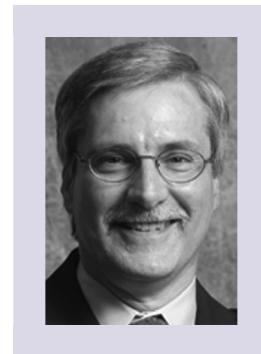


The Astrodome, Post-Katrina

Cover Photo by Michael J. Klag, MD, MPH

The Astrodome in Houston, Texas, was once billed as the “Eighth Wonder of the World.” In September 2005, the world’s first domed sports stadium housed a different sort of spectacle. Its massive vaulted ceiling provided shelter for thousands of evacuees from Louisiana left homeless by Hurricane Katrina.

One week after becoming dean of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Michael J. Klag visited the Astrodome “mega shelter” as a liaison between the American Red Cross and federal, state, and local agencies. Klag’s photograph captures the scene. Cots line the very field on which AstroTurf was introduced. A health clinic and counseling services were set up on the 50-yard line.



“Unless you were there, it is difficult to imagine the magnitude of the disaster and the consequent human suffering. The city of Houston and the American Red Cross have met the challenge in an incredibly admirable and generous way,” said Klag.

“What this disaster did was show us the cracks in our infrastructure, not only in disaster response but also in health care,” Klag said. “If people had access to health care and were receiving medical therapy, the health burden on the evacuees would be less. For me, the scene in the Astrodome illustrated the disparity between the haves and have nots of our society. No one in the Astrodome had a credit card. Anyone who could pay to be in a motel was somewhere else.”

Among his suggestions for future disasters, Klag recommends developing standardized processes and forms for recording health data, better health training for volunteers, and improving communication among public health, federal agencies, and volunteer organizations like the Red Cross.