

## Report: New Orleans Population Up

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NEW ORLEANS -- New Orleans' population has grown to about 273,600 people, or 60 percent of the number here before Hurricane Katrina hit nearly two years ago, a new report shows.

Both the report from demographer Greg Rigamer and an earlier household estimate by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center show the city's population continuing to rebound. But Rigamer said he expects it will be "many years" before New Orleans hits its July 2005 population of 455,000 \_ if it ever does.

"Everything is kind of happening in a natural progression," he said, "and when I say natural, I mean slow."

Rigamer bases his estimates on utility hookups, and his figures have tracked closely with U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

According to Rigamer's report, 273,600 people lived in New Orleans as of last month \_ 50,200 more than a year earlier. In July 2005, the month before Katrina hit, the population was about 455,000.

The center, relying on U.S. Postal Service data, said nearly 66 percent of the city's 198,232 pre-Katrina households were receiving mail as of June.

The center's deputy director, Allison Plyer, said the federal government considers household information the "best data we have as a population indicator."

More people means more stress on infrastructure \_ roads, buildings, water and sewer lines. Nearly two years after the storm, the cash-strapped city has yet to begin major reconstruction of its infrastructure.

Rigamer said growth has continued about 1 percent a month, a positive trend since the city has had no major housing or infrastructure developments recently.

Rigamer, in his report, said a significant number of people returned to areas with little flood damage after Katrina and that those gains have "radiated" into nearby neighborhoods.

However, neighborhoods disconnected from more recovered parts of town, such as the hard-hit Lower 9th Ward and parts of Gentilly, have been slower to repopulate, he said.

In July, 917 people lived in the Lower 9th Ward, the report said \_ 7 percent of the population in 2000.