# **Superdome Provides Shelter, but Not Comfort**

NEW ORLEANS – They lined up by the thousands to get inside, clutching meager belongings and crying children. A few hours later, the power went out, turning the building into a muggy mess. Then part of the roof blew off.

For an estimated 8,000 to 9,000 refugees — many of them poor and frail — the **Louisiana Superdome** ([search](about:blank)) was a welcome shelter from Hurricane Katrina, but a miserable one at the same time.

• [Click here to track Hurricane Katrina.](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/refresh/graphics_at2%2Bshtml/145105.shtml?3day?large)

With water pressure dwindling, the bathrooms are filthy. Barrels overflow with trash. Anxious to see what happened to their homes, a large group of refugees gathered by barricades near an exit and demanded that they be allowed to leave. They were told it is not yet safe.

"We all want to be home," said Kenelra Morrison, 23. "We know we can't be home, but you can't help being frustrated."

The refugees spent Monday sitting in the seats of the stadium and others sprawled out on blankets and towels on the floor. They played cards and read books and magazines in the areas of the arena where the lights worked in the 77,000-seat stadium, home of the NFL's **New Orleans Saints** ([search](about:blank)). Refugees were given two meals a day.

Superdome and government emergency officials stressed that they did not expect the huge roof to fail because of the relatively small breaches caused by Katrina's winds.

Refugees sitting below the holes were moved across the arena and away from any falling debris, said Doug Thornton, regional manager of the company that manages the stadium.

"I could have stayed at home and watched my roof blow off," said one of the refugees, Harald Johnson, 43. "Instead, I came down here and watched the Superdome roof blow off. It's no big deal; getting wet is not like dying."

In addition to the two holes, water was leaking in through many other areas, including elevators and stairwells, as the wind forced water in through any small opening. Across Poydras Street, numerous shattered windows were visible on high-rise office buildings.

"I was OK until that roof fell off," said 82-year-old Anice Sexton. "I was terrified then. Otherwise it hasn't been too bad. People are so nice and the people staying here have really been cooperative. But the washrooms are terrible."

Police chief Eddie Compass said he planned on letting the people go outside into a concourse area to get some fresh air. Doug Thornton, a regional vice president for the company that manages the Superdome, said he did not know how long the refugees would be in the building.

"Right now I'm just worried about how to keep 10,000 people comfortable in a building with no air conditioning and very little light. Our focus is strictly on that."

Power failed around 5 a.m., triggering groans from the crowd. The inside of the Superdome quickly became very hot with no air conditioning, and condensation made some floors wet and slippery.

The Superdome opened its doors at noon Sunday, and New Orleans' most frail residents got priority. The stadium is by far the most solid of the Big Easy's 10 refuges for the estimated 100,000 city residents who don't have the means, or strength, to join a mandatory evacuation.

"They hadn't opened up and let us in here, there'd have been a lot of people floating down river tomorrow," said Merrill Rice, 64. "If it's as bad as they say, I know my old house won't stand it."

Residents lined up for blocks as National Guardsman searched them for guns, knives and drugs. It was almost 10:30 p.m. before the last person was searched and allowed in. "We've got sick babies, sick old people and everything in between," said Dr. Kevin Stephens Sr., in charge of the medical shelter in the Superdome. "We're seen strokes, chest pain, diabetes patients passing out, seizures, people without medicine, people with the wrong medicine. It's been busy."

Morris Bivens, 53, a painter, came to the dome with his wife, daughter and five granddaughters ranging in age from 1 to 9.

"I had to come," he said. "Not for me. I ride these out all the time. But I knew I couldn't save those children in this one if something happened."

Dr. Thuong Vo was on his honeymoon in New Orleans with his pregnant wife, Stephanie Tran, when they were taken to the Superdome. Vo has been treating people during the day and sleeping on the concrete floor at night with his wife.

"Well, it'll probably be an adventurous baby," he said. "It's certainly been an eventful honeymoon."