

Preparedness in America

Research Insights to Increase Individual, Organizational, and Community Action

Executive Summary

September 2013



FEMA



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As disasters continue to impact our Nation, the role of individuals and the importance of engaging all sectors in reducing the impact of disasters has become increasingly evident. Recognizing the need to involve the Nation more fully, Presidential Policy Directive-8 (PPD-8), issued on March 20, 2011, states that “our national preparedness is the shared responsibility of all levels of government, the private and nonprofit sectors, and individual citizens.”

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is committed to social and physical science as the foundation for increasing individual and community preparedness and has conducted national household surveys to assess the public’s knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors on preparing for a range of hazards since 2007.¹ *Preparedness in America: Research Insights to Increase Individual, Organizational, and Community Action* advances our understanding of the complexities of motivating the public to prepare by examining trend data on personal preparedness behaviors and by providing findings on several new areas of analysis:

- Exploring the relationship between preparedness behaviors and individuals’ beliefs and experiences around disasters;
- Identifying profiles of the general public to assist practitioners in conducting more targeted and effective engagement, education, and messaging strategies; and
- Examining the effect of community connections and networks on personal preparedness.

FEMA recognizes that widespread cultural change is a long-term process, and while the national statistics on basic preparedness actions have remained largely constant, findings documented in *Preparedness in America* offer valuable insights for adapting education efforts to increase preparedness. Key findings from the research focus on the public’s behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes related to preparing for a range of hazards.

Preparedness Actions

- The percentage of surveyed individuals taking recommended preparedness actions remains largely unchanged since 2007.
- Seventy percent of respondents in 2011 lived in homes (rented or owned) where at least one action was taken to protect the structure; however, of the six mitigation measures analyzed, only two had been completed by more than a quarter of the homes.
- More than a quarter of respondents in 2011 reported they were contemplating or preparing to take action to prepare for emergencies and were likely to be receptive to outreach efforts.

¹ See Appendix A for a description of the FEMA National Survey Methodology and Appendix B for survey questions summarized in this report.

- Cost and not knowing how to prepare were each perceived as barriers by one quarter of those surveyed.

Beliefs About Risk and Efficacy by Hazard

- The data identified clear differences in how survey respondents perceived risk, severity, and efficacy by different categories of hazard. Respondents believed they were at risk for natural disasters and that preparing for them is helpful. Respondents believed terrorist acts, hazardous materials accidents, and disease outbreaks were less likely and that preparedness would not be as helpful.

Beliefs and Experiences Related to Preparedness Behaviors

- All examined beliefs (confidence in one's ability to respond, perceived risk, belief that preparing will help in an event, and belief that a disaster could be severe) related to natural disasters had a positive relationship with preparedness behaviors.
- For terrorist acts, hazardous materials accidents, and disease outbreaks, only the confidence in one's ability to respond had a positive relationship with preparedness behaviors.
- Willingness to consider preparing, knowing how to prepare, and having thought about preparedness had a positive relationship with preparedness behaviors.
- Referencing a personal disaster experience is likely more effective in motivating preparedness behavior than referencing disasters in other locations.
- Talking about preparedness had a strong positive relationship with preparedness behavior, yet less than half of the respondents reported doing so in the previous 2 years.
- Having planning and training encouraged or required at work or school had a positive relationship with other preparedness behaviors.

Preparedness Profiles Based on Beliefs and Experiences

- The public can be placed into Preparedness Profiles based on beliefs and experiences. Sociodemographic attributes have been identified for each Preparedness Profile.

Preparedness Through Social Networks

- The survey data indicated that the workplace, schools, and volunteer organizations that support community preparedness, safety, or emergency response are effective channels for preparedness outreach.
- Exposure to disaster preparedness through each of the three analyzed social networks (workplace, schools and response volunteer organizations) had a positive relationship to preparedness behaviors.

Preparedness Among Sociodemographic Groups

- People with low incomes perceived much greater barriers to preparedness (in terms of time, money, and access to information).
- Differences in preparedness across age, income, race, or population density categories were generally fairly small. Some substantial differences found were:
 - People in high population density areas were more likely to rely on public transportation to evacuate the area in the event of a disaster.
 - Volunteering in disaster preparedness/response was mostly done by people with average to high incomes.
 - Retirement-aged people (75+ category) participated in disaster training much less than people in other age categories.

Next Steps for FEMA

- Revise content and framing for preparedness messaging to include:
 - Re-examining preparedness messages;
 - Validating science base for protective actions;
 - Incorporating insights from disaster survivors; and
 - Providing localized risk data.
- Tailor implementation by stakeholder and sociodemographic group to include:
 - Launching a new community-based campaign, America's PrepareAthon!SM;
 - Providing tailored preparedness resources and training;
 - Supporting workplace preparedness;
 - Implementing the National Strategy for Youth Preparedness Education; and
 - Encouraging volunteer opportunities.
- Engage the whole community by:
 - Expanding partnerships at all levels and with all sectors; and
 - Supporting Citizen Corps Councils.
- Refine evaluation and assessment to include:
 - Conducting in-depth assessments of whole community preparedness in large urban cities;
 - Refining national research activities; and
 - Partnering with National Academies of Science to build on the findings in their report, *Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative*.

We each have a role in ensuring the resilience of our communities, our nation, and our way of life. Together, we can guarantee that everyone in America has the knowledge, skills, and resources to respond to the challenges brought by weather, disease, hazardous incidents, and terrorism.

This guide provides examples of good practices and matters to consider for planning and implementation purposes. The guidance does not create any requirements beyond those included in applicable law and regulations, or create any additional rights for any person, entity, or organization. The information presented in this document generally constitutes informal guidance and provides examples that may be helpful. The inclusion of certain references does not imply any endorsement of any documents, products, or approaches. There may be other resources that may be equally helpful.