

Mapping the Community

In addition to listing hazards and evaluating risk, it is important to map the community's diverse populations. For example, the community may contain groups of people who require special attention to ensure they receive information in a timely fashion. Does the community have members who speak a language other than the dominant one? If so, what sources do they use to get information? Are there community members who are unable to read? How do they get their information? What are the sources for people who are deaf or blind? Some of this information regarding community populations may be available through local services. Officials in various departments—for example, education, social and health services—may be familiar with various ethnic and language groups in the community.

Community attitudes toward hazards, risk, and disasters can be gathered through direct questionnaires, telephone surveys, and focus groups. These sources should provide the best information concerning how community members are likely to respond to emergencies, as well as information about the best available means for communicating with them and ensuring their cooperation in the event of a disaster.

Mapping community groups is important for understanding the community; mapping community resources, both places and people, also is important. Where are public buildings, such as schools, that could be used for sheltering community members left homeless as a result of a natural disaster? What are the locations of voluntary humanitarian services and social clubs, and what are the best ways of contacting them? What professionals in the community should be identified as important sources of aid, such as heavy machinery operators, health personnel, and social workers? Many potentially important community members who should be identified may not be part of the local services but, nonetheless, live in the community, such as retired social workers, military personnel, and physicians.

Developing a list of groups and individuals that could serve as resources, and knowing how to reach them, is only a first step. It also is necessary to reach out to them in the preparatory phase and get their agreement to participate in future disaster exercises and to serve in the event of a real disaster. In order to gain a wide consensus and willingness to take part in community efforts to prepare for disasters, it is important to understand how the community perceives hazards and what the residents consider an appropriate response should a threat develop. Drabek and Hoetmeter (1991) suggest that

large communities, which may already be using professional survey firms, can piggyback a disaster study onto another project. Smaller communities may be able to use local volunteers to gather this information; for example, a high school could take on the project of developing a questionnaire, distributing it to community members, and reporting the results

Networking

Emergency planning requires broad community involvement. When planning interventions in response to disasters, large groups of people always will be involved in the decision-making process. This, as Toubiana, Milgram, Strich, and Edelstein (1988) point out, necessitates continual discussion in order to maintain agreement between the various organizations, such as school personnel, emergency teams, and government officials. Carrying out an intervention with the fewest complications can only be accomplished when the various layers of government, the politicians, and organization administrators are all involved in the planning stages. Their influence is needed in order to implement and direct public policy.

According to James Witt (1997), private sector support is crucial to effective preparation: “Support from the private sector is often the weakest link in the emergency response chain for local governments. . . . Businesses bring a wealth of experience and insight to the table, and inviting business leaders to participate in regular emergency planning meetings will give all parties a chance to get to know one another” (p. 27).

One way to achieve the necessary community involvement is by networking. Networking has three distinct aspects: (a) meeting with rescue forces, such as the police and firefighters; local health services and psychosocial agencies; local television, newspaper, and radio outlets; and the education system; (b) breaking down the planning process into tasks; and (c) assigning the tasks to different groups, for example, a health committee, a social service committee, a transportation committee, and a media relations committee. Each committee may begin work on its own, but the committees eventually will need to work together (Drabek & Hoetmeter 1991). Burbank, California’s CDV, for example, has eight committees, each headed by a member of the CDV steering committee. These include a supplies committee, a safety committee, a coordinating committee, and a communications committee called BEARS, the acronym for Burbank Emergency Amateur Radio Service.

It is advisable to build a network with adjacent authorities, as no community is immune to incidents that exceed its resources. This process takes time but is not as complicated or difficult as might appear. However, it requires coordination and commitment of all the communities involved and their local governments.

In some places, networking means building an interdisciplinary team with non-government organizations (NGOs). A good example is the Emergency Plan of the City of Kiryat Shmona (*Report on Operation Grapes of Wrath*, 1996) where the Emergency Management Team is composed of people representing psycho-social services, formal and informal education, health and sanitary services, and volunteer/ humanitarian aid. Networking of this kind enables the limited human resources of the city to outreach to each of the 500 shelters, avoid duplication of services, and promote rapid response to actual needs of the population

Mobilizing Community Efforts

The following chart outlines the several types of help needed after a disaster, and the community groups that may serve as helpers.

Help Needed and Potential Helpers

Type of Help	Potential Helpers
Information	Media, local authority, emergency services
Education	Teachers, informal education staff
Counseling	School counselors, school psychologists, pastoral care
Recreation	Community centers, artists, sports instructors, youth organizations, volunteers
Mental health	Clinical psychologists, school psychologists, pastoral care, nurses, help-line
Social support	Social services, volunteer organizations, help-line
Shelter	Local authorities, social services, volunteer organizations

What this chart fails to stress, however, are the variety of helpers and help groups that arise spontaneously, whether to provide financial help to the neighborhood family hardest hit by the hurricane, or to help with cleaning and repairing the local business destroyed by terrorists. For example, individuals from Oklahoma City and surrounding areas showed an immediate outpouring of support for victims of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Office Building: people came to the area with food, to donate blood, and to offer free counseling services (Belshe, 1995; Potts, 1995). People seemed to need—as well as want—to be part of the response to the disaster.

The problem, of course, is that it is impossible to predict, plan for, and rely on action that is, by definition, spontaneous.

The Community Stress Prevention Center, located in northern Israel, developed a model useful for facilitating community involvement in preparing for disasters (Lahad & Shacham, 1995). The model has five phases.

Phase One: During this phase, meetings are held with local authorities and people

in key community positions, from the mayor to the switchboard service person. The goals of these meetings are to raise community awareness and to discuss basic training of local authorities. Contingency plans are developed that cover what knowledge and training are necessary, and what probable scenarios are likely to be most useful simulations.

Phase Two: The second phase involves a synergic effort of all municipal services to develop their contingency plans and map possible human resources to assist them in times of disaster. During this phase the notion is stressed that the public is a resource, not an enemy or an obstacle. Local services are encouraged to recruit volunteers to their emergency team.

Phase Three: The third phase focuses on interdisciplinary training of psychosocial and education teams. The teams are formed on the basis of neighborhoods or quarters, and the head of each team is a school principal or a community center manager. Professional and nonprofessional team members are trained to handle acute stress reactions and, at the same time, to activate community resources, that is, recruit and train local people for a variety of jobs, such as, staffing an information center, working with food dispensing, and managing a shelter.

Phase Four: Using various in-vivo exercises, this phase focuses on training teams and volunteers to work together. Discussions of lessons learned from the exercises, together with briefings, help ensure effective team coordination. This phase also focuses on public education and readiness, and includes exercises with the public combined with meetings with specific groups, such as parents, hospital personnel, and elderly community members.

Phase Five: The fifth phase uses community meetings to raise community members' awareness (as in the first phase), to commend volunteers, and to raise public self-confidence as a "self-sufficient" community.

The Community Stress Prevention Center model stresses that no single service and no single team can provide all the help needed in the wake of a critical incident: coordination of teams and committees is essential. Therefore, the model requires psychosocial, educational, community, and medical services to operate under one coordinating committee. The community's director of social services usually heads this committee and serves as a consultant to the crisis management team about the major psychosocial aspects of the disaster.

Helpers in Disasters in the Educational System

Disasters draw all kinds of helpers in addition to professionals trained in disaster relief, such as natural helpers and non-professional volunteers. When schools and especially children are involved, many people intervene who are not necessarily skilled and knowledgeable in working with schools and with children. Sometimes the good will of different “helpers” has to be coordinated and directed, and the intervention has to take into account the combined needs of the school and the type of help available.

The following list of potential helpers and their assigned target groups before and during a disaster may be helpful in planning disaster training for different groups.

- *Relatives, neighbors, and close friends* constitute a group of “natural” helpers who may provide the best immediate support for victims.
- *Medical staff, social workers, and counselors* are able to offer direct support, information, and advice. They also are able to train potential helpers on how to provide disaster relief.
- *Teachers* are an important group for helping children who are not in need of medical attention and who are not so severely traumatized that they cannot stay in a classroom. Importantly, teachers can provide children with a routine with which the children are familiar. In addition, they can listen actively to the children, attend to their emotional and social needs, and prepare them for post-disaster rituals, such as funerals and memorials.
- *School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers* can help teachers and school staff by providing counseling and attending to their needs, by sharing information on how to deal with children’s distress, and by offering advice on school disaster management. In addition, this group can provide parents with information on normal reactions to traumatic situations, as well as advice and counseling.
- *Community leaders, the media, and community agencies* can provide the community with information, reassurance about action taken, and leadership.