

# Loper to step down Dec. 1

By **KAREN NELSON**

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**PASCAGOULA** — Butch Loper is stepping down from his job as Jackson County civil defense director and into something that's not as constantly urgent.

Loper has guided Jackson County through Ivan, Dennis, Cindy, Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Faye and Ike in the 4½ years he has been the county's civil defense director. Not to mention an ice storm, tornadoes and a refinery fire.

"I took the job in May 2004 and I can say I took it at a very active time," Loper said Thursday. "I've learned a lot and feel I've brought our preparedness a long way. But it's taken its toll on me. I'm trying to lessen my stress, to be honest with you."

Loper said he knew it was time to do something different when he found himself sitting in a hospital waiting room with a laptop, e-mailing updates on Hurricane Gustav while awaiting word on his wife's surgery.

"When I commit to something, I'm 100 percent," Loper said about his work.

Loper will take what's technically a county promotion to the job of assistant Road



**Loper**

Department manager, a job he held unofficially before he became civil defense director.

"I'll still be assisting with emergency management whenever I'm needed," Loper said. "I just won't be in the hot seat as the director."

Loper will work on getting the county completely through Katrina recovery by herding FEMA- and MEMA-funded projects through the system so the county won't miss out on any federal or state funding. There's a deadline looming next year on federal funding for Katrina and there are still projects pending in Jackson County.

He also has experience in right-of-way acquisition for roads, real estate appraising and review appraising.

He said the county was saving money having him do review appraisals and right-of-way management before he moved to civil defense, so he'll return to that role Dec. 1.

The county will appoint a new director of civil defense. Loper is hoping Donald

Langham, his assistant, will move up. Board of Supervisors President John McKay said that is a possibility, but the county will advertise for the job and see who applies.

Paige Roberts, local Red Cross director, has worked with Loper from the beginning. Both started with Hurricane Ivan, and learned together how desperately the county needed shelters.

She said Red Cross handles the shelters, but it's the civil defense director who is ultimately responsible for the welfare and well-being of the people of the county during a disaster.

"He has a huge responsibility," she said. "We open shelters because he thinks we need to open them."

Loper said the work he'll miss most is forming partnerships with industry and emergency responders, and serving the public.

He said the county has come a long way in preparedness, but has a ways to go.

Since Katrina, and even before, his office has been absorbed with recovery.

"We've needed to get recovery out of that office," he said, "so civil defense can focus on preparedness."