

## Research Note

### Disaster Preparedness

*By Akshay Bhagwatwar*

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#### **Applicable Sectors: Emergency Services, Disaster Management**

Disaster management is the discipline that includes preparing for disasters before they occur, disaster response and supporting the recovery phase after the disaster.<sup>1</sup> Nations around the world lose billions of dollars due to the natural and technological disasters as well as terrorism. Multinational companies also invest money in preparing their disaster management plans with an aim of ensuring business continuity. The focus of all these disaster preparedness or emergency management activities is on reducing the economic and social impact of the disaster as well as on ensuring a speedy recovery and rebuilding process. Being prepared for a disaster can reduce fear, anxiety and losses that might happen. Local government and many disaster-relief organizations always run to help individuals and organizations when disasters happen. However, there are situations where such

organizations may not be able to reach the affected place immediately. It is such situations where having your own disaster management plan will help in reducing the damages.

Disaster preparedness can be viewed as a four phased method comprising of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.



The mitigation phase focuses on implementation of long term measures for reducing or eliminating risks. Thus, the focus during this phase is on ensuring that possible hazards do not turn out to be total disasters. The preparedness phase is where the risk managers or the emergency managers develop an action plan in preparation for the possible disasters. The action plan commonly has measures developing communication plans, stockpiling and maintaining disaster supplies,

building and training emergency response teams, developing emergency evacuation plans and so on. The disaster phase generally consists of the Disaster Relief Operation. This includes the dispatch of the core emergency services like the firefighters, police and ambulance crew. They may be supported by a large number of secondary emergency services such as emergency rescue teams. The recovery phase is focused on restoring or rebuilding the affected properties, repairing the critical infrastructure and re-employment. It is critical for the emergency managers to put an effort on ensuring the continuity of operations even when the recovery phase is in operation.

Many Government agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) release disaster preparedness checklists and kits to help individuals, communities and organizations prepare their disaster preparedness plan. FEMA has the [‘Are You Ready ? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness’](#) accessible publicly on their website. The guide provides a step-by-step approach to disaster preparedness by walking the reader through how to get informed about local emergency plans, how to identify hazards that affect their local area, and how to develop and maintain an emergency communications plan and disaster supplies kit. The guide also covers

evacuation, emergency public shelters, animals in disaster, and information specific to people with disabilities.<sup>ii</sup> The FEMA also developed the [HAZUS](#) (HAZards United States) software package which is central in the risk assessment process in the country. The current version of the HAZUS software is capable of modeling three types of hazards: flooding, hurricanes, and earthquakes. HAZUS has also been adopted by emergency management organizations worldwide.<sup>iii</sup>

The month of April brings in the theme of disaster preparedness in the USA. The Washington State's Emergency Management Division published the '[In-Focus 2010](#)' webpage recently with a special focus on earthquake preparedness activities. The division has also published checklists, questionnaires and videos for individuals, groups, schools and businesses to help them with their disaster management plans. In addition to resources for natural disaster management planning, the division has also published [H1N1 guidance](#) webpage focused on helping schools with their H1N1 avoidance and response planning.<sup>iv</sup> An example of a successful disaster preparedness program in the Washington State is the Puget Sound Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Planning Program (RCPP) which was created in 2008 to enhance regional catastrophic preparedness. The scenarios for the Puget Sound RCPP are



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two: (1) Catastrophic earthquake – likely a shallow-crust earthquake along the Seattle Fault and (2) A mass–aerosolized attack in the downtown Seattle core. The RCPP covers eight counties in the Puget Sound Area. It has three central objectives: to address shortcomings in the existing plans; to building regional planning processes and communities; and to link operational and capabilities-based planning with resource allocation. The details of the RCPP plan are available on the [City of Seattle](#) website.<sup>v</sup>

Business Continuity and disaster preparedness are one of the six ASA focus areas that ASA offers services in. ASA also published a research note in March which contains data related to various disasters in the United States as well as in other nations. The research note can be accessed on the ASA website’s [Research Notes](#) section.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster\\_preparedness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster_preparedness)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/index.shtm>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/hazus/index.shtm>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.emd.wa.gov/preparedness/prep\\_swineflu.shtml](http://www.emd.wa.gov/preparedness/prep_swineflu.shtml)

<sup>v</sup>

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/emergency/library/Attachment%20A.%20PUGET%20SOUND%20RCPP%20EXEC%20SUMMARY.pdf>