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Post-hurricane study advances

By Paul Grondahl

Richard Nathan, co-director of the Rockefeller Institute in Albany, spent last week conducting field research in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast.

He's completing the final phase of a three-year study of government's response to the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"It's a mixed bag," Nathan said.

"There are some success stories, but there are still huge amounts of rubble, sporadic rebuilding in the worst areas and all kinds of finger-pointing that the feds didn't do this and the locals didn't do that," he added.

Nathan has delegated much of the day-to-day operations of the institute to others so he could take a

lead role in the research and writing of six thick reports and a forthcoming book focusing on the response to the catastrophe by more than 40 state and local governments and school districts in three states.

The project is supported with a \$900,000 Ford Foundation grant. Nathan's group is partnering with the Public Affairs Research Council in Baton Rouge.

The study casts a critical eye at how \$116 billion pledged in federal money is being spent.

"There's been good work by some non-profit groups in the balance sheet we provide," Nathan said.

"There's a small box in New Orleans which is pretty secure where the levies are believed to be strong enough. But all around that box, there's a lot of work left to do," he said."