Disaster Planning Basics: Why Prepare?

Being prepared can reduce the fear, anxiety, and losses that accompany disasters. Communities, families, and individuals should be ready to evacuate their homes, take refuge in public shelters, and know how to care for their basic medical needs. People also can reduce the impact of disasters by flood proofing, elevating a home or moving a home out of harm's way, and securing items that could shake loose in an earthquake. The need to prepare is real. Disasters disrupt hundreds of thousands of lives every year. Each disaster has lasting effects, both to people and property.

- If a disaster occurs in your community, local government and disaster-relief organizations will try to help you, but you need to be ready as well. Local responders may not be able to reach you immediately, or they may need to focus their efforts elsewhere.

- You should know how to respond to severe weather or any disaster that could occur in your area, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, extreme cold, flooding, or terrorism.

- You should also be ready to be self-sufficient for at least 3 days. This may mean providing for your own shelter, first aid, food, water, and sanitation.

For Citizens

Every citizen in this country is part of a national emergency
management system that is all about protection—protecting people and property from all types of hazards. Think of the national emergency management system as a pyramid with you, the citizen, forming the base of the structure. You have a responsibility to protect yourself and your family by knowing what to do before, during, and after an event.

**Before**

- Know the risks and danger signs.
- Purchase insurance, including flood insurance, which is not part of your homeowner’s policy.
- Develop a plan for what to do.
- Assemble a disaster supplies kit.
- Volunteer to help others.

**During**

- Put your plan into action.
- Help others.
- Follow the advice and guidance of officials in charge of the event.

**After**

- Repair damaged property.
- Take steps to prevent or reduce future loss.

**Local Community**

It is sometimes necessary to turn to others within the local community for help. The local level is the second tier of the pyramid, and is made up of paid employees and volunteers from the private and public sectors. These individuals are engaged in preventing emergencies from happening and in being prepared to respond if something does occur. Most emergencies are handled at the local level, which puts a tremendous responsibility on the community for taking care of its citizens. Among the responsibilities faced by local officials are

- Identifying hazards and assessing potential risk to the community
- Enforcing building codes, zoning ordinances, and land-use management programs
- Coordinating emergency plans to ensure a quick and effective response
- Fighting fires and responding to hazardous materials incidents
• Establishing warning systems
• Stocking emergency supplies and equipment
• Assessing damage and identifying needs
• Evacuating the community to safer locations
• Taking care of the injured
• Sheltering those who cannot remain in their homes
• Aiding recovery efforts

State

If support and resources are needed beyond what the local level can provide, the community can request assistance from the state. The state may be able to provide supplemental resources such as money, equipment, and personnel to close the gap between what is needed and what is available at the local level. The state also coordinates the plans of the various jurisdictions so that activities do not interfere or conflict with each other.

Federal Government

At the top of the pyramid is the federal government, which can provide resources to augment state and local efforts. These resources can be in the form of

• Public educational materials that can be used to prepare the public for protecting itself from hazards
• Financial grants for equipment, training, exercises, personnel, and programs
• Grants and loans to help communities respond to and recover from disasters so severe that the president of the United States has deemed them beyond state and local capabilities
• Research findings that can help reduce losses from disaster
• Technical assistance to help build stronger programs

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Following a disaster, community members may be on their own for a period of time because of the size of the area affected, lost communications, and impassable roads.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program supports local response capability by training volunteers to organize themselves and spontaneous volunteers at the disaster site, to provide immediate assistance to victims, and to collect disaster intelligence to support responders' efforts.
when they arrive. CERT members are taught basic organizational skills that they can use to help themselves, their loved ones, and their neighbors until help arrives.

Citizen Corps

Citizen Corps provides opportunities for people across the country to participate in a range of measures to make their families, their homes, and their communities safer from the threats of crime, terrorism, public health issues, and disasters of all kinds. Through public education, training opportunities, and volunteer programs, every American can do their part to be better prepared and better protected and to help their communities do the same.

Citizen Corps is managed at the local level by Citizen Corps Councils, which bring together leaders from law enforcement, fire, emergency medical and other emergency management, volunteer organizations, local elected officials, the private sector, and other community stakeholders. These Citizen Corps Councils will organize public education on disaster mitigation and preparedness, citizen training, and volunteer programs to give people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to support their community's emergency services and to safeguard themselves and their property.