



# FEMA

## *Katrina's Challenge: A Small Elevated House*

**Pascagoula, MS** – Laura Watson’s house on Pine Street in Pascagoula, Mississippi, has suffered damage over the years from repetitive flooding caused by heavy rains and hurricanes. Concerned that she would have to leave the home and community she loves, Ms. Watson decided it was necessary to take steps to mitigate her home against storm damage after Hurricanes Elena (1985) and Georges (1998).

Ms. Watson received funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). The approved project totaled \$43,050, and was administered by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). “The HMGP funds made it possible for Ms. Watson to elevate her home,” said Director Robert Latham of MEMA. “The choice to do so prior to Hurricane Katrina certainly saved her home from becoming a total loss.”

The house was elevated to 14.1 feet above mean sea level on eighteen 10-inch by 10-inch timber pilings embedded six feet into the ground. The pilings are located on the front, center, and back of the house for support. White lattice, which is designed to break away, conceals a storage space beneath the home. Corner bracings were added for further support, and galvanized hurricane straps were also installed.

Ms. Watson evacuated to Alabama as Hurricane Katrina approached the Gulf Coast. As the storm hammered her community, Ms. Watson’s next door neighbor, who lives on higher ground and did not evacuate, kept her informed of conditions in Pascagoula by telephone. Ms. Watson vividly remembers her neighbor saying, “Laura, your yard looks like the Mississippi River.” As she listened to her neighbor’s descriptions of the storm and its impact on her property, she kept up hope that her house would survive.

Ms. Watson returned to her home two days later, when the water from the Gulf had retreated. She looked at her house and thought, “thank God my house is still standing.”

Ms. Watson surveyed her house for damages, and was amazed to find that practically everything was intact. There was one broken window on the back of the house and scattered debris in the yard from surrounding properties. Upon further inspection, she discovered that although the house was elevated, five feet of water had entered the living area. However, Laura noted, “if my house had not been elevated it would have been completely under water.

Ms. Watson immediately began cleaning her house to protect it from further damage and to protect herself from potential health problems that are caused by mold. She knew it was necessary to dry out water-damaged areas of the house and her personal belongings within 24 to 48 hours to help prevent mold from developing.

Unfortunately, a family across the street did not fare as well as Ms. Watson did during Katrina. Their house was completely submerged and is uninhabitable; it sits in the same low-lying area and is not elevated.



**Jackson County,  
Mississippi**



### **Quick Facts**

Sector:

**Private**

Cost:

**\$43,050.00 (Actual)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Elevation, Structural**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**