



**Robert Eckels**  
County Judge

**OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

# **PRESS ADVISORY**

*Friday*  
**September 24, 2005**  
**11:30 A.M.**

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## **“Spared doesn’t mean Safe” Officials Say to Stay Put, Don’t Come Back Home**

(Harris County, TX) – Houston and Harris County were spared what other parts of the state have seen; a category three hurricane with a 20 foot storm surge and 25 inches of rain. Several hospitals in Texas’ hardest hit areas will require evacuation, buildings have fallen, fires rage and telecommunications are struggling to stay functioning.

“Spared doesn’t mean safe,” says Harris County Judge Robert Eckels.

Over one million in the region remain without power and sporadic power outages continue throughout the Harris County area. Significant damage has been felt as close as downtown Houston and power outages are impacting every corner of the county. Roadways are clear but dangerous and people returning during the storm face the possibility of congestion before gasoline resources have been replenished.

“Let emergency officials assess the damage and clear any dangers. Let us get power restored and re-open hospitals. Our crews from medical and law enforcement are on the ground and they’ll continue to move all over this county but we can’t honestly tell you that is entirely safe for people to come back. Honestly, I’ve told my family to stay put,” adds Eckels.

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While Texas was not hit as hard as expected as a result of Rita's sharp turn north, northeast Texas has been hit hard and reports continue to come in. Harris County officials are now preparing to offer support with emergency medical care and other services.

As early as 2:30 a.m. last night Judge Robert Eckels was working with partners in the Harris County area reviewing equipment capability and sampling new technology to inventory our ability to transfer resources to the hardest hit areas like Beaumont, Texas.

"Harris County is still sustaining damage and we can't tell you how much that is right now. If you are trying to return to Harris County you are doing so at your own risk. We have unconfirmed reports of wash outs and bridge failures. If you go into areas that we have not assessed or secured there is no guarantee that we will be able to help you. We are out in full force to make Harris County a safe place again but if you are coming home now you do so at your own risk," says Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management's Frank Gutierrez.

**[www.hcoem.org/rita](http://www.hcoem.org/rita)**

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