

## **For evacuees, missing IDs are a roadblock to recovery**

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Trying to survive and find her mother as water submerged the city, Christal Johnson thought little about her belongings, least of all her wallet.

It may have slipped out of her pocket when she tripped over a downed tree as she tried to navigate through thigh-high water. Or maybe she simply left it with \$400, a photo identification card and her Social Security card in the apartment.

"You are rushing and you are panicking and you see water around you. You don't have time to grab anything," the 19-year-old said.

Johnson, a factory worker, escaped the floods. Her family is alive, and she and her uncle flew from New Orleans to stay with a relative in Antioch.

But she is finding that without a photo ID and other documentation, it is going to be hard to establish a life again.

A woman Johnson met on a bus offered to help her get part-time work at Wal-Mart last week. Unable to prove her identity, Johnson knew she didn't have a chance.

"Say you were right now writing me a personal check, how could I cash it? How can I get a job if I don't have an ID?"

"If the police stop me and ask for my identification, I have no proof to show who I am," she said.

It's unknown how many of the 1 million Hurricane Katrina evacuees lost their identity cards and other vital records.

The Louisiana Department of Motor Vehicles established a link on its Web site for displaced victims to apply for replacement state ID cards and driver's licenses. Social Security offices on the Gulf Coast are open extra hours to handle requests from people who may need to know their identification number or get a new card.

"In an era where identity means everything, it must be pretty traumatic for those people who have lost everything," said Chris Johnson, a Red Cross spokesman.

The identity confusion also creates opportunities for crooks. One Georgia woman was arrested this week on charges that she lied about being an evacuee from New Orleans and fraudulently received \$1,300 from the Red Cross.

Consumer advocates are also warning of identity thefts and are telling evacuees to watch their bank statements and order a copy of their credit reports once they get their lives back together.

Christal Johnson was able to apply for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency because she has her Social Security number memorized. She has also received some aid from Red Cross, which allows evacuees to identify themselves using their former addresses.

But she needs an ID and money to fly to Dallas so she can reunite with her mother, whom she talks to every day on the phone.

"Throughout the whole thing, I was worried about my momma," Christal Johnson said. "I didn't know if she made it out of the water."