Yes, FEMA trailers will still be available to help those displaced by the tornadoes of February 5, local FEMA representative Rita Egan said on Monday, February 25. But no, not even FEMA knows when the trailers will arrive.

Mayor Shelvy Linville was told last week that trailers stored in Hope, Arkansas would be opened up for several weeks before being tested for formaldehyde, but was given no date of delivery.

“I think I’m starting to see the bureaucratic wheels get stuck in the mud,” Linville said on Friday.

“I’ve gone as far up the ladder as I can go with this FEMA thing. I’m disappointed that they haven’t arrived; but we don’t want them if they’re going to make people sick. And if it’s true about the formaldehyde, I’m disappointed that this wasn’t taken care of a long time ago, when it first came up. The big concern to me is this is a bridge they should’ve crossed a long time ago.”

After the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released test results on February 7 that indicated dangerously high formaldehyde levels in trailers used to house victims of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA issued a statement vouching that the Tennessee-bound trailers were safe.

A press release issued by the CDC on February 14 indicated that average levels of formaldehyde in the 519 trailers that were tested at FEMA’s request was .77ppm (parts per million). Acceptable long-term expo-sure limit is 0.008ppm.

These conclusions support the need to move quickly to relocate trailer residents before the warmer weather of summer, placing highest priority on those who are symptomatic and/or especially vulnerable, the press release goes on to say.

It further recommended that those living in FEMA-supplied travel trailers and mobile homes should spend as much time outdoors in fresh air as possible, open windows as much as possible, and keep the temperature inside as low as comfortable.

Do not smoke, especially do not smoke indoors.

Families that include children, the elderly, and those with chronic diseases such as asthma should make a special effort to get as much fresh air as possible, and these families should make relocating to permanent housing a priority, the press release concludes.

Trailers, or ‘manufactured housing’ in FEMA terms, will be provided only after all other housing options have been exhausted, said Egan.

FEMA representatives are looking for rental property for Tennessee applicants that lost or were displaced from their homes. FEMA has received a total of 485 applications from Macon County, 175 from Sumner County, and 65 from Trousdale County.

Single-wide, 14’x60’, fully furnished mobile homes will be provided. Egan said that before the Hope, Arkansas trailers are sent to Tennessee they will be aired out for several weeks, then shut up again before being tested.