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New Orleans fires 51 police absent after Katrina

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NEW ORLEANS (Reuters) - The New Orleans Police Department on Friday fired 51 staff who walked away from their posts during or just after Hurricane Katrina, a department spokesman said.

Another 15 officers chose to resign while investigators examined their reasons for not reporting to duty, said New Orleans Police Department spokesman Capt. Marlon Defillo.

"It is unfortunate that some members did not uphold their oath of office," acting police Superintendent Warren Riley said in a statement. "We should not dwell on them because they did not have the best interest of the city or their colleagues at heart."

Riley has said that about 15 percent of the force did not show up for work after the August 29 storm that leveled whole neighborhoods and unleashed a deadly flood.

New Orleans police have been widely criticized for failing to control lawlessness after Katrina.

The 51 who were fired on Friday -- 45 officers and 6 civilian employees -- walked away from the job and have not reported back for duty, Defillo said.

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Defillo said.

Police will not be disciplined if they had good reason for not reporting, including those who were trapped on rooftops awaiting evacuation or out of radio contact, he said.

Another 54 New Orleans police officers who were not under administrative review either resigned to take jobs in other cities or retired in the first few weeks after Katrina.

Some officers are under investigation for possible involvement in looting, including the theft of nearly 200 cars from a local dealership.

The firings, resignations and retirements left New Orleans with 1,448 officers.

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