

## Generator program funded for St. Landry

BY WILLIAM JOHNSON • WJOHNSON@DAILYWORLD.COM • OCTOBER 15, 2008

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A \$500,000 federal grant will allow St. Landry Parish to purchase a fleet of emergency generators to allow critical services to remain operational in a hurricane or other disaster.

"This will definitely help. During Hurricane Gustav generators were one of our hot ticket items, especially for our various water and sewer systems," said Lisa Vidrine, executive director of the St. Landry Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

During that storm, large parts of the parish were without power for days, some areas were without power for essential services a week or more.

State Sen. Eric LaFleur, D-Ville Platte, said the parish's grant is part of a \$30 million state generator program to mitigate against storm-related power issues.

The grant will allow the parish's Office of Emergency Services to purchase a small fleet of mobile generators to power water systems, hospitals, police and fire departments and other critical infrastructure items in the event of a storm or other disaster.

While generous, the grant isn't enough to provide backup generators for everyone. LaFleur said a single 150-kilowatt generator can cost more than \$50,000.

In the last storm, Opelousas alone could have used about a dozen to keep its sewer lift stations operating.

"If these generators are trailer-mounted, however, you can move them around where they are needed and get by with fewer units," LaFleur said.

State Sen. Don Cravins Jr., D-Opelousas, called the program a big help for the parish.

"Moving generators around from staging grounds was troublesome and slow during Gustav," Cravins said. "This will allow St. Landry Parish to quickly address its emergency power needs."

"As long as major water pumps and lift stations are appropriately wired, the generators can be moved and plugged in at locations where they are needed," LaFleur said.

To make sure the generators are used where they are most needed, LaFleur said the generators will be owned and maintained by the parish's emergency preparedness office.

Vidrine said her office is in the process of prioritizing the parish's needs to make sure the money goes as far as possible.

"We are looking at several different options based on what is best for each agency and best for the parish. It all revolves around the life-sustaining principal," Vidrine said.

She said that work is well advanced and the parish should be ready to receive its generators by the end of this year.

While intended for governmental buildings and infrastructure, LaFleur said the mobile generators can also be used to assist private health care facilities such as hospitals or nursing homes that experience power problems even with their own emergency systems.

LaFleur said there is only one negative bit of news concerning this grant - it was first authorized for the parish following hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

"It has taken this long to work its way through the federal and state process. These would have been nice to have six weeks ago for Gustav," LaFleur said.