of the day packing to go to Nashville, working in the yard, cleaning up just enough to get the limbs and stuff off the front drive and sidewalk and walk up to the house. And then neighbors started coming in. Glad to see the neighbors, but -- I knew nobody was hurt, but it's good to see your neighbors coming back, and some of them were coming with chainsaws and equipment to start working and getting trees off their roof and cleaning their yard.

Two of them had stayed during the hurricane, hadn't evacuated, and they were describing what it was like with that wind whipping up and down the street and the trees crashing and falling. But they stayed and they were fine.

JS: How many, would you say half or more, or less than half of the houses in your subdivision . . .

DL: Nine out of 13 had trees on them. Most of it was the neighbors' trees. A neighbor's tree would fall on somebody else's house.

The water -- Lake Pontchartrain is about four to five miles south of where I live. And, to backtrack a little bit, in May of 1995, on a Monday and a Tuesday -- I think it was May 10th and May 11th -- it rained 20-something inches in Slidell and in New Orleans those two days, and there was major flooding then also, and my house didn't flood then. It's just enough on higher ground that it didn't flood. It's in the middle of Slidell, kind of neighborhood that was developed in the '70s. And fortunately, typically when people settle, they settle on high ground first. So this area is just a little bit higher than the rest of Slidell, and I didn't flood in '95.

Well, with Hurricane Katrina, it wasn't so much rain, it was the storm surge from Lake Pontchartrain that flooded Slidell. So Lake Pontchartrain being four or five miles from my house, when the storm surge came, it went all through the unincorporated areas of Slidell, then it got into Slidell, and it stopped about a half mile south of my house. There's a Highway 190, well, part of 190 runs south of me, and that was kind of the barrier that kept the water from coming over and continuing towards where I live. But, actually, west of me and east, it was lower, so houses and neighborhoods that were even with me but further east and further west flooded, but not my neighborhood. So I didn't get flooding, no damage to the roof, I didn't get rainwater in the house. That would have

been a hassle to deal with, especially talking to people after the hurricane, having to pull up carpet and flooring and drywall and tear all that stuff up. So, again, I was fortunate, no flooding.

But as I drove through Slidell coming in that Saturday morning, I came from the north side, so all I saw was evidence of the trees down and debris and buildings damaged or demolished, and didn't see the flooded part of Slidell at that point.

So I worked at the house and packed and met neighbors and did all that Saturday until about 2:30, and there was a curfew. I didn't know what time the curfew was, but I knew there was a curfew.

And I knew where most of the people in Slidell lived that worked for FDA, so I had taken my camera from work. I left and went by their houses, and a couple of them lived in south Slidell. And the water had receded, but you could see in the yards all the debris from the lake, all that grass, marsh grass and junk, and the mud line on their house four, five, six feet high. One of their boats had turned over and was next to his car. The streets were covered in mud, and it was still slippery and nasty, black mud from the lake. It smelled bad, looked bad, didn't want to step in it. That was just coating the streets, it was coating the yards, coating the inside of people's houses, as you'll see later. Golly. It was just, I didn't realize how much area had flooded till I drove around to where different people lived.

And then I kind of worked my way north, checking around toward Pearl River, which is north of Slidell. One lady lived out there. I took pictures of their houses, because I didn't know where they were and I figured they'd want to see them, didn't know if they'd been back or not.

And there wasn't much activity in Slidell that day, but there were people, you could see them starting to work in their yards and returning, going in their house, starting to gut houses, throw stuff out in the yards for pickup. But it still was mostly vacant, not much going on.

And I left I'd say about 3:30 at that time and drove back to my parents' house in New Roads. And, actually, when I got home, my dad was there. "How was it?" I told him just what I told you. My house was fine. And I said, "Just about every house in the neighborhood had trees on it." I named the neighbors I saw and I described what I just described to you. And I had the computer -- and I'm not that great with computers and cameras and stuff, the technological stuff. But I showed him that evening and the next day, and my mom, what the houses and what parts of Slidell looked like.

And then, that Sunday, I went to church. There wasn't much I could do -- I think I stayed at home that Sunday -- when I say home, I mean my mom and dad's house. That Sunday afternoon -- oh, I know what I did that Sunday, the Saints were playing the Carolina Panthers in Charlotte, and I watched that football game, and they won, which was good, brought a little happiness.

And I watched that, then I went back up to my camp, because I knew there was still a lot of traffic in the Baton Rouge area, and to get to Nashville, it's easiest, from where my parents live, to go through Baton Rouge and get on the interstate and go up through Hammond and so forth. But being in Baton Rouge in all that traffic -- and I didn't mention that, how much traffic there was in Baton Rouge that first week after the hurricane, and it just got worse, because so many people from New Orleans just

evacuated to Baton Rouge, and rescue workers and all that coming in, and I'll get to that later.

But I went up to my camp again that Sunday night and actually fished that afternoon again, caught a couple bass. And then that Monday morning, Labor Day, I drove to Nashville, and got up there, I'd say, about six o'clock. I remember the first person I saw was Janice Llopis at the hotel. She just, in fact, just came from Nashville back here at the beginning of August. She'd been up in Nashville since the hurricane, and she just came back to work here again, and she's in the office here. And she was the first person I saw.

And then it was check-in and getting a room. You start seeing more people in the parking lot and recognizing them and hugging them and glad that they're okay, and you start hearing all the stories of where they went and what happened. And some had been home already, but most of them hadn't been back to their homes yet.

No, I'm off a bit.

Labor Day -- no, I didn't travel on Labor Day. That's right. I stayed at my camp on Labor Day. Tuesday was the day I drove to Nashville, Tuesday, whatever day that would have been, like the 5th or 6th, the Tuesday after Labor Day.

Then the Wednesday was the day we all met at the Nashville office, and Mr. Dykstra came in and they started, you know, everybody that wanted to could relate the stories they had and how they felt. And they started giving us a general overview of what they thought was going to happen with the office and our careers and where we were going to be and all of that, more as a group basis than individual, but just tell us, "Well, we're going to be in Nashville for a while. We don't know how long, we don't know if

we're going to move back to New Orleans. We don't know what's going to happen. But for now, you all will be stationed in Nashville."

Some people were upset. For me, I didn't think I would be there that long because I knew I was going to have to come back sooner or later to do the work I was doing, because if we're all up there, who's going to be doing the work that they need to do? And they knew, you know, Mr. Thornburg knew, Mr. Dykstra knew I was already working with the state. So that Wednesday was just, you know, we had a formal meeting, and the rest of the day was just spent talking to coworkers and meeting some of the people in Nashville that we never really met before because we'd only seen them a couple times.

And that Thursday, they told me that afternoon I could go back, come back here, go back to Baton Rouge, because they knew I was working and they said, "David, your house is fine," because I told them my house was okay. I didn't have electricity yet, but my house was fine. I was staying with parents and relatives near Baton Rouge and in Baton Rouge, and there was no reason for me to be in Nashville. And they told me I could go back.

And they had us in a hotel. I'm sure you've heard part of this. But they had us at the Residence Inn, Marriott, in Nashville.

Well, I started packing my stuff to leave that night, and then they tell me Friday that the Commissioner is coming the following week to the Nashville office to talk to us, and they wanted me back the day he was going to be there. So to go and actually go back but then come back to Nashville to meet with the Commissioner.

JS: Wait. You were departing that Friday, that Friday after the Wednesday that you had arrived, so two days after you had arrived, you were ready to go back down to resume your work down here, I guess, living with your parents in New Roads, but obviously continuing your work with the state and so on as you had before. But they said the Commissioner was going to be coming in the following Friday and they wanted you back for that?

DL: Wednesday; I believe it was a Wednesday.

JS: Well, but the following week, and they wanted you to be there when the Commissioner came in.

DL: Right, because I would have been the only one that had firsthand experience of working in the area after Hurricane Katrina, so I'd have been the only one that could describe firsthand what we were doing, because it was me doing it.

JS: What did you think about that?

DL: Well, at that point it was okay, fine, I'll do it.

JS: Obviously, you would rather have been doing your work.

DL: Right. And also, I think by that point they had gotten some cars from GSA, and a couple other people were allowed to come down -- not the state, but to come, check on our houses, and go back to Nashville. I wasn't privy to all those discussions, but . . .

So what we set up, I think there was three of us. Never mind. I'm re-creating now. We have one car, and there were three of us: me, Elizabeth Battles, Phuong Tran . . . And we had one government vehicle. That's right. And we drove that Saturday from Nashville to Lafayette. We met Natalie, who you're going to interview, in Baton Rouge, picked her up, and we went to Lafayette.

We got to Lafayette about five o'clock to pick up government vehicles that were in an auction yard in Lafayette, because all our vehicles were inaccessible and we didn't know the condition of them. So they had arranged for these older government vehicles that had been used and were going to be auctioned off at this auction yard in Lafayette, to be returned to the government, to us to use for disaster work. So all of us left Nashville, drove, picked up Natalie in Baton Rouge that Saturday, and went on to Lafayette and picked up those extra government vehicles. And I kept one. I think they brought a couple back to Nashville. I think they brought one to Baton Rouge. We had four of them. And that was my Saturday, was driving all day. And Sunday, stayed with my parents.

And that Monday, I guess that Monday I started going out with the state again, met them at their office. Yes. The Monday I came to Harahan, which is a suburb here right by Metairie. There's a lot of industrial warehouses there. I met the state, one of the state inspectors, in Baton Rouge, and he and I came to Harahan. And he was from New

Orleans. He'd evacuated, but he'd made it back to their office in Baton Rouge, because the state office, the Food and Drug Administration for the state is in Baton Rouge.

So he and I went to Harahan that Monday, and I drove back to Baton Rouge that night. And most of the places in Harahan were not too bad; they weren't damaged that bad.

And the Tuesday, I went to Slidell, because I'd called Carol Sanchez, who I believe you spoke with. And I went to Slidell to work in that area, knowing there were a few places we had to inspect and where they were, and they were probably going to be in bad shape, and to check on my house again, drop off clothes and pick up more, because it must have been Thursday we were going to meet with the Commissioner, because that Tuesday I was going to go home, get, re-sort stuff, Wednesday leave to drive to Nashville to be there on Thursday. That's what it was.

So I worked in Slidell. Then I go to a couple places that, one was a crabmeat plant right by Lake Pontchartrain. It was completely, totally gone. I saw one of the coolers in the marsh about three miles from the plant. As I got closer, the road was a real curvy road, and they'd cleared just enough for one vehicle to pass, and there was just piles of debris anywhere from three to six, seven feet high on the side of the road, where these camps and houses had just, were all blown apart, and they'd cleared all that off the road. I got to this plant. The only thing left standing was the boiler, because at the crab plants, you had a steam boiler, and it was bolted in the ground, steel or iron bolted in the ground. So that was the only thing left standing. Everything else, you wouldn't have known a building was there. I could see his truck off to the side in the marsh and a cooler

in the marsh and things. Who knows where they went? And other places in that general area were like that.

And as I drove around Slidell, a couple places I went to that had flooded, they were cleaning out the mud with buckets and mops and all that.

And that day, two of my most vivid memories are -- or three, four -- one is just people confused, didn't know what was going to happen. Helicopters flying all over the place because they were using the area in Slidell where the city had relocated because their offices had all flooded, city offices and police stations, so they had a higher ground near the railroad tracks, and they were using that for rescue, for surveillance, whatever they were doing. But helicopters were flying up and down, back and forth, all over Slidell that day.

The smell. It smelled like a garbage truck all over Slidell because of the food and people throwing . . . More people are back, they're cleaning out their houses, they're putting old refrigerators in the yard, and the trash, and it just smells like when you get behind a garbage truck driving through the city, that smell. That's what it smelled like.

And then there was all the debris, because on some roads I would pass, even a two- or four-lane road, it would be lined up with debris, anywhere from four, six, eight feet high, just a solid wall of wood, tree limbs, appliances, cars, junk, just up and down roads. And whether it was neighborhoods, whether it was major thoroughfares through the town, it was just solid debris. And some of them, I can just picture that debris still, how much stuff there was. And that was just the initial stages of clean-up. It just kept coming. But that was a Tuesday.

And that Tuesday evening, around five o'clock, I called Carol, and she told me that they needed me more in Baton Rouge than in Nashville, and don't worry about coming up to be with the Commissioner. There was also a little bit of controversy with the state because one of their higher-ups was, I guess, a rather brash individual and blunt. Did Carol tell you about him?

JS: Yes.

DL: And I hadn't really dealt with him too much because I was being there with more of the program administrators for food and drug, more my peers and the supervisors on my level with the state. I hadn't really dealt with the higher-ups. And I knew he was.

But anyway, apparently something happened that day, that Tuesday, with problems, and Carol said, "You need to go back to the state. Be in Baton Rouge at nine o'clock tomorrow for a meeting, and try to help straighten out what's going on with him." She knew I was working with the state and doing well, but he was, from what I understand, basically fussing at everybody, wanted the federal government to come in and pay for this and do this, whether it was the retail food, whether it was the drinking water. He was just wanting government resources and government funding, and he was apparently a pretty hot-headed individual, and she wanted me to go and kind of help smooth that out. And she told me, she said, "You will speak for me, you will do for me, you are me down there." So she basically put me in charge of what was going on with the hurricane surveillance and activities and meeting with the state in her stead while I was here.

JS: Before you go on, let me ask, how many investigators are there in the District Office at this time?

DL: Probably 15 or 20, I'd say.

JS: But you're the only one here in New Orleans, the only one down here.

DL: At that time, I was still the only one here.

JS: Well, this is a week and a half, at least, after the hurricane.

DL: Yes. You're into the second week after the hurricane.

JS: Do you know, do you have any idea where the other investigators are? I mean, they're spread out?

DL: Yes, because we'd all met in Nashville. So most people had made it to Nashville on that Wednesday after Labor Day, when we were supposed to be there, when we were ordered to be there. Just about everybody had made it back for that. But the ones that lived in New Orleans, most of them had lost their houses. They didn't have nothing to come back to anyway. Even a few that lived in Slidell, a couple of them, their houses, like I said, I went by, they were just flooded. They didn't really have anything to come

back to initially. So I was one of the few that was actually based in the New Orleans office that could come back and have a place to stay near enough to do the work.

At this point, the lady that evacuated from Baton Rouge, she'd been living in Hammond, she made it back. Dana was there. And also now, three guys in Lafayette -- well, at that time there was two in Lafayette -- they were able to work. And at this point you're still not into New Orleans yet, and the floodwaters had just about receded, but this time there's no real urgency to get here because there's nobody in the city anyway.

JS: Well, you had been talking about your charge to go to the state and be the eyes and ears and represent the director of the Investigations Branch there. So, how did that work out?

DL: It actually worked pretty good. I met with the state that morning. And at that point, also, they'd committed people from Nashville to come down. Some of the investigators that were already stationed in Nashville, they had started getting volunteers, for them to come here to help out. So I was able to tell the fellow with the state that as far as the District itself, there was nobody here to help. It was me and just a couple in Baton Rouge, and that was it. I mean, we don't have the people to help you out like you need. He was looking for more, though, for real big resources, boats and really big resources, not just two or three people, but a lot of people to go to the regulated industries, the stores, particularly the stores, the pharmacies. I mean, they were looking on a much broader scale than the few of us that normally help them during the cleanup after a hurricane. I mean, he was looking for a lot of resources.

But at that point, the agency is starting to get more coordinated, and I never was that involved with all the decision-making. My responsibility was to provide them how many places we visited and what we were doing on a day-to-day basis locally. But I never was too involved with the bigger decisions, which was fine.

But that Wednesday, I was able to say, "Look, it looks like we're going to have people coming to help out. They'll be getting here over the weekend. They'll be coming from Nashville. You can start pairing up with your state inspectors. You can send them out on their own. And I said the state had a list of their permitted establishments. By this time, I had gotten our list, so they could have access to computers and all that in Nashville, and the system would have all the information.

So then we really started planning together, when these people come to Nashville, what they're going to do. So I have to coordinate that. And when they came, by that time I had it broken down by different areas. And you're going to cover this part of New Orleans, you'll cover this parish, you'll cover this section of New Orleans, or whatever.

A couple of the ladies that live north of Lake Pontchartrain, they never did go to Nashville, because they couldn't even get out of their neighborhoods to drive to Nashville by the time they said to get there. And one of them had family issues, that she couldn't leave her parents. So they were here. So by the third week after the hurricane, now they're available to start work. So it gradually became where more and more people became available between the two in Baton Rouge, the two, actually three north of the lake, Lake Pontchartrain, the guys in Lafayette. We're starting to get more people that can work in the area. Then the ones coming from Nashville. Then there's more people, a couple people that were in Nashville, they let them come back, that lived in Slidell. So

gradually over the next two or three weeks after the hurricane, you started getting more people to work.

So my daily focus became less going out to do the disaster work and more going to the state office and our Baton Rouge office and coordinating where people were going to go out. So usually what I would do is get to the Baton Rouge office around six, 6:30 in the morning, and spend an hour, hour and a half kind of plotting out what areas I think people should go to that day.

Then I would go to the state office, and everybody would meet there, both state inspectors and our inspectors. We'd meet there around 8:00, 8:30, 9:00, and I'd basically give them their assignments.

And then they would go out and report. Some would have cell phones and call me during the day. Other ones would call me at the end of the day and start reporting, okay, we went here, here, here, this place is closed; this one, no activity; this one's getting ready to reopen. There was all kind of scenarios and situations.

JS: What kind of places are they going to?

DL: Again, warehouses, food manufacturers, some drug and device establishments, biologics places.

JS: But what about retail establishments? Are we still . . .

DL: We hadn't gone, at this time we hadn't gone to the retail yet as far as our district folks. We're still visiting the typical places that we inspect.

JS: What are we finding?

DL: Well, in the outlying areas, Metairie, Harahan, on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain or further south of here, around Houma, Thibodaux, most of those places, the ones that weren't damaged too badly -- most of them are back in operation. Some are not, but they're there cleaning up.

And because the power stayed out so long, we actually didn't have as many problems with people trying to salvage stuff as usual, because -- the problems come when the power is out maybe two or three days, or maybe up to a week. It's partially thawed or they try to maybe justify keeping it. But when the power is out two, three weeks, there's no salvaging something that bad off. You could smell it. So it really wasn't as much of a problem.

The same thing with all the flooding that occurred, because the water's got -- it wasn't just a foot of water. I mean, you're talking five, six, 10 feet of water being over food for a week, two weeks at a time. There's no question. So actually, in terms of reconditioning and salvaging, it was easier than some other hurricanes, because the power was out so long and the floodwaters were so high and stayed up for so long that it wasn't much question of what to throw away. They were just throwing away everything.

JS: So, canned goods, everything?

DL: The canned goods were submerged.

We went to a few stores later. Now, there, it depends where it was on the shelf. They could salvage some of that. But generally, it wasn't that difficult.

Now, the seafood places that are close to the water, like in Saint Bernard Parish, the Chalmette area, most of those were just completely gone, like the places I told you about in Slidell, the crabmeat plant, anything that was fairly close to the waters was just wiped out. There was nothing. Nobody's there, nothing.

And then as you get here, this type of area, most of those structures were either, you know, maybe some wall might have collapsed or parts of the roof blew off or leaked, so it was not as severe a problem. It's still a problem, but not as severe.

But we were finding a range of stuff, but it wasn't . . . At first . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE A

DL: That first week or so when the people from Nashville came and joined the other investigators -- you know, we had a few more people -- most of the places in New Orleans itself were not open. There was nobody around. There were very few places open. I'd have to kind of just rotate. Maybe they did a place on a Monday and maybe wouldn't go back until Thursday or Friday. Then you start seeing it's going to be a long

time before some of these people come back, because we were leaving placards on the door to call either the Baton Rouge FDA offices or state office.

We were also working with the state, and sometimes we paired up an FDA with a state person. Sometimes it was just the state person, sometimes just FDA. But usually we had teams. We tried to have two people together at all times.

The week of, that same week where I was supposed to go back to Nashville and meet with the Commissioner, and then Carol called and said, "No, don't come back; start being me in Louisiana," that Saturday I went back to Slidell for the third time, and by then the electricity was on.

And I went into Mississippi, and that was the first time I went to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi to do some of the surveillance work there. Even though I'd seen the damage in parts of Slidell, when I got around Mississippi, Bay Saint Louis, Bayou Caddy, which is right by the Louisiana-Mississippi line, and that's just about where the eye hit and just east of the eye -- Waveland, Pass Christian, some of the names that have been in the news a good bit -- that was where the worst of it was. Everything I'd seen before that in other hurricanes -- a place wiped off -- maybe not to that extent, but there wasn't anything in Slidell I never saw before, maybe just the extent of it was larger. But when I got to Mississippi, when I got close to the coast, there's a lot of pine trees there, and what I started noticing that sticks with me was the pine trees. It looked like a forest fire had hit because they were all brown and dead, and it was from the saltwater scorching them, from the 15-, 20-, 25-foot storm surge plus the spray, and there was hardly a building standing, and the pine trees were scorched, and it just looked like when you see a picture in California or Idaho when there's a forest fire and there's nothing left. It basically

looked like a forest fire hit and nothing was left, except there just wasn't black ashes.

And that scene will stick with me.

And as I got closer to the water, the places at the docks, again, there was nothing.

And the National Guard was there. You had to show your identification to pass through certain checkpoints.

And one thing I remember is that there was a dock, and I went out and walked around the dock, and it was a beautiful afternoon, blue sky. There was not a soul that I could see. I didn't see a person, didn't see an animal, didn't hear a bird, there were no fish splashing in the water, no mosquitoes, no gnats. And to me it felt like what the end of the world would feel like. I was at the end of the road, at the end of a pier at the end of a road, with debris all around after the hurricane, where the trees, everything looks dead, scorched, and not a sound, not a person, not a living thing. And I said this must be what it would be like at the end of the world. It just, that thought, I will always remember that thought. It was eerie. And I stayed there a little bit, and then I left and drove along the beach and had just utter devastation on the coast.

New Orleans was flooded, Slidell, that area, was a lot of damage, but the coast of Mississippi where I passed was just devastation. I mean, just no structure standing, trees dead, toppled. It was something that I never saw with any other hurricane.

I worked in that area that day, but I went home. Nobody was around there except National Guard, very little.

JS: Were you the first FDA person?

DL: Well, at this point, I didn't know it at the time, but the guys in Mobile -- there's three investigators in Mobile -- they were working south of Mobile and going into Mississippi, working their way toward Biloxi and Gulfport.

And, actually, I had called. I called them that morning. I called one at his house, and his name is Sam Collins. And I said, "Sam, have you all been in Mississippi yet?"

He said, "Yeah, we've been up to about Biloxi."

I said, "Okay. Well, today I'm going east. I'll be in Hancock County; I'll work Hancock County today." That way we wouldn't be duplicating.

But they had worked a good bit in that area, and that area was hit bad, too, all the way to south of Mobile. Even in Mobile, on Mobile Bay, there was a lot of damage, and Bayou LaBatre, Alabama, there was a lot of damage. So from, even west of New Orleans over 100 miles across to Alabama, there was a lot of flooding and damage.

But anyway, that Saturday, when I left there, I went back home, spent the night that Saturday night, and then Sunday went back to Baton Rouge and basically did the same type work, where I was coordinating more than going out.

By that point, we started finding out that they were going to have people help with retail. We have a retail food specialist in Atlanta, and they had coordinated with people who were going to start coming in from all over. FDAers from all over the country were going to come in to help the state with retail starting in this parish, Jefferson Parish, and then work in Orleans Parish. So this was being coordinated at that time.

There was also coordination with the state to get some boats to do the samples of the water, because I'm sure you heard about Lake Pontchartrain and the "toxic gumbo,"

they were calling it, because of all the chemical spills, the oil spill at that refinery in Chalmette, Murphy Oil. There was the household goods and all the stuff that was supposedly in the water.

So, actually, FDA and the Center for Foods had coordinated to have boats come in to help the state sample the waters and to start classifying the oyster-growing waters again to see if they were safe, by areas.

So that was about week three -- September the 19th, I believe.

By then, things are starting to get coordinated to some degree. You've got me working with food and drug to do the regular food and drug type facilities, the manufacturers, the warehouses. Then you've got coordination going on with the state where we're going to send a bunch of people from all over the country to come work retail. You're starting to coordinate with the pharmacy, the Louisiana Pharmacy Board, to have pharmacists with FDA come to help.

JS: Commissioned Corps?

DL: Yes. And then the Center for Foods was working with our shellfood specialist in Baton Rouge, John Veazey. And they're starting to get the program with the sampling of fish and seafood and the waters and classifying the growing waters, so more things are happening now.

JS: And it sounds like a lot of establishments are coming back online, too, by this time. People are coming back.

DL: Except for Orleans Parish and Saint Bernard Parish. Those two, there's not much going on. But the rest . . . Oh, and Plaquemines Parish, around Venice, because that's actually where the hurricane came across -- I'm trying to think; I have a map in here. The mouth of the Mississippi is in Plaquemines Parish.

JS: What?

DL: Plaquemines. I can show you the map after.

And that's where it initially came across, and so that part was damaged severely, southern Plaquemines Parish. And then it came across around Saint Bernard Parish, and then it hit the coast of Mississippi and Louisiana right on the line. But anywhere where the eye passed, there was nothing going on.

But we did have a lot of activity in Jefferson Parish, where Metairie is, the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, Saint Tammany, Tangipahoa parishes, they're coming back, further outlying areas. So a lot of these areas were affected by the hurricane, but they're starting, you know, people are coming back, and we were able to get our work done.

One thing I neglected to mention or didn't emphasize too much was the amount of traffic. When I told you that we'd meet maybe at 8:30, 9:00 in the morning, what's normally an hour and 15-, 20-minute drive from Baton Rouge to here was taking two and a half, three hours. When they'd get to the Bonnet Carré Spillway, there'd be a National Guard checkpoint, and it would just be complete bottlenecks because of government agencies, rescue workers, relief organizations, people coming back. Because at this point

they're starting to let people come back home, maybe just for a day or two, to check things out.

But the amount of traffic on the main arteries into the New Orleans area was amazing. It was just bumper to bumper, and then when you'd get closer, it would just stop and it was pretty bad. So we were losing two, three hours a day just in traffic. Where normally something would take an hour, hour and a half, it was taking two and a half, three hours. So they might leave at 9:00 from Baton Rouge and get here, in the New Orleans area, around 11:30 and only be able to work until 3:00, and then I think the curfew was at 6:00, and a two-hour drive back. So even though we were doing a lot of work, we really couldn't get a whole lot done because it took so long to get here. And once you got here, traffic wasn't bad. In fact, it was kind of interesting and nice driving without all the traffic lights. People would come to a stop and let each other on, so sometimes traffic was better.

JS: Well, with all these folks coming in, the people that are coming in doing retail food work with the states or whether it's additional FDA investigators coming in to do traditional FDA work, two things. Where are they staying; where are you putting them up? And with all these traffic problems, is there any way to set them up in trailers or anything closer to the areas down here where they're going to be doing their work?

DL: Well, there was one guy that came from Nashville that had a travel trailer and a truck, and so he pulled his travel trailer with his truck, Steve Dittert. Because that was one of the things I did too. They asked me to look for campgrounds. Well, there's no

campgrounds anywhere near New Orleans that were open. The ones near New Orleans were closed, and then as you got around Hammond, where they have quite a few campgrounds, they were all full. So they were staying west of Lafayette and were driving from west of Lafayette to Baton Rouge to meet in the morning, and then to New Orleans. That's normally a two-and-a-half-hour trip one way anyway, without traffic. So that was taking them four hours or more both ways, so they were spending anywhere from six to eight hours driving, and then all four of them were staying in this trailer in a campground at night and then driving back here, working till midday, and then driving back. So they were getting back at 8:00, 9:00 o'clock, sleeping in the trailer, getting up at 6:00 in the morning, I guess leaving at 6:00 in the morning to get to Baton Rouge around 8:00, so they had a rough week.

A couple of them, let's see, we found a couple of hotel rooms in Baton Rouge, which was very difficult. There were hardly any rooms in Baton Rouge because of all the evacuees. And as evacuees leave, the relief organizations, government workers, everybody else that comes out after a hurricane, were trying to scramble for rooms. So we were able to get a couple of people rooms. So between that and the trailers, people were able to stay.

Now, the retail group came, I guess it was the week of the 19th they started coming down, and I wasn't really involved with that.

JS: Who was organizing that?

DL: I think mainly Kim Livsey out of Atlanta. She's our retail food specialist for the region. And I wasn't too involved with that, but I knew they were down.

And our milk specialist, who's actually now in Mandeville, Lezette Earhart, she lives near Mandeville, and she had a pretty good-sized yard with enough room for a trailer. So I think somehow they were able to rent a trailer. I don't know how this happened, but they rented a trailer, and for the first night or two, they had about 10 or 11 FDAers from across the country staying in that trailer in Lezette's yard and coming to New Orleans and Jefferson Parish to work at the retail establishments. So when I found that out, I called her, and then I called maybe Laurie Farmer in the region, and Mr. Thornburg, and I said, "I've got a house in Slidell, and my power's on, my water's on, my house is fine. They could stay there. It's closer to New Orleans, it's got three bedrooms plus there's a couple extra, you know, dining room, that they could spread out." I said, "It's probably a lot better than being cramped up in a trailer."

So it worked out where I met Lezette, gave her a key to my house. She went to them, and then they started staying in my house in Slidell. So I think there were 12 of them staying there. Didn't know any of them, and I'm in Baton Rouge. But I didn't worry about it. You know, people said, "You let people stay in your house and you didn't know who they were?" They were FDA. I'm not worried about it. Figure that way somebody's in my house anyway.

JS: True.

DL: So this is now the week before Hurricane Rita hit around Lake Charles.

JS: We haven't talked too much about Rita with the others, so I'm curious to hear about Rita.

DL: So at this point, Hurricane Rita is in the Gulf and starting to get bigger. Now, these guys are at my house in Slidell and we're starting to have one eye looking at the Gulf.

Oh, I forgot to mention, a couple people came from Florida District to help us. One of them was Brant Schroeder, who used to work in New Orleans. He started the same day I did. He came, and his family was still here, his mother was still here. And Justin Price came. So we had two from Florida. They were recruited, helping us with the food and drug part. But they left right before Rita. They left to get flights out.

But all these other guys, there was no way for all them to get flights to all over the country that were staying in my house.

So initially, I think the Region wanted them to go to Baton Rouge when Rita was getting close, and I don't remember who I called and said, "If they go to Baton Rouge, they're going closer to where Rita is predicted to hit. They're going west; they need to be east." I said, "They'll be safer in my house than trying to find a hotel room or sleeping on cots and doing whatever else that they would try to find a place in Baton Rouge." I said, "They're safe in my house." They agreed to let them stay in my house. So they stayed at my house for Hurricane Rita.

Hurricane Rita hit right on the Texas-Louisiana line, so the area around Lake Charles and Cameron, Abbeville, was hit very hard. Cameron looked like Mississippi. It was, most buildings were wiped out, very few structures standing, particularly along the coast.

JS: How big a hurricane was Rita?

DL: About the same size as Katrina.

JS: A 4?

DL: I think they were both Category 3's, because they were 5's when they were in the Gulf, and as they got closer to land, they lost intensity. But Rita may have been a little less powerful than Katrina, but they were both Category 3's.

JS: But when it made landfall, it caused a great amount of damage.

DL: Yes. But it wasn't, it was more rural areas where it hit, so I don't think anybody was killed from Hurricane Rita. And you didn't have the levees breaking like you had in New Orleans. If it wouldn't have been for that, we wouldn't have had near the problems we had in New Orleans. But with the levees breaking and flooding so much, that's what caused the major problems.

Our focus would have been Mississippi if it wouldn't have been for the levee breaking in New Orleans. That's where the main problems would have been.

But those guys stayed at my house for Rita.

What I had done -- remember, I told you I was in Nashville, and I had driven up there in my own personal vehicle the day after Labor Day, stayed in a hotel room. My initial plan, remember, was to come back here. Then they tell me no, you need to meet the Commissioner. So I had taken a government vehicle with a couple other people to drive and pick up more government vehicles in Lafayette. So for over two weeks, I'd been without some of my belongings because they're still in the hotel room in Nashville because I thought I'd be going back up there fairly quick, and my vehicle is up in Nashville. So at some point I need to get back to Nashville to get my stuff and my vehicle.

So I figured Hurricane Rita was a good reason to leave Louisiana again, go to Nashville and get my stuff. So the Friday before Rita hit, because Rita hit on a Saturday morning, September the 24th -- yesterday was the two-year anniversary -- I left again for my parents' house early in the morning, drove to Nashville, got up there that Friday afternoon, spent the weekend, checked out of the hotel finally, and drove my own vehicle back.

I came back that Monday to my house in Slidell, and all those guys were still there. They were out working when I got back. So I'm cleaning my yard, trying to get branches and limbs and debris, and they show up about 8:00. So I finally meet these 12 - I think there were 12 of them -- these 12 guys that had been staying in my house for almost a week now.

JS: So they're from, they're FDAers from . . .

DL: Yes, from all over the place, from one end of the country to the other.

And it was kind of funny. When I walked in, they had air mattresses and their pillows, and each one had their own little spot with their own little duffle bag and toiletries and so forth, and it was kind of interesting to walk in my house and see it look like a dorm room or a campground or something. And they'd made themselves at home, which was fine. In fact, they'd been staying with each other for a week, so they come in and they're joking with each other, and I'm the stranger to them in my own house.

They didn't use the washing machine. They were worried about using it. I said, "You can wash. You don't need to go to the laundromat. Wash your clothes. Live like it's your house."

So I just spent the one night there with them, and then I left and went back to Baton Rouge that Tuesday morning, because I said Monday night I got back from Nashville the second time, and that Tuesday morning went back to Baton Rouge and just kept coordinating.

JS: So, how long did this arrangement continue?

DL: The guys that stayed at my house were there for two weeks, so they left at the end of September. So by September 30th, October 1st, whatever that last weekend in September or early October would have been, they were there for two weeks.

And in September I spent three nights at my house. No, it was Tuesday I drove back to Slidell from Nashville again. I remember things about football because Monday night I was in Nashville, and LSU played Tennessee, football. That's right, it was a Monday night because that game had been postponed till the Monday because of Katrina. So it was Tuesday I drove back, met the guys in my house, and then Wednesday I went back to Baton Rouge. But by the next weekend, they were gone.

I never really got settled back in my house until the second week in October, when I was finally kind of moved back. And one memory that I have also -- and this went on for months after the hurricane -- I had stuff scattered. At one point I had stuff in my house, stuff in my parents' house, stuff in my vehicle in Nashville and the hotel room, and then stuff in the government vehicle, because wherever I spent the night, that's where I had it. But for a long time, it was always the case that we're moving.

We started getting these offices here and in Mandeville. I mean, it was always they were still moving stuff. I kept telling dad, "Nothing is ever in the right place." If something's in Baton Rouge, it needs to be here. If something's in Lafayette, it needs to go here. If it's in this box, they want it over here. It was always moving stuff, whether it's furniture, papers. We started getting supplies again, all our inspectional equipment, they started ordering all that stuff. Well, you've got to drive to Lafayette to bring them their equipment, or you were holding stuff in Baton Rouge for them.

And, again about Baton Rouge. At times we had 15 or 16 people in an office much smaller than the one you're in now. We had us, we had the people that came. By this time the pharmacists were down, and Barbara Wright in Baton Rouge was coordinating what was going on with the pharmacists. We just had people. We had

phone lines, computer lines all across the floors, five or six conversations going on the phone. Sometimes I'd have one phone and a cell phone at the same time. It was just like some type of command central. And Baton Rouge was, that was the main place where we did our work. And it was really helpful to have that office there.

By that time, Dana and I were taking these reports, you know, the situation reports, and people would call in at the end of the day. Dana would set up a spreadsheet and she and I would take the phone messages and she'd put the stuff on a spreadsheet, and then we'd relay that to Nashville so they could relay to Atlanta. And about every two days, they'd want different information in a different format: how many drug places, how many device places. Then the next day they'd think, well, how many, what was the value of what was destroyed, what was the value of damage to the buildings. So we were always -- we had all that data anyway, but there was always a tweak to it. But we kept up with it.

JS: How are your investigators here outfitted, the folks that were working here, like those that were living out of your house? Did they have the tools for their jobs?

DL: They brought their equipment from their offices. I remember some from Massachusetts, New York, Washington, Colorado. They were from all over. So they'd come.

And that's one thing that we want to come out of this oral history, is that for people to look at what was going on TV and see the destruction on the coast, see what was going on in New Orleans, all the chaos, and still volunteer to come down without

knowing where they're going to stay or what conditions they're going to be living in and working in. That says a lot for the dedication for all the people that work for FDA, because these people, these investigators, some of the supervisors, whatever their position, they're all volunteering to come down and help us, help the state, help the community. And to do that, seeing and knowing what was going on, it's something I admire about them individually and then organizationally as a whole, because I've met some of them since.

I've run across them. Some people came that I didn't even know had come, because there were actually people that came to work for FDA, volunteered down here to work, that I didn't even know they were here until months later, when I would see them after the hurricane. "Well, I didn't even know you were down here." But they were staying in shelters. There were a couple of places in Baton Rouge set up. I forget what they call them, these situation-command type centers. They were sleeping on cots and in sleeping bags on the floor, in old gyms and state buildings, outlying parishes. In Lafayette, Alexandria, where I'm from, some of them stationed over there at these Red Cross shelters. That's where a lot of the Public Health Commissioned Corps, nurses and doctors and the different professionals -- that's where a lot of them were sent, was to these shelters.

Again, they were sent. They were obligated by duty to come. But, still, it doesn't change it from the ones that volunteered to come that were not Commissioned Corps, and somebody like me volunteering. And I'm just thankful that they came and helped us out after the hurricane. Just a few of us that were down here, we never could have gotten all

that done. The state couldn't have gotten it done. And they were dedicated. We all were dedicated, working long hours.

As far as the agency is concerned, I think one thing that's going to change is the organizational structure to get information to the field and back from the field to headquarters, because they would always want numbers and statistics and these daily situation reports, with communication not the same as it is now. If the phone lines were busy, sometimes you'd have to dial numbers 15, 20 times to get a line out. Our cell phones would work, but sporadically. Headquarters was demanding and wanting information; they can't communicate to you what they want initially, and you can't communicate back to them what you're doing.

JS: How do you think it will change? Do you think they have an idea now, a better idea about the problems in communication?

DL: What I've seen the last couple years is they've set up these incident commands, and, like this year with Hurricane Humberto that was barely a Category 1 a couple of weeks ago that, again, it hit right where Rita did. But beforehand, already e-mails had been sent out -- not just the District; I'm talking about HHS, actually. I had one Commissioned Corps person I supervise put on standby. They did it last year even though the Atlantic hurricane season was fairly calm last year. There were a couple times that they'd already had preparations made. So it looks like, after Katrina, not just the FDA but the whole government is trying to make sure they're prepared better. But locally, they revised our emergency operations procedures.

But at least I know and the ones that have been through this a lot of times know what to do, and now we've got Blackberries with text messaging, and that seemed to work. I didn't have one then, but they work during a hurricane, apparently, or the aftermath.

So I think the ability to communicate technologically is better now, just with some of the devices we have, and with prior preparation, not just for the District, but Agency and Department-wide. And they gave us these cards to carry for when we evacuate, to call the 1-800 number. That's part of the emergency procedures.

I think the coordination with the state always worked really pretty well with them after hurricanes. I took it upon myself to contact them initially, and usually I've done that before because I'm very familiar with the state and the areas, and especially the seafood and food firms, and I can look at a list of 200 firms and pick out which ones are the most likely to have problems in an area, and that's one thing you can concentrate on first, just like the state inspectors. So we work pretty good with them.

And the benefit of working with the state is if you do pair up and there's a firm that may not want to voluntarily destroy something and may want to try to keep something that's suspect, the state has the authority to embargo or seize it on the spot, whereas we don't. So that's always a benefit of working with the state after disasters and pairing with them, or at least communicating with them while we're out, because if we run across a situation where there's suspect product and the firm is not willing to voluntarily destroy or correct or recondition, then we can notify them, and they can come and take a look and decide whether they're going to seize or embargo.

JS: You know, there was a case that I ran across. This was September 8th. And apparently there was a shipment of shrimp, pretty big, 120,000-pound shipment of shrimp that went out from Mobile, well, I think it was from Alabama, to Florida, and apparently part of this shipment had been submerged. And it was seized. I guess it was seized in Florida because, obviously, it was adulterated. I'm guessing that was probably an egregious case. We didn't run into too many of those in the aftermath of the storm.

Were you in contact with many of the folks in Nashville? I mean, did you have a sense for what was going on up there, what folks were doing up there? You were obviously focused on the work right here at the time.

DL: I called Carol every once in a while because my supervisor, Carolyn White, was up there, but most of the people that were really from New Orleans and really affected by the hurricane, either losing houses or there were some that three or four weeks later were still looking for family members. There were a couple people that I remember whose elderly mother or elderly grandmother was in a nursing home, maybe in North Louisiana or in Mississippi. They were asking me, "David, where is," and they would name some of those small towns because that's where grandma may be in a nursing home in New Orleans, and they evacuated them to . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE B

JS: Were they asking you to find out about this person?

DL: No, just where the facility was. Like if they wanted to go visit, but they never heard of some little small town in North Louisiana. They knew I knew, so they'd ask me, "David, where is Winnfield?" "David, where's this place?" and I could tell them how to get there.

But I didn't really have much communication with the ones that left New Orleans because, from what I knew, they were busy trying to put their lives back together. I don't know how much, how involved they were, but they were dealing with FEMA and Red Cross, SBA. For a while down here, we didn't have a supervisor, and I was it up until, like I say, about the second week in October.

And by that point, I kind of arranged the initial work we had done; we accomplished most of what we needed to do. Things were a little bit more organized, and at this point we're starting to try to move to these offices. So I started getting more involved with that.

JS: So setting up the offices in Mandeville and Metairie, which, we obviously didn't have them.

DL: Right. And, again, I wasn't that involved with it, but there was that point where we needed to start getting back to doing kind of what we normally did. We'd been to the places in New Orleans, so we knew most of them now, if they were going to come back, they were back already. We were visiting the same places over and over, trying to see if they were back. So we'd accomplished the major part of what we needed to do, and it

was time to start kind of regrouping, start organizing these other offices, start doing more of the regular work again.

One of the biggest things we were involved with a few months after the hurricane -- I'm talking October, November, December, January -- was coffee, because New Orleans is a major location for where coffee comes in; green coffee beans from all over the world come into New Orleans. The Folgers plant is here in New Orleans; there's a couple other coffee roasters. They store the green coffee in warehouses. Some of the warehouses flooded, some roofs leaked or were damaged and water would come in and rainwater would come into containers. So there was, I don't quite know why it became such a big priority, but a lot of these coffee brokers and dealers in New York were pressuring FDA because the supply of coffee, I think, was not on the market like it should be because so much was damaged and being held here, and a lot of them were worried about the condition of the coffee, was it safe, the beans, and so forth.

So these warehouses and coffee roasters, most of the warehouses, we started getting in contact with them for reconditioning so they can basically segregate what was damaged from what was okay.

JS: But had they been on the list of those early establishments?

DL: Yes. We initially had visited them, either us or the state, depending on the assigned area, and documented the amount of damage, but now it's the point where they need to start moving the coffee, clearing out the old coffee, get new coffee in, and

segregating what was good from what was bad, and figure out how they're going to destroy the bad stuff.

So mid-October to late October, they're submitting these reconditioning plans to our Center for Foods and they're reviewing them. So by the end of October, CFSAN has reviewed reconditioning plans of these warehouses, and it varied because some coffee was in the 150-pound sacks, some was in what they call 2,000-pound supersacks, some were in containers, you know, those big 40,000-pound containers like you see in shipyards and stuff. Those look like a boxcar. Some of those were damaged on the docks at the port where water had leaked in.

So there was varying scenarios of what had happened to the coffee, whether it was flooded in the warehouse, rainwater in the warehouse, rainwater from a leaky container. So there was a variety of reconditioning plans that were submitted to CFSAN, and we had to start going out there and watching them recondition. Now, we didn't stay out there the whole time because some of it took months to go through tons and tons and tons of coffee beans, but we periodically stopped in.

That was kind of an ongoing thing for months, just coffee reconditioning. They'd get ready to do it, they'd let us know. Sometimes we'd go, sometimes we wouldn't, depending on what they were doing. But once you see the process, they didn't change it. It was pretty repetitive, you know, cut open a sack and open it up, and they'd scoop it and look at it. Most of those coffee graders, they'd been doing that for years.

But what they would call damaged, I felt certain they were very conservative. They weren't trying to save every little bean. Even if it didn't look damaged, because maybe one portion of a sack got moldy, but a 150-pound sack at the other end might have

been fine, they still might have thrown half of the sack away just to have a little bit of separation between the one that was obviously moldy and the one that was obviously good. So we didn't have too much problem with reconditioning. But that was just ongoing for months.

JS: So that, I think, is it fair to say that might have been kind of a disproportionate amount of time spent on coffee beans?

DL: In a way, yes.

JS: I mean, coffee's important; we all like coffee.

DL: Like I say, there was some, I don't really know where the pressure came from, but it was pressure from somewhere for the agency and FDA to focus on coffee, the reconditioning.

I think there was a news story about it. Maybe one company was claiming it was bad and another one, you know, the brokers and dealers. I don't really know what the background of that was.

But for a while, we were starting to think that's all we're going to be doing now is coffee. And typically we didn't even fool with it too much because a lot of it was still in import status, and we worked domestic.

JS: I know there were some cases of vibrios, certainly in Mississippi. But how did we do in terms of food-borne pathogen problems in the aftermath of the hurricane?

DL: As far as I know, we didn't, I don't think there were any incidents reported.

As I said, CFSAN was able to, from their Dauphin Island laboratories, south of Mobile . . . If I remember right, they were able to get some boats from there. I don't know where, they may have acquired another boat somewhere. They started doing the sampling, like in Lake Pontchartrain and some of the other lakes and waters nearby, and in the Gulf for the water classification. The water samples may have had elevated levels of *e. coli* from the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain, a little bit more than normal. But overall, they didn't find any kind of problems that initially were being communicated to the media, all this toxic soup. They'd analyzed for heavy metals, they analyzed for chemicals, they analyzed for bacteria, pathogens, and after about a week or two, the water levels were normal. In parts of Lake Pontchartrain, some of the water samples started coming out cleaner once that water drained out. It kind of flushed the lake in a way. So as far as I know, we never had any real problems. There were no incidences of any outbreaks from the shelters or, as far as I know, with the restaurants that started reopening.

I think what helped us in that regard, again, is that the floodwaters stayed up so long and the power stayed out for so long that people weren't trying to save a dollar or two by salvaging something, because they knew it was worthless. And particularly with the media coverage. Anything coming from New Orleans or Louisiana, people were

going to be skeptical of anyway, so why chance it by manufacturing and shipping something that's maybe compromised?

In fact, when I was in Nashville that first time -- I got there on a Wednesday -- I think it was that Wednesday afternoon, maybe the Thursday, Don Kraemer from CFSAN called me -- he was associate director of the Office of Seafood -- telling me that Maryland wanted to ban all seafood from Louisiana after the hurricane, not just from the area here, but all of it, thinking the whole state, I guess, was in bad shape. And he wanted me to contact the seafood administrator for Louisiana and talk to him and let him know about that.

Naturally, the seafood program manager for Louisiana was saying, "No, I'm not going to put a ban on shipment of seafood out of Louisiana. I don't have any data." They were talking about, relatively, a small area compared to the rest of the state.

He said, "Give me time. I'm going to start sampling. Give me equipment and money. I don't have anything anymore. We can start sampling."

And, understandably, he was reluctant. He didn't approve Maryland's request to ban shipments of seafood from Louisiana.

What they did was close some of the oyster waters, and they stayed closed for anywhere from a month, two, three months, whenever the water quality got back to what it should be.

One of the bigger problems was, it didn't matter if you would have harvested. Most of the fishing fleet was destroyed, the docks were destroyed, the ice plants were destroyed, all the infrastructure, even some roads going to these areas, were destroyed or impassable. So there was not much seafood coming out, particularly from the southeast

part of the state and in Mississippi for a long time. With debris in the water, shrimp boats couldn't run because their nets would catch all the junk that was in the water.

As far as the seafood industry, which is the one I'm most familiar with, they had, actually, a good year in 2006 in terms of the amount of harvest per boat because there were fewer boats, so their catch went up. Plus with less pressure, there were more fish, more crabs, more shrimp. So production-wise, total production was down, but dockside price and what each fisherman could catch was actually pretty good.

Last year, in April, I went to Alabama. I went from Mobile, Alabama, to Lake Charles, on the Texas line, to seafood facilities along the coast, and tried to stop or visit or find out about every one to kind of get a status on whether they were open; going to reopen soon -- what I call long-term inactive, where maybe they were going to reopen, maybe not, they didn't know, they were waiting on loans, waiting on insurance, or whatever, and they didn't know what their future was going to be; and out of business and never going to reopen. Most of the ones that closed permanently were usually older establishments with older owners, and they didn't want to start over again.

But there was a lot of destruction on the coast, a lot of active rebuilding, though, at that point when I went last year. And I say April, roughly six months, seven months after the hurricane. And actually I compiled a pretty detailed memo and sent it to Mr. Thornburg addressing Katrina and Rita, the amount of firms we had before for seafood, how many we have now that are active, inactive, out of business.

JS: I would like to see a copy of that, if that's possible, if you can lay your hands on it.

DL: Okay, yes. In fact, I was looking at it this morning.

JS: Great. That would be a nice addendum to this document, too.

DL: I have an opportunity to do that again this year, but probably the percentage is up some.

The last year or so, I was looking it over -- the state gives me a list of their permitted establishments. The last year or so, just generally throughout Louisiana, there's been more new businesses open, some have come back. There's still not as many as there was before the hurricane, particularly with oysters. It'll take a while for the oyster beds, where they can reseed the oyster beds and start getting more oysters.

JS: So even now, two years after the fact, it's still something that's going to take -- it sounds like it's a process that takes years.

DL: Yes.

JS: Well, you were the man on the scene in the aftermath of the hurricane here, and, fortunately for the agency, you had enough experience here and had experience in working with the state, so you could get things done. And, fortunately, there was this call to have everyone back in Nashville, and it certainly took you away from here and away from the work for a few days. But your folks in Nashville I think recognized that it was a

lot more important to have somebody here, especially since you had a place to live, at least.

Looking back now, two years after the fact, you mentioned that communications were certainly a problem. But if you had other things that you could see that could be fixed, the way things were handled and the way the agency handled the hurricane, are there any things that sort of pop out at you, what we might have been able to do a little bit better? And what did we do right?

DL: Oh, the right is, as I said, the people that were able to come and volunteered to come and to help. I mean, that, to me, would always be the strength. It's just, those of us who work for FDA, Public Health, and we have dedicated people that work for us. That strength will probably overcome most of the mistakes that were made.

I never really gave much thought to what we could do better, probably because a lot of the time I was so focused on working and doing what I know needs to be done, and I'm not thinking about maybe, at the moment, what can I do better, what can be done better. But things that you hear about later that went wrong, I wasn't really that involved with and knew about. Maybe I heard it by word-of-mouth, but never really got involved with it.

I know some of my coworkers, particularly ones that had to stay in Nashville, were frustrated that they didn't know how long they were going to be in Nashville, whether they were going to be permanently in Nashville, whether they would they be able to come back, just issues of driving back and forth from Nashville to check on their houses and . . .

You know, I heard other people's stories and the things that they were disappointed with, and all I could do is just maybe repeat those, but I don't have the firsthand knowledge.

For starters, in my experience, there's really no way to prepare for that without some mistakes being made and things that you always know you could do better. The one thing that I was trying to prepare for ahead of time -- based more in the past experience -- is when these hurricanes would hit and we'd have to do the disaster work, that it would take a couple days to get coordinated before we go out. And where the state is out one or two days after, already working and visiting most of the places, we're still trying to figure out, get a list of the establishments, get the list distributed to people who are going to go out, find out who's going to go out. And that's one thing that, if we can prepare for it, I mentioned that after Katrina, even though Katrina was so, the scale is much bigger, that we need to have a better plan locally, in the District, because when we know a hurricane's coming, to already have a CD or printout in people's hands that they can have with them and be prepared. They may evacuate to Mississippi, may evacuate to Arkansas, but when you come back, you can either call here and be prepared to go to this area or this place.

And, actually, that's what I did a few months before Katrina, when Hurricane Dennis hit Alabama. I had a printout ahead of time. I'd already gone through it geographically and by industry, sorting it out. If Hurricane Dennis would have been as bad as a storm like Katrina, to be able to say, "Okay, you guys in Mobile are going here," to already talk to people to see who would be available to go, have it broken down, "You go to Mississippi and do this, you work this county," and Katrina kept that from

happening because it came so quick and there was so much devastation after. So they would do that after the fact with Katrina.

But I think even now, that would be a weakness that if a hurricane would hit next week, we may have the emergency procedure in place, but we'd still be uncoordinated for the first day or two. And if it's not major, if it's not like Katrina, where you can get out within a couple days, be ready.

Like I say, they have the Incident Command System set up now, and there's a program or a procedure now with the state. But I've always admired the state because their inspectors have a little more freedom and leeway, it looks like, to go out and do the work they need to do, whereas here, it seems like inspectors, investigators, and with the supervisors, they have to do all kind of planning after the fact and decide where you're going instead of saying before, "Okay, Joe, when this hurricane hits and it's over, and when you go out, you need to cover Lafourche Parish; Jane, you need to cover Terrebonne Parish. Here's your list. When you get back, be in communication." And I think we're only a step or two behind the state, and that's probably the reason why, because their inspectors don't have to wait for multi levels of coordination to go out. They just go and start doing the work they need to do, which is what I did after Katrina. I didn't really wait to get permission. I knew that they would be depending on us and we're depending on them, so I went out and started working.

JS: Well, maybe in situations like that, maybe a little bit less centralized authority could be a little more effective.

DL: I think. And now that I'm a supervisor -- and, fortunately, last year we didn't have any hurricanes, and thus far this year. But if there was an imminent hurricane coming, and it looked like it was going to be pretty severe, I already plan to talk to each one of my group and find out where they are going. You can't predict, but if it's just a routine hurricane, when they'll be coming back, and have them work an area they're familiar with, and I'd be in coordination with the state. I've kind of got in my mind what I would try to do to make it where there's not a lot of indecision two days after.

Because I remember after Hurricane Ivan, again, I evacuated Slidell. At first I thought Ivan might be coming about where Katrina came, but it veered toward Alabama and Florida. But there was a big evacuation then. I actually went up to my camp. But they called and said, "You need to be back to go to Alabama." So we get back, and the computers are not up, the phones are not up, so we're all standing around waiting for a list to be printed of the firms to visit, because we've got an official establishment inventory. I was working off of one this morning.

This is the seafood firms in Louisiana. This is all the seafood firms. And what I'm doing now is . . .

JS: This is a pretty sizable document, too.

DL: Yes. Right now what I was using it for was, we assign work to the states under contract, so I was using this list to assign, pick out seafood firms to give to the state under contract.

But this is the type of list we carry with us when we go out to do hurricane disaster work. They're printed up by parishes or municipalities, and you work off the list. And it's not just the seafood; it's the entire inventory.

So the first thing you do is cull the places you don't need to go to. You don't need to go to a clinical investigator, you don't need to go to certain types of places, but other ones are necessary to visit.

So when I would get involved with it, I'd give people this list that I already had marked where they should go. But as people become familiar with doing disaster work, they should know where to go. But if I have something like this, which I keep available now, if a hurricane hits, then I have this in my hand and everybody else's hands to work from.

JS: How many pages is this -- I'm guessing it's about 40 pages or so.

DL: Forty-one, a good guess.

JS: Forty-one pages. How many of these establishments could a single investigator cover in a day in sort of one of these post-hurricane events?

DL: Typically, it depends, but if you get in an area where they're fairly concentrated, 10, 15, 20 . . .

JS: Really, that many?

DL: If you get in, like in Pensacola, for example. Then we had to get the inventory from Florida's district because we didn't have that inventory for Florida.

But when I got the Pensacola area's list and started kind of going through it, plotting out -- and I wasn't familiar with Pensacola as far as streets and anything else -- I started looking. I'm looking for things close to the water to start with, and then I see the dock. So the first place we need to go -- and we paired up -- I told the person I'm with, "We need to go to this dock," because if anything's going to be wrong, it's going to be right by the water initially." So, sure enough, we went toward the dock, and there was flour. I mean, a huge warehouse full of, I believe actually it was flour. Well, the water, the storm surge had gotten in, and some areas were under five, six feet of water, and there was roof damage, so there was a lot of flour that was damaged and couldn't be reconditioned. So we spent a lot of time there the first day, and we had to communicate with the Florida District and the state, because they had to come in after us and embargo it.

But sometimes when you run across something where it's a situation where it is bad and there is an ongoing process -- maybe they've already started reconditioning or maybe the salvagers are there -- you may spend mostly a whole day in one place. And then the next day, it goes fast. Generally, you can expect to visit 10 to 12 places a day, I think most people tend to get that many, if it's fairly routine.

And there's a little form we fill out. That's a Disaster Surveillance Report. There's not much to it: name and address and the amount of product they destroyed, estimated damage.

But I know one thing that could probably be improved, too, is to standardize the information people want, because we know what to get when we're out at the firm. Like after Katrina, when they started wanting daily numbers, and today they want this set of numbers, and then tomorrow they want these extra numbers, and then they go back. Like, for example, if you initially tell them, "Well, we visited 57 places today," the next day they'll say, "Well, you already visited 57. Now tell us how many were medical devices, how many were drugs, and how many were food. Start breaking it down by commodities," and we start doing that. Then two days later, it's, "Well, tell us how much was destroyed at each place." Well, each investigator has all that in their diary, and they're compiling all their notes, so it's not like you're not getting it, and it's not like they're not willing to provide it. But when you're in these situations, you don't have all that time to compile it daily. So that was, after Katrina, it was making it hard because these investigators are out in the field and they're reporting to me what they're seeing and where they visited, and I've got to keep daily asking them more questions because headquarters is wanting more information.

JS: So it would help to have a sort of established rubric of information that's requested from headquarters or wherever.

DL: Right. Tomorrow they could say, "Well, if you have a disaster, this is what we're going to want to know, and this is how I want the information," and we'll have it for them.

But Katrina was such a worst-case scenario.

JS: It was a worst-case scenario, but someday there are going to be other emergencies, maybe not on this scale, but who knows? An earthquake here, a tremendous tornado somewhere else, a firestorm somewhere, where we're going to be faced with dire situations and need to figure out how to deal with that in terms of the work of the agency. So it's the experiences that people here in this district office have with Katrina that I think others can learn from, and that's why I think stories like those that you've just described will be so helpful to people in the agency, and people outside of the agency too, so they can maybe learn a little bit more what it is we do and how we face emergencies. So I really want to thank you for the time you spent with me today talking about it. It's educational. Thank you.

DL: All right.

You know, I'm about to say why I became the supervisor, because I know part of it was how did things change after the hurricane.

JS: Oh, right. We do want to cover that. That's right. Because I also want to see, right now, what kind of a staffing level do we have in both of the offices here in Mandeville and Metairie. Do you know off the top of your head, roughly?

DL: Seven of us in Mandeville full time. In fact, Barbara, who works in Baton Rouge, spent some time in Mandeville too. But basically there's seven in Mandeville. Here, I never really counted, but I guess we've got about a dozen people in Metairie now.

Actually, the staff is about right for what we do; they're not overwhelmed with work by being short staff, at least investigators in the field. Probably could still use another one or two in the area. But it's less staff than we had before, but I don't see where it's too much of a burden right now.

JS: Bring me up to date on how, where you are today and how you got to that position.

DL: All right.

I always said I never wanted to become a supervisor. I like doing the field work, doing inspections. I did foreign travel. I liked being in the field. But Katrina did prompt me to become a supervisor for a couple reasons: One, I did like the role I played after the hurricane, where I was kind of coordinating and trying to organize things, and hopefully I did a good job with it; and I liked -- a little bit too much action sometimes, a little too much stuff going on, but I liked it; I enjoyed that part of it.

And my supervisor, Carolyn White, went to Nashville after the hurricane, and then she was still the supervisor and she was in Nashville, but she wound up transferring to Atlanta at the beginning of 2006, because at that time her husband was in Atlanta. He was in the school system here, the principal. He found a job in Atlanta. So he got a job in Atlanta, so while she was in Nashville, he was in Atlanta. And at about the time she got the transfer to Atlanta, he got his job back here. The school had reopened, so now he was back in New Orleans and she was in Atlanta. So they missed each other.

But when she went to Atlanta, that opened up her old position, and we had an actor. It was Allen Carmen, who's actually in this office. He was acting for several months. But he never was in investigations. And I felt that, with the experience I had -- at that point, I had been 16 years with FDA -- that I could probably benefit the agency more at this point, with what's going on after Katrina, as a supervisor than as an investigator. And so when they had a job announcement in -- it came out in June of last year -- I debated. One day I'd say, "I'm going to apply," the next day I talked myself out of it, and an hour later I'd convince myself to apply.

I think, talking afterwards, quite a few of the people here and in Mandeville wanted me to apply. They didn't pressure me or say too much, but afterwards I found out they were really wanting me to apply. Two of them said they said a novena, which is Catholic. I'm a good Catholic person.

Anyway, I ended up applying. And I talked to Carol before I applied. I said, "Carol, do you think I'd serve the agency and the district better at this point being a supervisor, or continuing my job as an investigator?"

She kind of looked stunned and said, "I never thought you wanted to become a supervisor."

I said, "Actually, most of my career I didn't. But I think the timing is right now." Since the hurricane, there had been acting supervisors. In fact, for a couple of people -- not in Carolyn White's group; they were in another group -- that supervisor had become pregnant with twins and had kind of a difficult pregnancy, so they had been under acting supervisors for months . . .

TAPE 3, SIDE A

JS: Go ahead.

DL: So, as I said, I think the timing was right to have somebody permanent here, because some other people had been in groups where they had acting supervisors for multiple months, and since the hurricane, Carolyn was supervising us out of Nashville for a few months, and then Allen became acting supervisor after Carolyn went to Atlanta. You know, I wasn't sure how long all the acting supervisors would go on, and when they opened up this position, I just felt that the timing was right for me, really, with the expertise I had, to kind of stabilize things, which I think has happened.

That's the main reason, and I haven't shut the door on investigations completely. I wouldn't mind at some point in the future doing more inspections and getting back out in the field more. But it's been exciting the last year. I've enjoyed the time as a supervisor more than I thought I would.

JS: What are some of the responsibilities you have in this position?

DL: Well, to direct and plan the work of the investigators that are in the group, which are now seven, and one consumer safety technician, I guess a secretary.

JS: What area do they cover geographically?

DL: Mostly they've been working in southeast Louisiana. They'll still take what we call road trips to different areas as needed, but with a little bit shorter staff here, they've been able to work and stay busy in the New Orleans area, the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Sometimes they go around Baton Rouge, on occasion take a road trip to Lafayette or Alabama, but basically in this area they've been able to do most of their work.

I give them the work plans at the beginning of the fiscal year, which is the list of firms to visit. From that point on, they can plan when they're going to visit and do their inspections. And sometimes they'll ask me, particularly with seafood, when is the best time or when is the firm going to be open, because I have that knowledge. But some of them do other program work, like biologics. I don't know too much about that; I'm learning. And that's the good part. I've been able to learn a lot as a supervisor from the people that I'm supervising. They have experience, a lot more experience in some of the other program areas than I do, or they're gaining that experience by going out and doing these inspections or going to training. And I'm reading their reports and talking to them and learning.

Then there's always a crisis that comes up, whether it's pet foods or a recall, the Castleberry recall. That's kind of like the hurricane work, where you start having to plan and coordinate something all of a sudden that you weren't planning on doing before, start organizing people to go to places and, same thing, communicate what they were doing and pass that, those totals and numbers and tallies on up the line, like for the Castleberry recall. You know what I mean? Stores you visited, what size was the store, how much

product was on the shelf. So we've had a little bit of practice this year with the type of work we do after hurricanes just because of the recalls.

In the program work, I do a lot of work with the State of Louisiana, with the contract, like I told you about this contract we have where we pay them to do inspections for us, a certain number of firms. And that's how my relationship really built with the state through the years, doing some of the disaster work with them and doing some technical work with them, doing some training. But I was always, in the last seven or eight years, involved with the contract -- usually not as a contract officer, but helping the contract officer, because, again, I knew the inventory very well, I could help them assign firms, review reports. So that's been my main involvement with the state, and it helps me know them on a first-name basis and be familiar with them and know their phone numbers and their cell phone numbers, and can call them, and that background I have with them helps when you do have to work in a situation like Katrina.

JS: Some people who will be reading this perhaps don't understand that FDA does have to work with the states to do some inspectional work just because of the volume of the establishments that we have to deal with.

DL: Right. And the states inspect establishments more frequently than we do. Typically, though, we'll spend a longer amount of time with a firm.

As an example, maybe a crabmeat processing plant. The state may visit once every quarter, but they may stay two hours or so, where we'll go once a year, but we may spend three days and be there at night when they're at work, and be there at four o'clock

in the morning when they open the door to get started working, may spend 24 hours there, may stay the whole day sometimes, just continuous. Usually it's not that severe, but a 16- to 18-hour day for a couple days in a row in a crabmeat plant is fairly typical for us, and working nights and strange hours, where the state typically doesn't do that. So we balance each other pretty well sometimes. They go there more often, we go there less often but stay longer when we go, and we stay the oddball hours.

JS: What are we spending the time on when we're there?

DL: We're doing routine inspections. We're watching -- for example, the crabmeat plant, to be specific. Typically, the crabs come in from the fishermen in the afternoon, anywhere from three to seven o'clock, depending how far they have to travel to bring the crabs from the water to the plant. And let's say they start cooking crabs at seven or eight o'clock in the evening, and that process may last four or five hours. And also, when they're finished cooking, they'll take the backs off of the crabs. Sometimes it goes concurrently with cooking; sometimes it's after. And that may last, say, midnight, one o'clock, watch them clean up, and then maybe there's a two- to three-, four-hour break in the early morning hours where nothing's going on. And maybe the employees come in the morning at five o'clock to start taking the cooked crabs and picking the meat out of it to get the jumbo lump crabmeat or the crab claw meat. So that process might go on for several hours, five o'clock till two or three in the afternoon, and we'll watch most of that. Sometimes we'll be collecting samples.

A few years ago they had this HALCE program where the firms have to identify hazards and control the hazards and keep records, so now we have to look at more paperwork than we used to during our seafood inspection, so that takes some additional time. We have to look at the records they keep and the plan they have and make sure it's adequate.

So those type of things can make for a long, detailed visit. And if it's violative and you find problems, you spend more time writing up the problems, compiling your list of observations, and then presenting it to the firm.

JS: So it can take three days.

DL: It can easily take three days, and particularly if you work two straight days, almost 24-hour days, and usually that third day, you catch up on your sleep a little bit and then start working on your report to give to the firm.

Overall, the hurricane personally didn't change too much with my life. My home is still there and didn't lose property, didn't lose family members, didn't have any real suffering on a personal level. It was just a lot of work, professional, the work for the month, two months after the hurricane, getting settled in these new offices after, and kind of getting acclimated and getting back in a routine again for what we were doing before the hurricane.

You know, last year, some days the hurricane came up every day in conversation, whether you were talking to coworkers, neighbors. They were always talking about the

hurricane or the storm. Now, at least in my experience this year, maybe every few days it comes up. It's not as much on people's minds.

As far as us, most of our investigators and one of the supervisors are back in their regular routine. They've been doing normal, regular work this year. It's not much with the hurricane anymore except I think the ones that were really affected by losing their houses, family members, relatives, friends. They still have those effects. But personally, it really didn't have that strong an effect on me compared to other people.

But it was just the professional work that month of September, working 14-, 16-, 18-hour days and never spending more than one night or two nights in a row usually in the same place, because I'd stay at my aunt and uncle's in Baton Rouge for a couple nights. But I didn't want to stay there excessively or continuously. Then I'd go to my parents' for a couple nights, and maybe one night in Slidell, and then in Nashville. It was just to keep up with all that. But it didn't bother me at all because that's what we're paid to do; that's our job, public health. Keep that in the forefront of your mind. The work is something, it's not easy, but it's easy to do if you keep in mind why you're doing it.

JS: Well, it's not exactly easy to do, though, in situations like you faced after the hurricane, though. I think those were challenging circumstances.

What have we not covered that we should? We've covered a lot.

DL: Not really, because I know we talked a lot about my personal experience and my kind of day-to-day description for what occurred right before and then for the month or so after.

One thing I didn't mention is that the first, second week of October, when I finally could get away from Baton Rouge and get back home and to really live at home again, the reason why is because in that time, we have an Office of Criminal Investigations in Covington, which is north of the lake. And by that time, the two that lived in Slidell, Wendy Blane and Liz Battles, were back; Claire Minten and Traci Armand, who lived around Mandeville and never had gone to Nashville, so they were there. Those four, and then Lezette, who's our milk specialist. Phuong Tran, he lives in Slidell. His house flooded. He was our import. We're all back in the area now. So we worked out of the Office of Criminal Investigations, their office in Covington, from, I guess, the time I got there, like I said, about the second week in October. They'd been there since the end of September.

So what happened is the Office of Criminal Investigations set us up in the conference room, a big table, and they connected wires like the computers and the phone lines. So from mid-October until I guess mid-January, there were six, seven of us around this big conference table. There were two phones, I believe, but each one of us had all our computers. So while we were doing the coffee reconditioning and the regular inspections and looking for office sites and dealing with GSA, we're all around the conference table doing our work. There were some days, two on the phone, two conversations going on and trying to type a report.

So we finally got the office in Mandeville -- we moved in mid-January.

JS: On what basis did people come back? I mean, obviously, most people stayed in Nashville, then people came back down here.

DL: Yes. Basically, the determining factor was, did they have a place to live down here? So that includes the ones in Mandeville that are there now and were here right after the hurricane, October after the hurricane, most of them that lived in Slidell or lived on what we call the North Shore. Anything north of Lake Pontchartrain is called the North Shore. Most of us who lived on the North Shore didn't have that many problems, could live in our houses. And the agency knew that work still needed to get done and couldn't be done out of Nashville, with people coming from Nashville down continuously, so they realized that it was important to establish an office quickly. You know, it was temporarily at OCI with the people that were already either there and never had left; like I say, a couple of them never had to go to Nashville, or didn't go. But that was pretty much the determining factor. Once things kind of settled down after the first months after Katrina and people had their homes and electricity and water and could live in their homes, particularly on the North Shore, we established that office first.

And then, like the people here, maybe they lived here in Metairie or parts of New Orleans that didn't flood or didn't have much damage to the houses, well, they had a place to come back to, so they started coming back in December and January, when we got this office established here in Metairie. And since we got this office established, we had one person transfer from Houston who was originally in New Orleans, left right before the hurricane, transferred to Houston, then got married -- she was from Baton Rouge -- got married to a guy in Baton Rouge, and she moved back. So we've had two or three people come in since the hurricane.

You know, I don't know all the decision-making process, but to me that was basically it, as people could have a place to live and come back here, something to come back to, they could. So most of the ones that are, I guess, still in Nashville, generally I'd say they were the ones without houses, you know, flooded, couldn't really come back. I think most of the support people they wanted to keep in Nashville because they're not out in the field where they need to go out and do investigations.

I don't know if you interviewed some of them, but some of those . . .

JS: I did.

DL: They're still taking it kind of hard. They're still up there.

JS: Yes, some of them are.

DL: But that was, I guess, the general rationale as to who came back, who had something to come back to that could actually work and get out in the field and have a place to sleep at night.

JS: But also in terms of the nature of the work that they could do.

DL: Right.

JS: It would make sense for people who did work that needed to be done on-site here to be here.

DL: Right.

JS: Rather than the opposite case.

DL: Because the ones of us from North Shore, most of us were investigators. So like Sue O'Regan, who's a secretary, consumer safety technician, she didn't come down till January once we got the office established. Even though she lived in Mandeville and her house was, actually, it was fine, but there was no place for her until we got the office in Mandeville. Just like Melissa Combs, who's the secretary right out here, she lives here in Metairie, but till we had this office, there was no place for her. And the compliance staff, like Nicole Hardin and Mark Rivero and Rebecca Asente and Pat Schafer, they were all up in Nashville until we had this office. They're not out doing field work, but there was nowhere for them to come to. So I guess they were really anxious to get here, so once we got the lease and the space for this office and the one in Mandeville, now it was better for those who could come back who may not have been the ones out in the field, but who had houses and places to live for them to come back to.

JS: And when again was it that we actually got in here?

DL: January '06, January 2006.

JS: Oh, for both Metairie and Mandeville?

DL: Right about the same time.

And then a couple of the investigators here, like Larry Estavan, he actually came back, I want to say in October, after the hurricane, because his wife worked for the V.A. and they put her up in an apartment in Gonzales, so Larry was able to work in the area and come to Covington, to the OCI office, periodically to check his e-mail and get set up, do some work. But mostly he worked in the field and actually, I think, out of his apartment, that apartment they had.

And a couple of the other ones came in January, because I say, until we had this office, there was nowhere for them to be, even the ones that were investigators that worked and lived down here in the New Orleans area. They couldn't work at OCI-Covington. We were already full there.

The key thing was getting both of these offices set up. And it's really, to me, worked out well because there's enough work now on the North Shore, because some facilities in New Orleans have moved north of Lake Pontchartrain. So there's enough work along that I-12 corridor from Baton Rouge through Mandeville, Slidell, into Mississippi, where they can do a lot of that work, and the ones here in Metairie can work in the New Orleans area, even though those in Mandeville still do a good bit of work here.

I was in Mandeville when I became a supervisor. The only reason I'm in Metairie now is because I supervise people in both offices, so I've got an office in Mandeville and an office in Metairie.

But I know, in Mandeville, they could keep that office and stay in it without ever being consolidated into one location in New Orleans again. They'd prefer it. And it makes sense, because if another hurricane hits, you've got a place north of the lake that's probably not going to flood and it's not going to be in the condition that this area was in. But in the future, whether these two offices will be consolidated again, or consolidated at all . . .

JS: Into a district office, you mean?

DL: Well, even just consolidating these two offices into one office, and it not even being a district office, but just putting the two together. I don't know if they'll do it -- I mean, there's been talk about it, because each lease is for a year, both offices. They renewed the lease this past year, in the spring, for both offices. I don't know if they'll renew it in the future. It's between GSA and I guess Mr. Thornburg and the region. But there's the potential that these two offices could be consolidated into one.

And in terms of the future, I don't know if the District Office will come back to New Orleans or not.

JS: As far as I know, that's not been decided.

DL: And I don't think it is.

I mean, at this point, the staff is less, but, as I said, we're not hurting for staff either. We've got basically enough people to do the work. And I think there's only one or two investigators that are still in Nashville that were here before. So, like I said, the support staff and the managers would be able to come back. I don't know what the future holds for that, but it's actually working pretty good right now.

One guy that was in Slidell, Charlie DuPont, his house flooded. He moved to Lafayette after the hurricane because he's from the Lafayette area. And he was actually at the Lafayette Resident Post for a while, came to the New Orleans District Office, and was here until Katrina. And then when his house flooded, he went to Lafayette. That's where he evacuated to, got an apartment there, and now has bought a house. So he left Slidell. So that's one person who left the area, local, but still within the district. But quite a few people left the district, some probably permanently and others may want to come back in the future if we do open up a district office, because after the hurricane, they sent out the announcement that other districts, if they had any openings, that was an opportunity for people to transfer if they wanted. So some went to Atlanta, some went to Dallas. So when people leave the district, they may or may not come back.

DL: But Dallas District and Atlanta District I think were the two main districts that received employees. Most of them are investigators; a couple of them are not. But they received our New Orleans District personnel, which, again, was good because it gave them the opportunity to transfer. And usually it's sometimes kind of hard to transfer

without a job opening, to just take a hardship or just say, “Well, I’d like to live in Dallas. Can I move over there?” You’ve got to have some kind of justification usually. And work with FTEs and ceilings and so forth, and those districts could provide those openings. Again, that was nice of them. I don’t think most people want to move too far. I don’t think anybody went up north or out west.

JS: Well, I think we’ve covered a lot here.

I want to thank you again. This has been an incredible discussion.

And, as I said, as the only person on the ground here right after the hurricane, you saw things that nobody else in the agency saw. So I can understand why they wanted you to have a discussion with the Commissioner when he came down to Nashville. But, of course, I can also understand completely your position in needing to be where you’re needed most, and Louisiana was that place.

So, anyway, thank you again.

DL: All right. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW