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**MEDIA**

# Praise for Reports on Hurricane Katrina

By **BRIAN STELTER** APRIL 25, 2010

They are not winning trophies or plaques, but some journalists who write about New Orleans are unwittingly earning “Seals of Approval” from Levees.org, a group that educates people about why the city was so vulnerable.

The recognitions, which take the form of e-mail messages to the writers and editors, are meant to discourage the notion that the flooding after Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster.

“We want reporters to know when we notice when they take the extra couple of words — just two or three more words — to describe the flooding accurately,” Sandy Rosenthal, the founder of Levees.org, said last week. “A major American city went underwater and many people died; we think those few extra words are worth the effort.”

Ms. Rosenthal and other advocates say they are resisting “Katrina shorthand.” To blame the storm for the devastating flooding, they say, is misleading; several engineering studies have affirmed that levee failure was responsible for most of the flooding, and a federal judge ruled last year that negligence by the Army Corps of Engineers was partly at fault.

“Katrina shorthand,” Ms. Rosenthal said, has diminished as time has passed, but it remains a concern. By praising the reporters who get it right, the group hopes to “encourage them to continue to report accurately,” she said. “There’s nothing like reinforcement.”

The group says it has sent 30 to 40 of the letters since the initiative started last November.

Julian Benbow, a basketball writer for The Boston Globe, received one for specifying that “the storm hit Monday, the levees broke Tuesday.” The Post-Tribune of Northwest Indiana received one for saying that the Army Corps of Engineers’ “system of levees failed in New Orleans.” Eric Deggans, a television critic for The St. Petersburg Times, received one after writing a column about the HBO series “Treme,” which is set in New Orleans. On his blog Friday, he called the e-mail message an “odd attaboy for a line in a column I thought was simple as saying the sun rises in the east.”

As a rule, journalists don’t like attaboys for any reason (unless there’s a check attached). Ms. Rosenthal said that her organization would keep sending the virtual Seals of Approval at least until the fifth anniversary of the flood in August. “Hopefully,” she said, “the day will come when we don’t have to do it anymore. Our goal is for this to be household knowledge.”

***Correction: April 28, 2010***

An article on Monday about Levees.org, an advocacy organization that sends notes of praise to journalists who correctly ascribe the flooding in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to levee failure, misstated the given name for its founder. She is Sandy Rosenthal — not Susan.

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