

## La. Road Home company fined

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The Louisiana Recovery Authority on Tuesday levied a fine of more than \$1 million against the contractor in charge of the program to help homeowners relocate or rebuild houses damaged in the 2005 hurricanes.

The state government entity fined ICF International of Fairfax, Va., \$692,500 for failing to meet a target of 116,000 total Road Home case closings by June 30. The company was also fined \$356,879 for failure to meet other performance measures, according to a prepared statement released by the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

ICF was hired to run the state program, which is called The Road Home.

The company's contract with the state required ICF to close and distribute money in a specific number of cases.

ICF reported closing 114,615 claims as of June 30, which was 105 weeks after the recovery program began. Under the terms of the contract, ICF is required to pay \$500 for each of the 1,385 unclosed claims short of the 116,000 benchmark.

The fine will be subtracted from the payment of the company's next invoice, said Christina Stephens, the Louisiana Recovery Authority press secretary.

A "closing" is the term used to describe the final step of completing the paperwork in order for claimants to receive the money.

Between 15,000 and 25,000 applicants are still waiting for their grants, Stephens said.

Many of those people complained to the Louisiana Legislature that the Road Home program is too slow in handling the paperwork and distributing the recovery funds.

Gentry Brann, director of communications and external affairs for The Road Home Program and vice president of ICF International, said in a prepared statement Tuesday: "We closed 98 percent of all eligible, active, workable files, and therefore have exceeded the intent of the measure, which was to close 95 percent of them by June 30."

Paul Rainwater, Recovery Authority executive director, said in the prepared statement, "We do recognize that many of the homeowners who have yet to close represent the most complicated Road Home cases to close and we are committed to working through the remaining caseload to identify systemic issues and help move to closing."

Most of the cases closed are those in which property ownership papers are in order, Stephens said. Many of the remaining applicants have been more difficult to process, such as property where family members continued to live after the owner died.

"We're not talking about the low hanging fruit anymore," Stephens said.

The Road Home program also announced a previously planned and approved staff layoff, Brann said in another prepared statement Tuesday.

The staff reduction becomes effective Sept. 13 and affects about 550 positions throughout the Homeowner Assistance Program.

In addition, two Housing Assistance Centers, in Chalmette and Harvey, will close Sept. 13. Four Housing Assistance Centers, in New Orleans, Kenner, Baton Rouge and Lake Charles remain open.

"This change is part of the overall plan of the program and will not impact the program's ability to continue processing applications, appeals or elevation awards," Brann said in the statement.

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