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**Statement by the Honorable Bobby L. Rush, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection  
for the**

**Hearing: The Public Sales of Hurricane Katrina/Rita FEMA Trailers:  
Are they Safe or Environmental Time Bombs?**

April 28, 2010

WASHINGTON — “Good morning and welcome to each of our witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the subcommittee today. At this hearing, we will discuss the public sale of more than 100,000 travel trailers and homes by the General Services Administration (GSA). For these transactions, the GSA served as the sales agent of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

“Ladies and gentlemen, if you didn’t know more than what I just said, most of you would probably say, *“That’s interesting. That’s an awfully big lot of trailers...the government is selling off a lot of property. Maybe I should run down to the court house or hop online to take advantage of a deal like that!”* But, these are *not*, just your typical travel trailers. They are the very *same* trailers that FEMA purchased and provisioned as *emergency* housing for hundreds of thousands of displaced Gulf Coast residents.

“Unbelievably, these are the *same* trailers that made thousands of people ill, some *severely ill*, from exposure to formaldehyde gasses and vapors. Young children, elderly people and those with serious respiratory conditions, from asthma to bronchitis, inhaled these vapors over long, extended periods of time. Am I the only one left scratching his head at this outcome?

“My first reaction was to fire off a letter to FEMA and GSA to find out more about the status of the sales. I asked the heads of these agencies a range of questions, beginning with what steps each of them had taken before disposing of contaminated property.

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“How did they notify buyers that these trailers could be contaminated by excessive formaldehyde? And, if newly proposed standards had been proposed, might it have resulted in reduced formaldehyde exposure?”

“I’d like to thank GSA and FEMA for promptly responding, and explaining, the courses of action they took before making their decision to go forward with the sale of the trailers.

“But, let me state for the record that I would have liked to have seen the federal government commit to more testing of these trailers *before* bringing them to sale.

“I also think it would have been a good idea if the government had come up with better safeguards than simply posting warning stickers and certifications to advise and protect the public.

“I genuinely want our discussion, today, to shed more light on some of the other options for disposing of the surplus trailers that actually came up for discussion. I’d also like to know what other options *could have been* implemented that would have kept FEMA’s costs down and whether or not those possible courses of action *should have been* the subject of greater discussion or, even, action.

“Has it been so long ago since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita took place that our nation has forgotten the painful lessons these epic disasters taught us? I hope not.

“This August will mark the five-year anniversary of these tragic events. It is my sincere hope that this hearing will help us to review what we have learned from that experience so we will not repeat these failures in future emergencies and crises.

“I salute the proud and courageous people of our Gulf Coast states who have moved forward since these events occurred. They’ve pulled together and demonstrated remarkable grace and resilience to repair what was broken and to replace what was lost.

“May God continue to bless and keep you. I look forward to hearing from all of today’s witnesses.

“With that, I yield back the balance of my time. “

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