

U.S. SURGEON GENERAL VISITS "POOREST OF THE POOR" IN MIGRANT LABOR CAMP

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FLORIDA CITY, FLA. FLORIDA CITY, Fla. (AP) _ U.S. Surgeon General Antonia Novello visited the "poorest of the poor" victims of Hurricane Andrew on Saturday at a migrant camp on the edge of the Everglades. Everglades Labor Camp, a dusty, muddy sprawl in the flat grasses that abut the entrance to Everglades National Park, was almost overlooked after the storm. It's not on any map. Soldiers in the U.S. Army discovered it after the storm.

Novello, who is Hispanic, said it was important that migrant workers not be overlooked in relief efforts. She said many who only speak Spanish could become intimidated and confused if confronted with English-speaking bureaucrats. "We are not going to let the poorest of the poor be forgotten," Novello said after landing at the camp by Army helicopter.

Novello toured the camp clinic where she held sick babies. She said she was "amazed and relieved" that no health epidemics surfaced after the storm, as she had feared. Later, she attended a meeting between Federal Emergency Management Agency officials and migrant workers at the camp, and tempers flared over housing delays.

"Sometimes there can be a difference between perception and reality," Novello said at the hot, crowded center, where families waited for FEMA to process their housing applications. "They need to understand things in their own language. If they don't, they can get angry and that brings desperation and the belief that no one cares for them."

More than 400 trailers were destroyed in the hurricane, leaving more than 150 families homeless at the camp. New trailers are scheduled to arrive Wednesday. More than 3,000 migrant workers live within three areas of the camp. Some live in federally subsidized housing that sustained only minor damage. The majority are Mexican and the rest are from Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

"They don't have anything left," said Arturo Lopez, of the Coalition of Florida Farmworkers Organization. "For most farm workers, their biggest asset is their car and a lot of them even lost those in the storm. So now they lost the one thing they need to get to work."