

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Department of Health and Hospitals Update
Programs Available to Help Manage Stress**

BATON ROUGE -- Over the next days and weeks, thousands of Louisiana citizens will be returning home to find downed trees, damaged homes, and power outages. Stress levels may be also rising for thousands of Louisiana citizens who evacuated to shelters. Worries about home damages and the well-being of family and friends can contribute to elevated stress levels.

The Department of Health and Hospitals is reminding individuals of programs available to help them cope during this time of recovery. Louisiana Spirit, the DHH-Office of Mental Health's crisis counseling and stress management program, offers these suggestions to manage the stress that many are facing:

- Remember that rebuilding may take days or weeks
- Make sure to get enough rest
- Keep regular eating habits and drink adequate amounts of water
- Keep things as normal as possible for children
- Seek help when needed, especially from local authorities
- Take care of family and friends
- Listen to the local news for updates

"Stress levels are high right now as everyone wants to return home and begin the process of recovering and rebuilding from the impact of Gustav, but it's critical to remain calm and listen carefully to the authorities," said Anthony Speier, Ph.D., executive director for Louisiana Spirit. "It's also never easy to get home and find damage you didn't expect to see. It can bring on lots of emotions, including feelings of hopelessness and anxiety."

Jennifer Kopke, assistant secretary for the Office of Mental Health adds, "We know that over the next days and weeks, people will be very busy trying to clean up and rebuild. We encourage anyone who may be feeling stressed to call our Louisiana Spirit crisis counselors at (800) 273-8255. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and are ready to listen and to give advice."

The stress of an overwhelming experience can also trigger a relapse in people who are in recovery from addictive disorders, such as drug and alcohol abuse. People who are facing such a struggle can contact the DHH-Office of Addictive Disorder's help line at (877) 664-2248.

For more information about Louisiana Spirit, a free counseling service formed in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, contact Pierre Washington at (225) 219-5031 or (225) 803-4592 or visit the Louisiana Spirit Web site at <http://www.louisianaspirit.org>.