WASHINGTON (AP) - Most of the changes in natural disaster preparedness proposed by the White House and Congress since Hurricane Katrina are years away at best, leaving the Gulf Coast and other areas vulnerable to new devastation.

Only a few of the 211 suggested improvements from three federal reports will be ready when the hurricane season starts June 1, and limited dollars and political squabbling already are complicating the progress.

"Nature doesn't care about reports," said Kathleen Tierney, director of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado. "Nor does it care about the fact there are people still suffering, and we're not ready.

"The big question in everybody's mind is whether entities that proved themselves incompetent to handle Hurricane Katrina can become competent by the summer of 2006," Tierney said Friday. "So far, we've seen no evidence of that."

Separate investigations by the House, Senate and White House delved into managing an emergency response to a storm as massive as Katrina, which stretched across 90,000 square miles:

--The House report did not make any recommendations for change. It did conclude that local, state and federal officials lacked any sense of urgency in preparing for catastrophic disasters.

--The White House inquiry focused on flawed federal plans and confusion during the storm, which hit Aug. 29. The report made 125 recommendations, including 11 to be completed by June 1, including plans for evacuating victims, ably tracking supplies and delivering quick information from disaster zones.

--The Senate report, portions of which were released last week, offered 86 recommendations, most notably replacing the Federal Emergency Management Agency with a more potent successor. The report made the case for more money local, state and federal responders, without saying how much or the source of the dollars.

"We recognize that our recommendations will not be enacted in the next five weeks, before the next hurricane season begins," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who led the Senate inquiry. "But we cannot stay with the same deeply flawed system that has proven that it simply does not work."

President Bush on Friday rejected the idea of killing FEMA.
"The lessons of Katrina are important," Bush said. "We've learned a lot here at the federal level. We're much more ready this time than we were the last time."

"Let's, first of all, pray there's no hurricanes," Bush said. "That would be, like, step one."

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who oversees FEMA, has said he expects the agency to meet the June 1 deadline for the White House's 11 top-priority changes.

FEMA's chief, R. David Paulison, said in an interview Friday he views the reports as blueprints for the agency's future and he puts them into two groups: "What can we accomplish now, in this hurricane season, and what are some of the long-term issues?"

Local and state authorities had little, if any, input on shaping the federal recommendations, said Bev Cigler, a public policy professor at Penn State University. She has worked with local and state responders while helping lead a Katrina task force set up by the American Society for Public Administration.

The reports, she said, are "a skeletal set of recommendations that are pretty commonsensical and, unfortunately, needs more money."

Congress examined long-standing design problems with New Orleans' levees, which broke during Katrina's surge and led to flooding of 80 percent of the city. Repairing the levees by the hurricane season's start has been a paramount concern for Louisiana officials, said Walter Isaacson, vice chairman of the state's recovery authority.

Five weeks out, it looks as though that will happen. "We'll have good levees that won't break," Isaacson said.

Rep. Charlie Melancon, D-La., is more skeptical. Making sure the levees can withstand another Katrina takes more money that he said Congress will be reluctant to approve. The storm already has cost the federal government $103 billion, the Senate Budget Committee says.

"The doling out a little bit at a time is difficult, and then having to compete for it is difficult," Melancon said. "The reports themselves, I believe, make Americans aware that the Gulf Coast has still got serious problems and a long recovery."