

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

WALTER J. BOASSO

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

HELP, LLC

HEARING OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

JULY 8, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member King and Members of the Committee:

My name is Walter J. Boasso and I am the President (CEO?) of HELP, Inc. and, more importantly, I am a former resident of a FEMA trailer. HELP stands for Housing Emergency Logistics Plan and is a direct outcome of what I experienced as one of the first officials on site in New Orleans dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and what me and my family experienced as displaced residents of New Orleans living in a trailer provided by FEMA after this disaster.

Until recently when I sold my company, I was the CEO/President of Boasso America Corporation. Boasso America is the largest tank container operation in the world, with over 500 employees. Through this role, I have over 30 years of experience and expertise with shipping containers and all of the alternative uses for these items. Our operations covered all of the major ports in the United States including Chicago, Detroit, Charleston, South Carolina, Jacksonville, Florida, Houston and New Orleans.

In addition to my role as CEO and President of Boasso America, I was involved in government through my election to the Louisiana State Senate, serving from 2004 to 2008. My district covered a large section of the east coast of Louisiana and I represented 122,000 people – every one of which was affected in some way by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Through my position as a State Senator, I was part of the first contingent of officials coming in to New Orleans after Katrina's devastation. Mr. Chairman, I could spend hours with this Committee recalling that event and the governmental response to that event. I could describe in detail and through plain and simple facts the loss of life I dealt with, the lack of food, the absence of medicine and safe water, no communications system, no logistical coordination of any kind. I could describe in detail the personal impact of this event on me and my family. My home had 13 feet of water during Hurricane Katrina and 5 feet of water during Hurricane Rita. My business's home office was underwater as well and all of my employees – all of the people who made up Boasso America – lost everything.

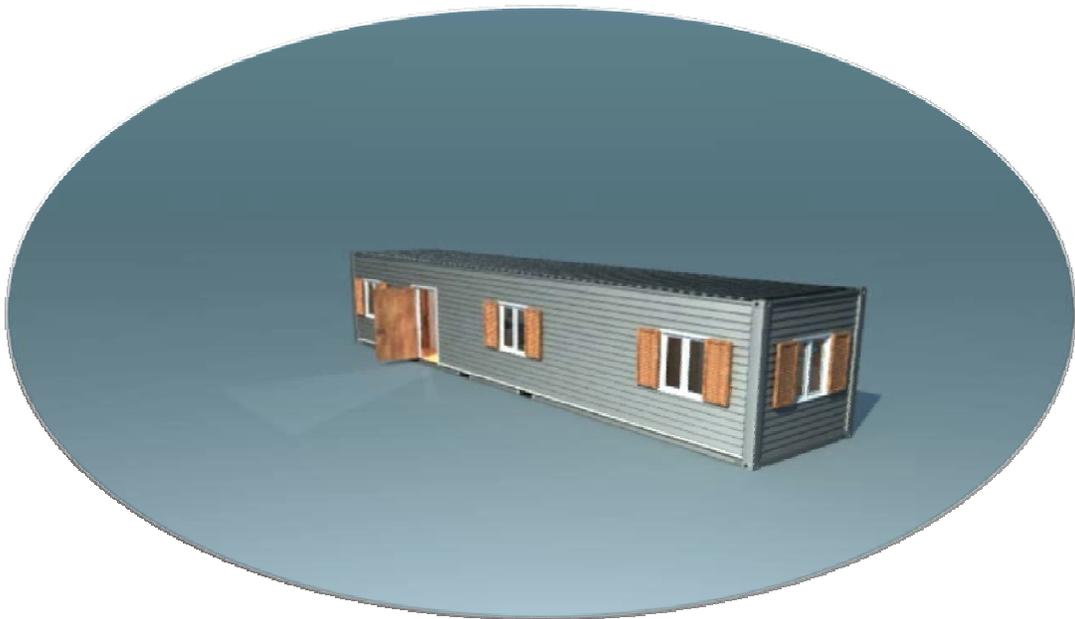
We lost everything because of a natural disaster that occurred and the simple fact that, after it occurred, there was no plan or effort from a governmental level to help people return to their homes or to their work or to have the basic necessities to survive. Quite simply, there was no coordinated state or federal response of any kind for almost 8 days. Mr. Chairman, that's the tragedy of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina. When the people of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish and the other impacted areas of the Gulf needed it the most, the government's emergency and disaster systems and services failed them. And the death and destruction I saw and the responses to these disasters, or in reality the lack of response, led me to begin work on providing an alternative interim housing program or plan and thus was born HELP.

HELP stands for Housing Emergency Logistics Plan and our plan and company provides interim emergency and disaster housing solutions that are more effective, comfortable, environmentally acceptable and cost efficient than the interim housing solutions the government has relied upon for too long. It also incorporates into the overall disaster housing response system a coordination with the nation's intermodal logistics systems in order to get housing units where they're needed as quickly as possible and in the least costly manner possible.

Our model is very efficient and understandable. They are built upon the models of shipping containers – they are made of a heavy steel outer shell in accordance with international shipping container standards and re-styled to suit community housing types and needs. The interiors are built from sustainable materials with no hazardous chemicals involved, thus creating a green environment for the residents. They're handicapped accessible and, most importantly, the internal layouts, furniture and fittings see to provide comfort to those who have suffered the loss of their home in a more "normal" or "home" environment. Also, these units are designed to be hurricane and storm resistant, unlike FEMA trailers.

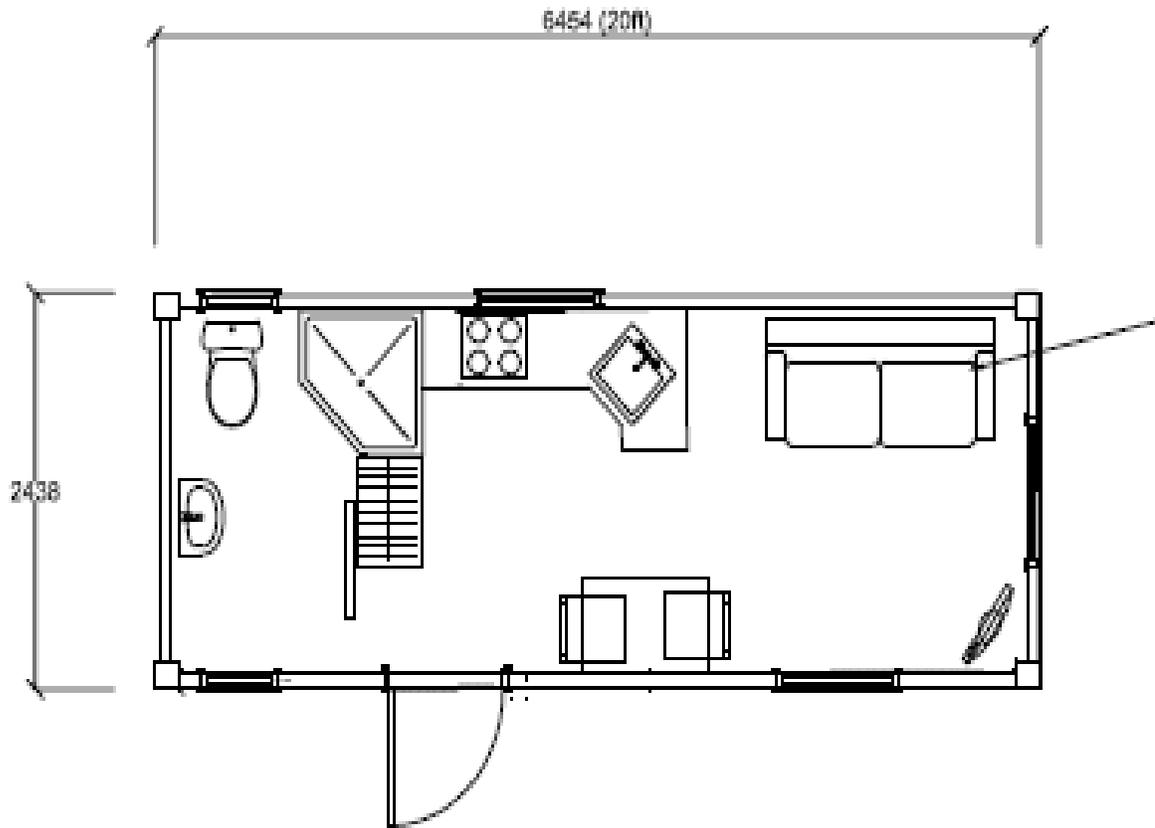
Because of the shipping container model they're based upon, the HELP interim housing units are designed and built for immediate dispatch for placement at the home site of families who have suffered a loss of their home. The units are not dependent upon one (and only one) form of transportation to get them where they're needed. The units can be moved on any conventional container truck chassis readily available throughout the country. They can also be deployed by rail or barge and are placed onsite using standard fork lift trucks.

As shown in the following diagrams, the units are very attractive and, yet, very flexible and versatile in their configurations. The following three diagrams present the outside of the unit and typical 20 and 40-foot in length units.

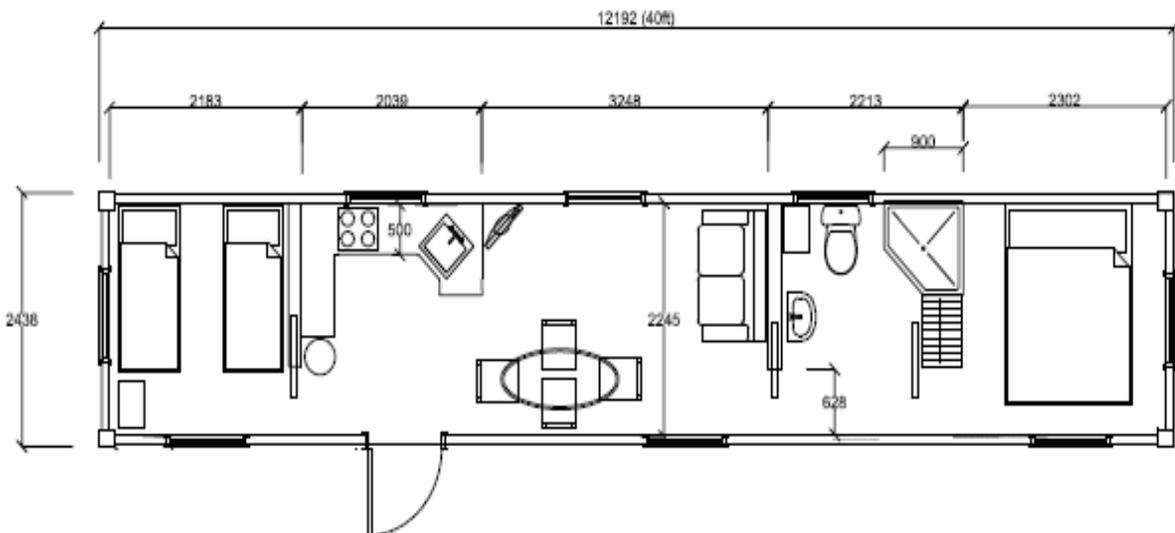


HELP DISASTER HOUSING UNIT

20 FOOT (IN LENGTH) UNIT FOR 2 OCCUPANTS



40 FOOT (IN LENGTH) UNIT FOR UP TO 6 OCCUPANTS



The most important aspect of the HELP model and its disaster housing unit is the storage and reuse factors. Because of the container model it's based upon, the HELP units are stackable and easily

maintained while being stored. As with all shipping containers, the 20-foot and 40-foot HELP units can be stacked up to nine units high. There, over 2000 HELP 20-foot units can be stored on 1 acre of land as opposed to the same acre only able to store 170 FEMA-style 22-foot trailers.

HELP Units stack up to 9 high

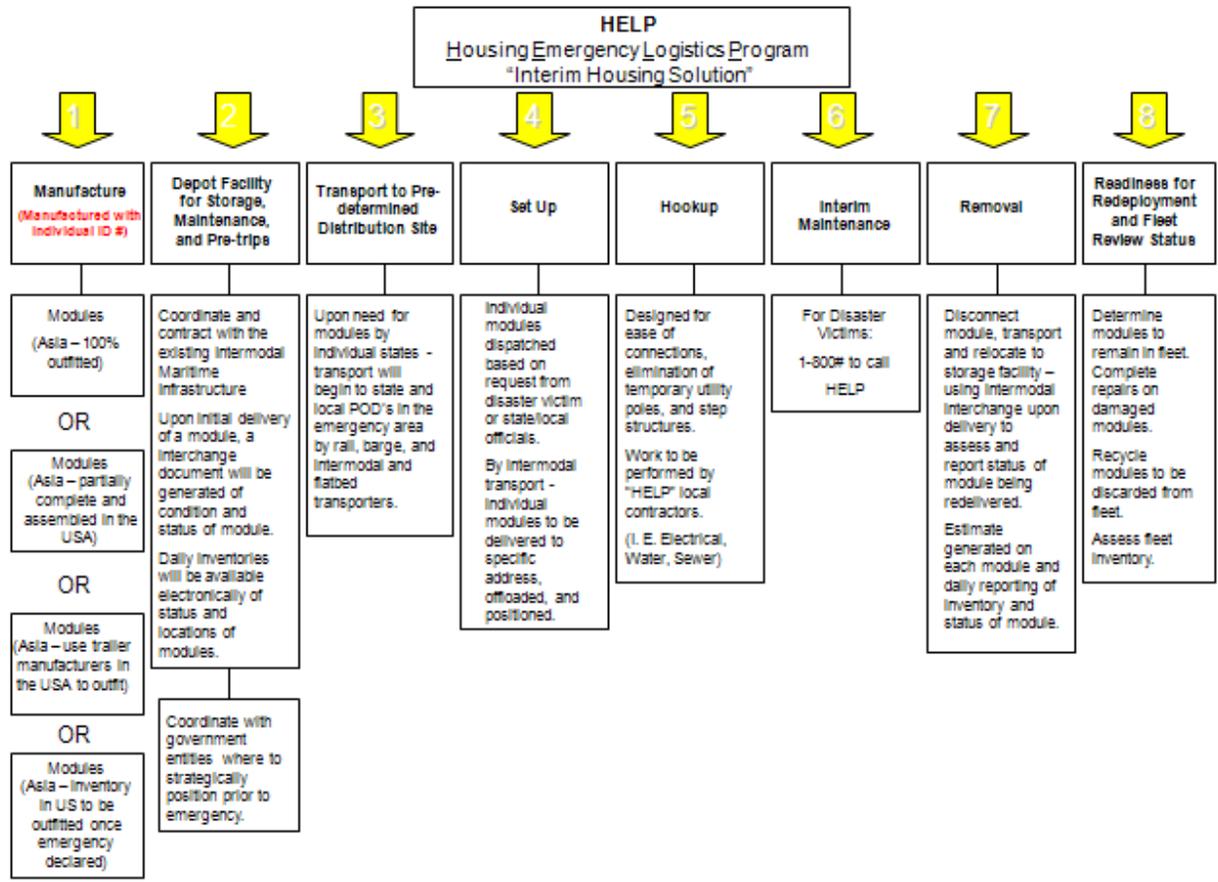


FEMA Trailers in Storage



The flexibility of the units is another important aspect. Only two types of HELP units are needed to accommodate between 2 and 6 persons per unit. Therefore, most families can be accommodated but, if larger units are needed, two or more units can be sited closer together, thus providing unlimited flexibility.

From an environmental perspective, HELP's units stand alone. The units are constructed from sustainable materials that have no hazardous chemicals. The insulation factor in the HELP unit is double that of a FEMA trailer, providing significant energy savings during its use. Air conditioning and ventilation systems are provided with the unit and are easily maintained during both use and storage. Each unit stores its own waste and this waste is either regularly pumped out to a handling vehicle or into the existing community sewage lines. And, as with all shipping containers, the units are recyclable.



July 8, 2009

As outlined in the chart above, the HELP unit model from a logistical standpoint and an implementation standpoint is very simple. The units are manufactured and fitted out. They are stored in pre-positioned or strategic locations. They are transported via any number of modes of transportation to where they are needed in the event of a disaster. They are ready to go when they are delivered and families can start utilizing them immediately. When a family can go back to their home, the units are removed, cleaned up and stored for the next time they're needed. Again, a very simple chain of events logistically.

In particular, as you can see from this chart, the HELP disaster housing unit provides very important elements that other disaster housing units utilized in the past do not and cannot meet. I want to expand on two very significant elements which I hope the Members of the Committee view in the same light as I do. First is the element of storage and the second element is longevity. These two items provide, in my opinion, the criteria that have been missing from the disaster housing options provided by FEMA in the past.

As noted earlier, the HELP units are designed off of shipping containers. Having been in the shipping business for over 30 years, I understand the need for utilizing small spaces for storage as efficiently as possible. Because of the design and because of how they're manufactured, the HELP units can be stored in almost any location and a large number of them can be stored in a small space.

Because of their stackability, we can pre-position or store until needed almost 2,000 units in the same space that only holds around 180 traditional FEMA travel trailers. This storage efficiency frees up valuable space in order to pre-position or store other much-needed disaster response supplies and equipment.

Secondly, with simple maintenance during storage (items such as checking the heating and cooling systems, water and wastewater systems, etc.), the longevity of the unit is significantly higher than traditional FEMA disaster housing options. This single element of longevity ensures that disaster housing assistance is available whenever and wherever it's needed. With enough units on hand at any given location, in a pre-positioned storage facility, the units are ready to be delivered wherever necessary and set up, year after year. There's nothing to rot, nothing to fall apart, no axles to break.

All of the components of the HELP unit add up to one very important point – the HELP unit provides a cost-effective, efficient, long-lasting type of disaster housing that the government and FEMA desperately need. In preparation for my presentation today, I reviewed FEMA's plans contained in the National Disaster Housing Strategy. This strategy laid out several criteria for disaster housing options. These criteria include:

1. Range of Use – How adaptable it would be under various environmental, geographic and cultural or conditions required by local governments;
2. Livability – How well the units can accommodate or help provide for a household's daily living essentials as well as their physical and emotional need;
3. Timeliness – How fast units could be made ready for occupancy;
4. Cost – How cost-effective the unit would be in absolute terms and in terms of its value relative to additional requirements established as critical in meeting FEMA immediate housing needs and priorities that include:
 - a. Footprint – units should be small, capable of HUD certification and suitable for FEMA community sites or privately owned sites;
 - b. UFAS – a sufficient number of units must be available for occupants who are disabled and the units must comply with Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards;
 - c. Indoor Air Quality – utilizing a holistic approach to indoor air quality control measures by eliminating or limiting use of products that contain pollutants, enclosing potentially harmful air pollutant sources in impermeable barriers, using filtration/ventilation to dilute or decrease airborne pollutants, requiring rigorous quality control measures during the manufacturing process, specifying control methods through contracting and procurement processes and other methods of control; and
 - d. Production Lead-Time – providers must be able to deliver a certain number immediately or within a short time frame to meet FEMA's operations and performance requirements.

Let me state again, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, that I reviewed these items only recently and I was surprised at the compatibility of the HELP units with these criteria. Our units meet every one of these criteria and I would hope, because of that fact, that FEMA would see the benefits in having the HELP unit as one of its disaster housing response options.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member King and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity to come before you today and provide information and background on what I believe is truly a significant new tool for FEMA to use in providing disaster housing options for families that have lost their homes and need safe, clean and efficient temporary housing and which can be provided to them almost immediately after a disaster strikes. I lived through Katrina and I've applied the lessons I learned, and lived through, in developing this concept. I want other families that go through a disaster of any kind to not have to go through what I went through and I believe HELP and its product can provide the type of housing that disaster victims need and deserve.

Again, I appreciate this opportunity to provide this information and I will be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.

FOLLOW UP INFORMATION AND OUTLINE OF TESTIMONY

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Summary of Testimony:

- Introduction and Outline of Walter Boasso resume and experience
- Introduction of HELP concept based upon experiences of Mr. Boasso in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
- Overview of HELP units and details
- HELP housing unit benefits and logistical operation
- HELP compatibility with FEMA Housing Assessment Tool criteria and National Disaster Housing Strategy
- Concluding remarks

