

All Disasters are Personal:

National Disaster Preparedness Starts with Every American Citizen

Abstract

Currently and in past years, the various levels of government in the United States have spent tens of billions of dollars and countless man hours on achieving national preparedness. Yet studies, commissions, reports and experts all report that America is in fact, not prepared. This paper will analyze the basic premise that “All Disasters are Local” and take it one step further. This author is of the opinion that America will never truly mitigate the terrible consequences of disaster events until all citizens are individually prepared; that all Americans have the comprehension, willingness and energy to militate against, prepare for, respond to and recover from their own disaster events.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze what it will involve to totally prepare the United States for future disasters and catastrophic events. The author will review what has occurred in the past, the successes and failures in the current system and what strategies and activities will be required to prepare every American citizen.

The U.S. Congress *Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina* stated “the failure of local, state, and federal governments to respond more effectively to Katrina - which had been predicted in theory for many years, and forecast with startling accuracy for five days - demonstrates that whatever improvements have

been made to our capacity to respond to natural or man-made disasters, four and half years after 9/11, we are still not fully prepared.” (Initiative 1).

Simply put, America is not prepared for major disaster events. The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 demonstrate the general lack of disaster preparedness on the part of the government and its citizens. Even though all levels of American government have not revealed a totally effective level of preparedness and response, it is not because of a lack of effort or the expenditures of resources. All levels of government, federal, state and local, have spent tens of billions of dollars on emergency management and response. American governments have shown some successes in the arena of disaster preparedness. However, there has been only a basic level of effort to alter the mindset of the American public towards one of individual and family preparedness. The comments of “It can’t happen to me” and “Not in my backyard” are far too prevalent in the American psyche and the reality has demonstrated time and again that those that are impacted the greatest by disasters are those citizens with this denial viewpoint.

In speaking about “disaster preparedness”, one must define what that term means. The Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA defines a disaster as “An occurrence of a natural catastrophe, technological accident, or human-caused event that has resulted in severe property damage, deaths, and/or multiple injuries [...] a “large-scale disaster” is one that exceeds the response capability of the local jurisdiction and requires State, and potentially Federal, involvement. As used in the Stafford Act, a “major disaster” is “any natural catastrophe [...] or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under [the] Act to supplement the efforts and available

resources or States, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby.” (SLG 101, GLO-1)”. The *2004 National Response Plan* or NRP defines preparedness as “The range of deliberate, critical tasks and activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the operational capability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents. Preparedness is a continuous process involving efforts at all levels of government and between government and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to identify threats, determine vulnerabilities, and identify required resources.” (NRP 71). Basically, disaster preparedness is “a state of readiness for a sudden accident of natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life.” (AskOxford). It is an attitude and an effort to think through what could happen and institute activities to mitigate the effects and arrange for an effective response and recovery.

An indication of the problem relating to the individual’s responsibility for the preparedness of each individual lies in the Federal government’s definitions of disaster preparedness. The FEMA definition discusses when the local government is overwhelmed, but does not include when citizens themselves are overwhelmed. The NRP definition speaks to the efforts of official organizations, but again, does not include the efforts of individual citizens. Americans have slowly handed over responsibility for their safety and wellbeing in large part to the government, which has, in some ways, encouraged this negligent mindset. Early American settlers perished if they did not “look-out” for themselves and their families. Over time, our “Government” has steadily taken over this responsibility and many citizens have lost the ability or will to take care of themselves during disaster events and emergencies.

During all disaster and emergency events, the first people affected are average citizens in communities much like our own. The first emergency responders on scene at an emergency are the local fire, police and emergency medical services responders from these communities. The first emergency managers that begin coordinating the response and recovery are the local emergency management directors. An event may grow to encompass an entire region or an entire nation; however, it is still impacting one community at a time. A local emergency responder is still the first to respond and the last to leave. “A basic premise of the NRP is that incidents are generally handled at the lowest jurisdictional level possible (NRP 15).

State and federal government agencies cannot be everywhere. In most instances, it is going to take a measurable amount of time to alert higher authorities, request additional resources, and activate, mobilize and deploy those state and federal resources. The local responders are typically going to be on their own for this amount of time. It may take several hours to for state resources to be on seen in limited amounts. It will take two to three days for most federal resources to arrive on scene.

Local emergency managers and responders take action because people are in need or in danger. If no one is in danger and there are no damages to property or the environment, and there is no threat to life and property, then there is no emergency and no activation of the emergency forces. Emergencies and disasters impact people’s lives. Each impacted person is an individual who suffers some physical, emotional or financial harm. A basic concept of emergency management philosophy is that “all disasters are local.” In fact, because of the impact that these events have on individual people, it could be said that “all disasters are personal.”

A prime example of what a disaster can do to people is exemplified in one of America's greatest disaster events – Hurricane Katrina. President George W. Bush commissioned his homeland security advisors to review what occurred during this terrible storm.

When the winds and floods of Hurricane Katrina subsided, an estimated 1,330 people were dead as a result of the storm. The vast majority of the fatalities—an estimated 80 percent—came from the New Orleans metropolitan area; Mississippi suffered greatly as well, with 231 fatalities. Many of the dead were elderly or infirm. In Louisiana, approximately 71 percent of the victims were older than sixty, and 47 percent of those were over seventy five. At least sixty-eight were found in nursing homes, some of whom were allegedly abandoned by their caretakers. Of the total known fatalities, there are almost two hundred unclaimed bodies remaining at the Victim Identification Center in Carville, Louisiana. As awful as these horrifying statistics are, unfortunately they are not the end of the story. As of February 17, 2006, there were still 2,096 people from the Gulf Coast area reported missing. (Fed Response 8)

Many of these victims died because they were unable to ensure their own safety. Neither they nor their families put into place, before the disaster, plans or activities to ensure that they would be taken care of should there be a disaster. They were not prepared. Many of the victims had special requirements due to age or physical weakness. Did families of these victims develop emergency plans beforehand to ensure that their loved ones would be evacuated or protected should disaster strike? The very likely answer is no. The prevalent mindset has been one of denial and one that demonstrates a lack of responsibility. Typically, the after-the-fact response usually involves questions about the Federal responsibility and not the individual or family responsibility.

The Federal government agency responsible for disaster preparedness is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is a sub-entity of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). “The Homeland Security Act of 2002 established DHS to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States; reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism, natural disasters, and other emergencies; and minimize the damage and assist in the recovery from terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and other emergencies. The act also designates DHS as a focal point regarding natural and manmade crises and emergency planning.” (NRP 8)”.

The Federal government tends to prepare for the “last” disaster. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security was a reaction to the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks. It was the single largest reorganization of the Federal government since the National Security Act of 1947. Before the creation of DHS, the FEMA Director reported directly to the President of the United States. After DHS became a reality, the FEMA Director reported to the Secretary of Homeland Security. This created an additional layer of bureaucracy and lack of understanding. It became very evident during the Hurricane Katrina disaster event.

The U.S. House of Representatives report, the *Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina* stated “The “single biggest failure” of the federal response was that it failed to recognize the likely consequences of the approaching storm and mobilize federal assets for a post-storm evacuation of the flooded city. If it had, then federal assistance would have arrived several days earlier.” (Initiative 134). The report also found that “Federal agencies, including DHS, had varying degrees of unfamiliarity with their roles and responsibilities under the NRP [*National Response Plan*] and National Incident Management System” (Initiative 143). The report further stated that “Not only did senior DHS officials fail to acknowledge the scale of the impending disaster, they were ill prepared due to their lack of

experience and knowledge of the required roles and responsibilities prescribed by the NRP.” (Initiative 145). It is very clear that the DHS leadership was hampered by a lack of comprehension about what their role was during a major natural disaster. People died because neither they nor their national government was prepared to ensure their safety.

The White House also completed an analysis of the disaster, which it entitled *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina – Lessons Learned, Feb 2006*. Less harsh on itself than the U.S. House of Representative’s report, the *Federal Response* however still acknowledged the federal government’s lack of preparedness for a severe natural disaster. The report stated “Our obligation is to [...] reduce America’s vulnerability to both the acts of terrorists and the wrath of nature; and prepare ourselves to respond to and recover from the man-made and natural catastrophes that do occur. The magnitude of Hurricane Katrina does not excuse our inadequate preparedness and response, but rather it must serve as a catalyst for far-reaching reform and transformation. To do this, we must understand Hurricane Katrina in its proper context.” (Fed Response 13). Like the citizens of this country, the national government is not fully prepared to protect its citizens from major disasters.

Like the national government, the majority of the state governments also have not demonstrated a high degree of readiness and preparedness for natural disaster events. The state governments have far fewer resources than the national government and have fifty different disaster preparedness processes and levels of attention. Though there are fifty different state-level disaster preparedness organizations, they all have the same legal requirements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the state’s residents. The *National Response Plan* (NRP) identifies that the state governor’s, “As a State’s chief executive, [...] is responsible for the public safety and welfare of the people of that State or territory. The Governor:

- Is responsible for coordinating State resources to address the full spectrum of actions to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from incidents in an all-hazards context to include terrorism, natural disasters, accidents, and other contingencies;
- Provides leadership and plays a key role in communicating to the public and in helping people, businesses, and organizations cope with the consequences of any type of declared emergency within State jurisdiction;
- Requests Federal assistance when it becomes clear that State or tribal capabilities will be insufficient or have been exceeded or exhausted.” (NRP 8).

The state governments are far closer, geographically, and have a far greater understanding of the peculiarities of its residents than do the national government. The state governments have a better comprehension of the natural disasters that the state may experience. Many state government officials do not want the “interference” of the federal government; although they are always willing to accept any federal funding that comes their way. The *Federal Response* describes the disaster response function between the states and the national government as:

“Disaster response in America traditionally has been handled by State and local governments, with the Federal government playing a supporting role. Limits on the Federal government’s role in disaster response are deeply rooted in American tradition. State and local governments—who know the unique requirements of their citizens and geography and are best positioned to respond to incidents in their own jurisdictions—will always play a large role in disaster response. The Federal government’s supporting role respects these practical points and the sovereignty of the States as well as the power of

governors to direct activities and coordinate efforts within their States". (Fed Response 11).

However, as it was demonstrated during the Hurricane Katrina event and many other historical natural disasters, such as Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Northridge Earthquake in 1994 and the North Dakota Floods in 1997, states are not fully prepared to respond a natural disaster. The State of Louisiana's response to Hurricane Katrina is however, the most glaring example of the lack of readiness and preparedness to an event. The *Federal Response* states "Prior to Hurricane Katrina's landfall, State and local officials did not use the Emergency Alert System (EAS) in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Alabama. (Fed Response 28).

The state governments have fewer resources than the national government, but are much closer in awareness and proximity to their residents. The local governments have even fewer resources and are even closer to their residents than the state government. The NRP states that "A mayor or city or county manager, as a jurisdiction's chief executive, is responsible for the public safety and welfare of the people of that jurisdiction. The Local Chief Executive Officer:

- Is responsible for coordinating local resources to address the full spectrum of actions to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from incidents involving all hazards including terrorism, natural disasters, accidents, and other contingencies;
- Provides leadership and plays a key role in communicating to the public, and in helping people, businesses, and organizations cope with the consequences of any type of domestic incident within the jurisdiction;
- Requests State and, if necessary, Federal assistance through the Governor of the State when the jurisdiction's capabilities have been exceeded or exhausted. (NRP 8)

Few communities or counties invest in a very robust emergency management program or have local leaders trained and prepared for their leadership role during a major natural disaster. The U.S. House of Representative's "*A Failure of Initiative*" report found that "despite adequate warning 56 hours before landfall, Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin delayed ordering a mandatory evacuation in New Orleans until 19 hours before landfall. The failure to order timely mandatory evacuations, Mayor Nagin's decision to shelter but not evacuate the remaining population, and decisions of individuals led to an incomplete evacuation. The incomplete pre-landfall evacuation led to deaths, thousands of dangerous rescues, and horrible conditions for those who remained. (Initiative page 2). It also stated that "the New Orleans Police Department was ill-prepared for continuity of operations and lost almost all effectiveness. (Initiative 4). The state and local leaders, emergency managers and emergency responders were clearly not prepared for a disaster that many had predicted.

It has been shown that government is not necessary the end-all answer to disaster preparedness. Local, state and federal governments have invested billions of dollars and millions of man-hours in disaster preparedness. The State of Louisiana, alone, received federal emergency preparedness and response grants totaling \$194,754,912 in the three year period leading up to Hurricane Katrina. (Initiative appendix 4). In the four years preceding the 9-11 attacks "the federal government has given \$8.6 billion to states for equipment, first responder training, and disaster exercises." (Initiative 174). Yet, the Louisiana emergency managers were completely overwhelmed and unprepared.

A Failure of Initiative reported that "According to FEMA, the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (LOHSEP) had an inadequate staff, both in numbers and training. [...] The FCO Operations Chief, Tony Robinson, agreed, saying the EOC had only 40

fulltime trained staff, leaving only 20 staff to operate in 12 hour shifts.” (Initiative 192). It begs the question of how much money it would take for a state government to be prepared to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its residents. “The Select Committee has spent much of the past five months examining the aftermath of this catastrophic disaster. It has become increasingly clear that local, state, and federal government agencies failed to meet the needs of the residents of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.” (Initiative ix). “It remains difficult to understand how government could respond so ineffectively to a disaster that was anticipated for years, and for which specific dire warnings had been issued for days. This crisis was not only predictable, it was predicted. (Initiative xi).

Clearly, the only way for an individual to ensure the safety and wellbeing of his or her own life and that of their family is to accept responsibility for their own disaster preparedness. Government may assist, but it can never truly replace the individual’s own responsibility.

The difficulty lies in getting the individual to be responsible for their own disaster preparedness. Our society has changed a great deal in the past century. The incredible number of civil lawsuits and the corresponding sky-rocketing lawsuit awards is one example of a trend towards a lack of personal responsibility for one’s own actions. Another example is the nearly complete lack of actual disaster preparedness activities by individual citizens. The *Federal Response* noted that “despite hurricane watches and warnings throughout the day, it appeared many people along the Gulf Coast either remained unaware or unconcerned about the storm that would soon ravage their communities. (Fed Response 25). Compliancy is one of the primary culprits. The Federal Response also found that “many Gulf Coast residents had become so accustomed to hurricanes and tropical storms that they refused to evacuate despite the warnings.” (Fed Response 26).

The Council for Excellence in Government and the American Red Cross commissioned the Peter D. Hart Research and Public Opinion Strategies polling company to survey several thousand Americans, regarding individual disaster preparedness. The survey involved interviews both before and after the Hurricane Katrina disaster event. The resulting study entitled, *“The Aftershock of Katrina and Rita: Public Not Moved to Prepare”*, provided some glaring points on the complacency of Americans. (Aftershock 1).

The study found that “fully two in five (38%) Americans say that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have given them absolutely no motivation to prepare for an emergency; an additional quarter (24%) say that the hurricanes have given them “just some” motivation.” (Aftershock 3). Why are Americans not motivated? Why has the vast majority of Americans accomplished nothing to prepare themselves and their families for disasters? A big reason for this is that they do not understand their own vulnerability or the value of their own efforts. The study stated that “many Americans seem to regard preparedness as unnecessary or ultimately ineffective. As has been discussed, a majority (54%) of people admit that one reason they choose not to be more prepared is because they do not believe that a disaster will affect them personally. This figure actually represents an increase since August, when 47% said the same.” (Aftershock 6). So even though the entire country watched in awe at the devastation in the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the average citizen does not believe that a disaster event will happen to them.

The study goes on to state that “despite having heard the desperate pleas of separated family members in the days after Hurricane Katrina, most Americans still have no plan on how to communicate with their family members during or after a disaster. Just 36% of adults report that they have prepared a communication plan to contact family members or loved ones in an emergency if they get separated. Even fewer (25%) have established a specific meeting place in

the event that they or their family members are evacuated or cannot return home.” (Aftershock 6). The vast majority of Americans have taken few measures to protect themselves and their families from natural disaster events. “On one of the most basic benchmarks of preparedness, Americans fall dangerously short. Only 43% of the public has assembled a Disaster Supplies Kit with emergency supplies such as water, food, and medicine that is kept apart from everyday use.” (Aftershock 5). It is clear that Americans are in denial regarding natural disasters. This denial comes from a lack of knowledge and understanding.

How it is that Americans lack a civil preparedness education? The *Aftershock* study found that “many Americans still lack basic knowledge concerning how to prepare. [...] Remarkably, despite extensive education campaigns by both government and not-for-profit entities, 44% of Americans report that they have not done more to prepare for a disaster because they do not know what things they should do. Perhaps one lesson learned from Katrina and Rita is that more people now admit their ignorance and realize that they need to learn more about how to prepare. (Aftershock 7). It is evident that for Americans to be responsible and willing to prepare themselves for disaster, they must become much greater educated in disaster preparedness. The study also indicates that current levels and systems of public education for disaster preparedness are not sufficient. People joke about 1950’s and 60’s children hiding under their desks during the threat of global atomic war, but at least they had some understanding of civil defense.

The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina report concluded that a “national consensus” is needed to galvanize the country to action regarding disaster preparedness. The report stated that:

“Today there is a national consensus that we must be better prepared to respond to events like Hurricane Katrina. While we have constructed a system that effectively handles the demands of routine, limited natural and man-made disasters, our system

clearly has structural flaws for addressing catastrophic incidents. But we as a Nation—Federal, State, and local governments; the private sector; as well as communities and individual citizens—have not developed a shared vision of or commitment to preparedness: what we must do to prevent (when possible), protect against, respond to, and recover from the next catastrophe. Without a shared vision that is acted upon by all levels of our Nation and encompasses the full range of our preparedness and response capabilities, we will not achieve a truly transformational national state of preparedness. (Fed Response 66).

All American citizens must be responsible for their own personal wellbeing during a disaster event. The various levels of government are there to supplement, not replace the individual's own response and recovery activities.

The *Aftershock* study reported that Americans recognize their lack of knowledge. This is the key to developing a national consensus or what has been termed “A Culture of Preparedness.” by *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina* and the Department of Homeland Security, Preparedness Directorate's *Draft Strategic Plan Framework: Commitments in Principle*. The *Aftershock* study also discovered that “59% of adults say that they would be willing to spend time volunteering to help with homeland security efforts.” (Aftershock 4). Since citizens are willing to volunteer for homeland security, it would imply that Americans are not adverse to disaster preparedness, only uneducated.

The Department of Homeland Security Preparedness Directorate has drafted a plan called the *Strategic Plan Framework: Commitments in Principle*. This plan lists several goals that the Preparedness Directorate has to better prepare the United States for disasters. The plans second

goal is to “Promote a Culture of Preparedness.” (Strat Plan 2). This goal promotes “a culture of preparedness through partnerships with public and private sector stakeholders and outreach to the American public that strengthens our Nation’s readiness posture against all hazards.” (Strat Plan 2). The plan’s objectives encourage the development of “a national campaign emphasizing personal and community preparedness, continuous learning, and an understanding of the multiple aspects of the risk continuum.” (Strat Plan 2). This is an important change in the government tendency to do the job for Americans, instead of encouraging its citizens to prepare themselves. Another plan objective is to “define and encourage the values and behaviors that embody a culture of preparedness.” (Strat Plan 2). The Preparedness Directorate understands that the task will involve more than just providing public information to those who are interested; it will require a concerted effort to change attitudes and behaviors.

The belief that to truly prepare America, we must get each and every citizen to be a willing partner was also indicated in the White House’s *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina – Lessons Learned* report. The report stated:

“Our preparedness culture must also emphasize the importance of citizen and community preparedness. Citizen and community preparedness are among the most effective means of preventing terrorist attacks as well as protecting against, mitigating, responding to, and recovering from all hazards.” (Federal Response 80)

Congress recognizes that citizen preparedness is vital to ensure disaster preparedness for our country. Government can assist and encourage disaster preparedness, but it cannot replace the citizen initiative. The report further stated:

Thus, citizens and communities can help themselves by becoming more prepared. If every family maintained the resources to live in their homes without electricity and

running water for three days, we could allocate more Federal, State, and local response resources to saving lives. Similarly, if every family developed their own emergency preparedness plan, they almost certainly would reduce the demand for outside emergency resources. As the 9/11 Commission Report states, “One clear lesson of September 11 is that individual civilians need to take responsibility for maximizing the probability that they will survive, should disaster strike.” (Federal Response 80)

The role of government in citizen preparedness is one of developing programs and systems to provide training and education, encourage planning and action, and furnish citizens with the tools, materials and equipment to ensure their own safety and wellbeing during disasters. This process will take strong leadership and a dedicated commitment on the part of our local, state and federal government entities.

There are already many civil preparedness programs in place. These include the “Department of Education elementary and secondary school programs; Citizen Corps; State and local government training programs; and Federal cooperation with the National Governors Association.” (Federal Response 80) The Department of Homeland Security has developed an easy-to-use internet website called “Ready.gov” and FEMA’s website has extensive information on individual and family preparedness and response. FEMA in cooperation with the American Red Cross has developed and supplied a large number of informational brochures on civilian preparedness. Other good programs include FEMA’s “*Are You Ready*” informational and educational program and the US Freedom Corps’ Citizen Corps initiative. The *Federal Response* report further stated:

“Encouraging preparedness awareness and activity is a shared responsibility across all levels of government that we must make a priority. Preparedness today will save lives

tomorrow. In addition, DHS and other Federal agencies should identify both the individual skills and capabilities that would help citizens in a disaster as well as the types of messages from trusted leaders that would encourage citizens to be better prepared. Public awareness messaging must shift to include more substantive information, as opposed to just telling our citizens that they need to “do something.” For example, the “Stop, Drop, and Roll” campaign used so successfully in fire safety as part of the “Learn Not to Burn” program provided citizens with specific steps to take. Other successful campaigns include the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s “Buckle Up America” campaign, which prescribes proper use of seat belt and child safety seats.”

(Federal Response 80)

This report has demonstrated that the impacts of disasters will only be significantly lessened by a citizenry who understands, practices and takes responsibility for their own civil preparedness. Government and associations cannot supplant the individual’s responsibility. Current public information programs only provide opportunities for those few individuals who have an interest in civil preparedness. The *Federal Response* report listed a lessons learned item that stated:

The Federal government, working with State, local, NGO, and private sector partners, should combine the various disparate citizen preparedness programs into a single national campaign to promote and strengthen citizen and community preparedness. This campaign should be developed in a manner that appeals to the American people, incorporates the endorsement and support of prominent national figures, focuses on the importance of individual and community responsibility for all-hazard disaster preparedness, provides meaningful and comprehensive education, training and exercise

opportunities applicable to all facets of the American population, and establishes specialized preparedness programs for those less able to provide for themselves during disasters such as children, the ill, the disabled, and the elderly. (Fed Response 80)

Americans must embrace the “Culture of Preparedness”, if it wants to break the cycle of death and destruction caused by natural and man-made disasters. The American government, at all levels, must stop assuming total responsibility for individual preparedness, but at the same time it must implement civil preparedness programs to educate and activate our citizens. The country must review all of the current programs that are effective, such as the Fire Services’ “Stop, Drop, and Roll” program or the Public Safety’s 911 emergency services contact number. Every child knows how to extinguish a fire on their clothes or what number to call for an emergency. This is where we need to start with our campaign to reintroduce Americans to personal responsibility for civil preparedness.

It is essential that civil preparedness and personal responsibility become a regular part of our children’s education through their years of educational experience. Like learning to read and write, civil preparedness will begin basic and proceed to advance studies. Games and coloring books with civil preparedness messages would be introduced to kindergarten children. Middle school children would be encouraged to complete science projects on natural disasters and develop their own family disaster plans and home evacuation plans. Research papers on the history of disaster events and the development of school continuity of operations plans would be required of high school teenagers. Teenagers would be required to complete community service projects with the community emergency management or public safety departments. Civil preparedness must become an integral part of every American’s childhood education.

Local and state emergency management programs must be strengthened through funding and staffing. Elected officials must comprehend the benefits of effective emergency management programs. Some of this comprehension will come from their own childhood experience with civil preparedness education. Emergency managers will become as familiar to the general public as fire and police are today and will understand the importance of a good program.

The top priority of the more effective emergency management will be continued progress on children and adult civil preparedness education. America must evolve from “public information” programs to “public education” programs. Civil preparedness must evolve from “awareness” to “social acceptance”. Americans must not only know about civil preparedness; they must be able to evaluate and analyze their own individual and family preparedness state.

Natural disasters are getting more and more expensive with every occurrence. Estimates put the cost of Hurricane Katrina for the government to be anywhere from \$150 to \$300 billion. There are 300 million Americans. Should the top estimate figure end up being accurate, this amounts to \$1,000 for every American man, woman and child in this country. This is a far greater cost, then what it would take to provide the educational and emergency management resources to develop a “Culture of Preparedness” in the United States. This does not even take into account the number of lives that could be saved, the amount of lost production that could be conserved or the non-governmental costs of disasters. Americans can not afford to not be prepared.

Every American citizen and their family must take responsibility for ensuring their own safety and wellbeing by totally incorporating civil preparedness in to their daily lives. Our government entities must concentrate on promoting civil preparedness instead of assuming all responsibility from the individual. Civil preparedness and emergency management must become

as common place as daily weather reporting and our school systems. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina – Lessons Learned* report acknowledged that:

“The new culture of preparedness must stress partnership among all levels of government. Local governments will continue to have responsibility for providing the immediate response capabilities for the vast majority of incidents while State governors will continue to have sovereign responsibilities to protect their residents. Yet preparedness must emphasize the shared nature of these responsibilities in a catastrophic event. State governments must work with their local jurisdictions to ensure that they have developed plans and capabilities that are appropriate for the homeland security challenges confronting them. Both State and local governments must also reach out to their citizens, private sector, and community groups to promote their preparedness efforts.” (Fed Response page 82)

In order to prepare America and all its citizens for future disasters and catastrophic events, every level of government and every citizen must embrace a “Culture of Preparedness”. Civil preparedness must once again become a daily activity and responsibility. We cannot rely simply on disaster preparedness brochures setting on municipal office countertops, but must educate each citizen on civil preparedness and civil responsibility to a high level of comprehension. It must be incorporated in the education system from Kindergarten through high school and beyond and become as familiar as using a telephone.

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