NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR CATASTROPHE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

# The Katrina Effect on American Preparedness

— A report on the lessons Americans learned in watching the Katrina catastrophe unfold

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## Executive Summary

This report, comparing data collected in two surveys, one prior to Hurricane Katrina and one following, identifies a significant drop in public confidence in government's ability to handle disasters in the wake of the botched response to Hurricane Katrina, as well as highlights the growth of a percieved "preparedness divide" between rich and poor.

Hurricane Katrina exposed serious weaknesses in American preparedness for disaster at all levels of government and across the civic networks that bind communities together. Although the hurricane created unprecedented damage, much of it foretold, it also should have reminded Americans that they must be prepared to last several days on their own.

Americans were clearly paying attention to the event. According to the Pew Research Center's News Interest Index, Katrina was one of the most watched events of the past quarter century. Seventy percent of Americans were paying very or fairly close attention to the hurricane and its aftermath, placing it only behind the Challenger accident, the September 11th attacks, and the 1989 San Francisco earthquake, and tying it with the Los Angeles riots that followed the acquittal of the officers involved in the Rodney King case.

The question is what Americans learned in watched the Katrina catastrophe unfold. Although the Department of Homeland Security recorded a surge in visits to its ready.gov website, it is not clear who came and what they wanted. Although the visits do confirm at least some a surge in public interest, the numbers are just too meager to declare great progress. Indeed, pre- and post-Katrina national surveys conducted by New York University suggest that Americans are no more prepared after Katrina hit than they had been before.

## Key Findings:

*According to the October survey, which repeated many, but not all of the questions asked in July, the "Katrina Effect" was mostly negative:*

**• Americans did not receive a wake-up call from Katrina -- more than half said they were no better prepared after watching the event than before.**

**• Many Americans have lost confidence in their local government, police departments and local businesses to help those who need assistance following an emergency. Only fire departments and charitable organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army held on to their pre-Katrina levels of confidence.**

**• Americans were generally split on who was to blame for the federal government's lack of preparedness post-Katrina -- 60 percent said it was impossible to be very prepared for hurricanes, terrorist attacks or a flu epidemic, while 40 percent blamed the government.**

**• Among those who blamed government, the vast majority said that the problem was mismanagement, a lack of leadership, and an unwillingness to make preparedness a priority.**

## Key Recommendations:

### Congress Should

**• ...give the president authority to create a new Citizen Preparedness Directorate.**

**• ...give the president greater authority to strengthen the federal government's human capital in the preparedness effort.**

**• ...reform the presidential appointments process to assure that key positions are filled rapidly with qualified personnel.**

### State and Local Governments Must

**• ...be clear about who "owns" the emergency preparedness task.**

**• ...make their emergency management functions as visible as possible.**

**• ...establish local command centers.**

If Katrina had little effect on preparedness, it appears to have near-catastrophic impacts on public confidence in the local and federal governments on which they depend for help during emergencies. Katrina also appears to have increased awareness of the importance of time and money to effective preparedness—having watched the disaster wreck havoc in poor communities, many Americans appear to be convinced that money is the most important resource for preparedness.

The surveys were conducted on behalf of the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service and the University's Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response (CCPR). The pre-Katrina telephone survey of 1,506 randomly-selected Americans was conducted from July 14-28, barely four weeks before Katrina came ashore. The post-Katrina survey of 1,004 randomly-selected Americans was conducted from October 10-16, barely five weeks after Katrina moved on.

## Katrina and American Preparedness

Last summer's New York University survey revealed a vast majority of Americans who remained almost as unprepared for catastrophe during the months and years after September 11th as they had been before. Although the October New York University survey came only weeks after Katrina hit the Gulf States, there is little evidence that the hurricane brought a wake-up call for the nation. Thinking back to before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which arrived in short succession, only 12 percent of Americans said they were much more prepared to deal with emergencies, just 21 percent said they were somewhat more prepared, 57 percent said they were about the same, and 8 percent said they were either somewhat less or much less prepared. Figure 1 shows the comparison in response to September 11th and the two hurricanes.

### *The Preparedness Divide Persists*

The answers do not speak to a massive surge in preparedness post-Katrina. However, there is at least some movement toward greater preparedness across what I have called the preparedness divide, meaning the distance in preparedness based on education and income.

On the one hand, individuals with a high school education or less were twice as likely as their college-educated peers to say they were much more prepared after Katrina and Rita than before, 15 percent to 7 percent. Having watched the images of stranded citizens in New Orleans, perhaps less-edu-

**Figure 1: Perceived Preparedness after September 11 and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**

| Level of Preparedness | After September 11th | After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita |
|---|---|---|
| Much more prepared after | 17% | 12% |
| Somewhat more prepared | 27 | 21 |
| About the same | 50 | 57 |
| Somewhat less prepared | 2 | 5 |
| Much less prepared | 2 | 4 |

N=1,506 for September 11th question, 1,003 for Katrina/Rita question

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cated Americans finally saw the need for action. On the other hand, there was no difference in new-found preparedness across income groups, suggesting that preparedness requires more than just intent and education. It also requires money, a resource in short supply among low-income Americans.

The role of money in preparedness is particularly clear when Americans were asked what might explain the challenges they face in fully preparing themselves for a potential emergency. Many of the answers were exactly the same pre- and post-Katrina:

- 75 percent said they wish they were more organized before Katrina, compared with 69 percent after Katrina.
- 57 percent of Americans strongly or somewhat agreed that they wish they had more time to focus on preparing after Katrina, compared with 53 percent before.
- 46 percent agreed they were not sure exactly where to turn for help after Katrina, compared with 49 percent before.
- 27 percent said they did not want to think about preparedness after Katrina and Rita, compared to 23 who did not want to think about September 11th
- 18 percent said they did not think preparedness was necessary after, compared to 19 percent before.

The lack of change in these questions suggest continuing barriers to preparedness among a very large percentage of Americans, particularly on those who do not have the personal organization, time, and knowledge about where to turn to help. Although the spirit may be willing, as the percentages on the desire for more preparedness suggest, the access to real information may be weak. The number of hits on the federal government's www.ready.org site may have surged somewhat after Katrina (300,000 unique visitors in September is hardly a milepost in a nation of more than 150 million internet users), but large percentages of Americans apparently are not sure where to go for help in developing a check-list of options for improving their personal and family preparedness.

Paradoxically perhaps, the only two indicators of preparedness to change significantly were the desire for more money to prepare and the sense that Americans know what to expect in the event of an emergency, as shown in figure 2.

Both sets of comparisons show statistically significant difference pre- and post-Katrina, and suggest that Americans believe they know more about what to expect and wish they had the money to get out of the way of catastrophe.

### *Images of Disaster*

The question, of course, is what respondents mean when they say they now know what to expect from an emergency. Is it chaos, confusion, and disorganization? Is it being stranded in their flooding communities, gridlock on the highways, and problems finding housing? It may be no surprise that these Americans wish they had more money given what they saw on the rooftops of New Orleans—more money would have helped the least fortunate buy their way out of town, or at least buy a car that might have made an exit possible.

These two sets of answers show continued problems raising preparedness among the most vulnerable Americans, meaning those with less education and lower incomes. Less-educated, lower-income Americans were more likely after Katrina to say they did know what to expect from an emergency—65 percent of Americans with a high school education or less said they did not know what to expect

## Figure 2: Expectations and Wishes about Emergencies pre- and post-Katrina

| Level of agreement | I'm not sure what to expect | | I wish I had more money to prepare | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Katrina | Post-Katrina | Pre-Katrina | Post-Katrina |
| Strongly agree | 47% | 30% | 33% | 41% |
| Somewhat agree | 31 | 32 | 20 | 26 |
| Somewhat disagree | 10 | 15 | 23 | 26 |
| Strongly disagree | 9 | 19 | 22 | 14 |

after Katrina, compared with 57 percent before, while 74 percent of Americans with household incomes of less than $25,000 per year said they wish they had more money to prepared, compared with just 62 percent before. These Americans may not know what to expect, but they clearly wish they had more money. In short, the preparedness divide continues to work its will after Katrina, and may have gotten worse.

## Katrina and Confidence in Local and Federal Institutions

As these responses suggest, Americans are still highly dependent on their federal and local institutions to tell them what to do in an emergency. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath exposed significant weaknesses in those institutions.

Readers are forewarned that much of the following discussion compares apples to oranges between July and October. In the July, pre-Katrina survey, New York University asked Americans about the preparedness of local institutions for two specific scenarios of emergency—a terrorist bombing at a local supermarket or grocery store and the spread of a deadly disease or virus across their communities. In the October, post-Katrina survey, New York University only asked about preparedness for emergencies in general.

### *A Weakening of Confidence*

Still, the comparisons suggest some weakening of support in some, but not all local institutions:

- Local fire departments and charitable institutions such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army and hospitals were seen as the most prepared to help people in need of assistance in a general emergency post-Katrina: 34 percent of Americans said both local institutions were very prepared for emergencies, while 48 and 52 percent respectively said the institutions were somewhat prepared.

- Local police came in second in general preparedness to help people post-Katrina: 17 percent said their local police were very prepared for emergencies, while 48 percent said they were somewhat prepared.

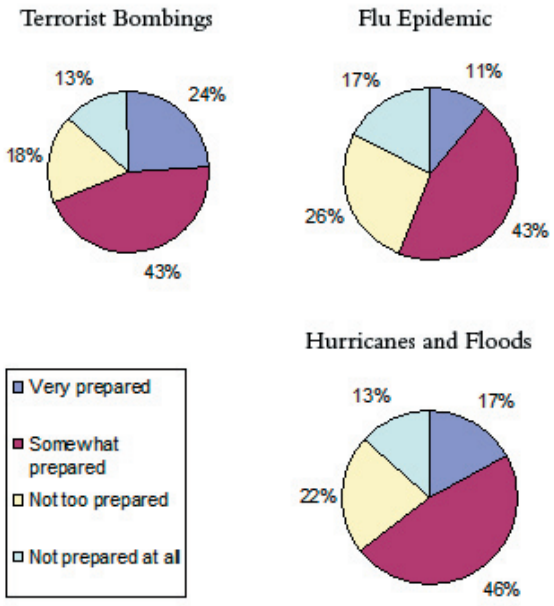
- Local governments and business were rated as the least prepared for emergencies: Just 12 and 11 percent respectively said these two institutions were very prepared to provide assistance in emergencies, while 50 and 42 percent respectively said these institutions were somewhat prepared.

Compared to pre-Katrina preparedness for the two disaster scenarios, local fire departments and charitable institutions managed to hold their ground—they were generally rated as just as prepared for general emergencies as they had been for terrorist bombings and the spread of a deadly disease or virus. However, local police, governments, and businesses all lost ground when their general ratings are compared to the two scenarios. Whereas 38 percent had rated their local police as very prepared for a bombing, and 22 percent had rated them as very prepared for a deadly virus or disease, only 17 percent of Americans rated them as very prepared for a potential emergency.

### *Confidence toward the Federal Government*

Although the pre-Katrina survey did not include federal government preparedness, the post-Katrina survey shows surprising, but perhaps not unexpectedly low confidence in government responsiveness. The federal government was rated as largely unprepared for three specific scenarios: terrorist bombings, hurricanes and floods, and a flu epidemic. The results are shown in figure 3:

### Figure 3: Federal Government Preparedness for Three Disasters



Asked who was at fault for the lack of preparedness, 62 percent of Americans said that it was nearly impossible to be very prepared for terrorist bombings, 60 percent said the same about hurricanes and floods, and 55 percent said the same of a flu epidemic.

Among those who said it was the federal government's fault for not being very prepared, the vast majority of Americans rejected the argument that the federal government did not have enough employees and money to be prepared. Rather, roughly six in ten said that the federal government's leaders were not concerned about being prepared, while seven in ten said being prepared is not a top priority, and roughly eight in ten said the federal government was too disorganized and mismanaged to be prepared. Figure 4 shows the patterns.

Two final points are worth mentioning on confidence in federal and local institutions. First, asked seven weeks before Katrina about the way things were going in the country, 55 percent said they were dissatisfied with the way things were going; asked again five weeks after Katrina, 60 percent said they were dissatisfied, a loss of five percent that can be attributed at least in part to the handling of the Katrina aftermath.

Second, all of the post-September 11th surge in confidence toward the president, vice president, members of Congress, presidential appointees, and government employees is now gone. Much of the decline is obviously unrelated to Katrina—these leaders lost ground month by month with the war in Iraq, rising gasoline prices, and a host of other issues that carved into public confidence. Nevertheless, the surge is gone:

• Favorability toward the president, George W. Bush, rose from 57 percent very or somewhat favorable in July 2001, pre-September 11th, to 83 percent in October 2001, post-September 11th, but fell to just 48 percent favorable over the next four years.

• Favorability toward federal officials the president selects to run the different departments and agencies of the government rose from 60 percent pre-September 11th to 79 percent in October 2001, but fell to just 47 percent over the next four years.

• Favorability toward members of Congress rose from 58 percent very and somewhat favorable pre-September 11th to 71 percent in October 2001, but fell to just 45 percent favorable over the next four years.

• Finally, favorability toward federal government workers rose from 71 percent pre-September 11th to 76 percent in October 2001, but fell to 62 percent over the next four years.

In short, whereas President Bush received the highest surge immediately after September 11th, he experienced the greatest fall (a 35 percent drop), followed by Congress (a 26 percent drop), federal workers (a 14 percent drop), and presidential appointees (a 13 percent drop. Given their starting points, however, federal government employees are by far the most favorably viewed federal officials today, followed by presidential appointees, the president, and members of Congress.

## An Update on Confidence in Charitable Organizations

Donor fatigue has become the explanation of choice for the recent slowdown in giving following Hurricane Rita and the Pakistan earthquake. According to the theory, Americans are simply exhausted from the constant appeals for help from across the globe and besieged by higher gas prices at home. Give them time and some good economic news, so the theory goes, and the money will start flowing again.

The search for some reasonable explanation is particularly important given the record-

### Figure 4: Who is Responsible for the Lack of Preparedness?

| Explanation | Terrorist Bombings | Hurricanes and floods | Flu Epidemic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of money and employees | 33% | 36% | 36% |
| Government too disorganized and mismanaged | 92 | 87 | 85 |
| Not a top priority | 63 | 74 | 72 |
| Leaders not concerned | 55 | 67 | 63 |

Percentages involve only respondents who said government was at fault for a lack of preparedness for each specific event.

## Figure 5: Trends in Confidence in Charitable Organizations, pre- and post-Katrina

| | A great deal | A fair amount | Not too much | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| September 2002 | 13% | 47% | 26% | 11% |
| August 2003 | 12 | 47 | 27 | 10 |
| October 2003 | 18 | 45 | 27 | 7 |
| January 2004 | 13 | 49 | 25 | 9 |
| August 2004 | 15 | 50 | 25 | 7 |
| July 2005 | 15 | 49 | 24 | 8 |
| October 2005 | 13 | 50 | 25 | 8 |

breaking pace of giving immediately after Katrina hit. Americans gave more money for Katrina in a shorter period of time than for the victims of September 11th, but the giving is drying up almost as fast. The Red Cross is now struggling to meet its $2 billion Katrina target, while CARE reports that contributions for Pakistan relief are off by as much as 90 percent compared to the giving in the wake of the South Asian tsunami.

Donor fatigue does not appear to be the only cause of the slowdown, however.

### *Trends in Confidence Updated*

According to a mid-October survey by New York University, donors might find the giving easier if they believed that charitable organizations would do a good job spending the money wisely. The telephone survey of 1,003 randomly-selected Americans was conducted from October 10-16.

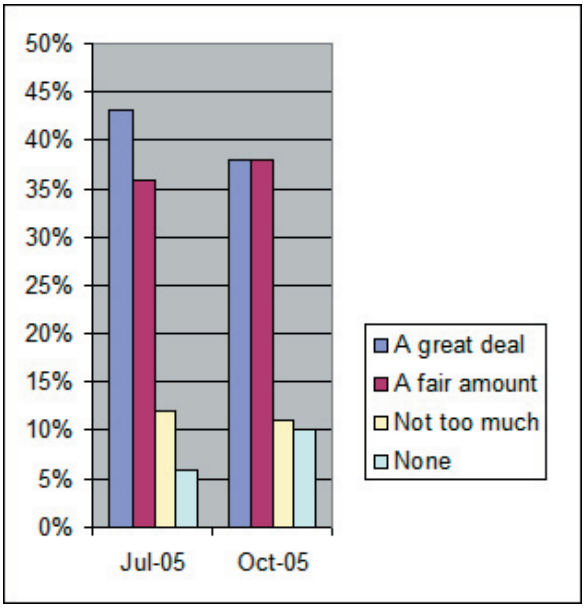
As of mid-October, Just 14 percent of Americans said they had a great deal of confidence in charitable organizations, while 31 percent said they had little or no confidence, and 51 percent who said they had a fair amount of confidence. As figure 5 suggests, confidence in charitable organizations remains stuck at modern lows. It also shows that charitable organizations have not received the traditional surge in confidence that follows international and domestic disasters.

The fact that 63 percent of Americans have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in charities is not necessarily good news. Indeed, charitable organizations would do well to worry about the company they keep. Looking across a range of recent polls, charitable organizations rank just above television news, organized labor, and law firms, and well behind the military, small businesses, colleges and universities, and organized religion.

### *Confidence in the Red Cross and United Way*

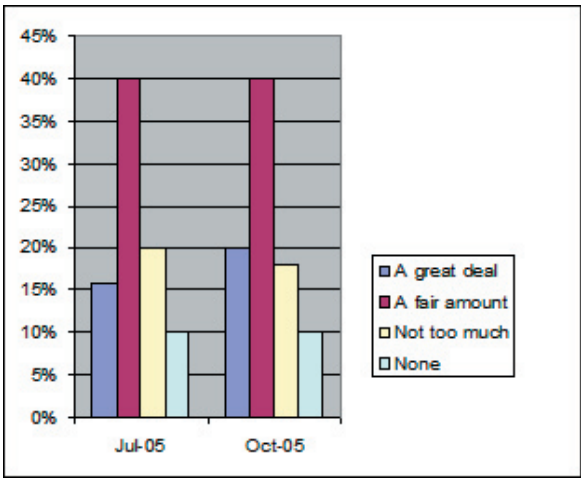
The survey also shows that confidence in the Red Cross has fallen. July, 43 percent of Americans had a great deal of confidence in the well-known known charity; by mid-October, the percentage had fallen to 38 percent, an admittedly small, but statistically significant drop that occurred before the recent stories about Red Cross over-counts of the number of people it had helped the Federal Emergency Management Agency house in the Gulf States. Figure 6 shows the full comparison pre- and post-Katrina.

## Figure 6: Trends in Confidence in the Red Cross, pre- and post-Katrina




In comparison, confidence in the United Way increased slightly, largely due perhaps to the organization's much lower-profile in both raising and distributing relief in the Gulf States. The gains in the percentage of Americans who said they have a great deal of confidence in the United Way are small, but statistically significant. Figure 7 shows the trend.

Figure 7: Trends in Confidence in the United Way, pre- and post-Katrina




***Continued Concerns about Charitable Operations and Accountability***

The latest survey also reveals continued public worries about how charitable organizations operate:

• 31 percent of Americans in the post-Katrina survey said charitable organizations do a very good job helping people, compared to 29 percent last summer.

• 20 percent said charitable organizations do a very good job running their programs and services, compared to 19 percent last summer.

• 17 percent said charitable organizations do a very good job at being fair in their decisions, compared to 16 percent last summer.

• 13 percent said charitable organizations do a very good job at spending money wisely, compared to 11 percent last summer.

• 67 percent of Americans said charitable organizations waste a great deal or fair amount of money, compared to 61 percent in August 2004, and 66 percent last summer.

• 47 percent said the leaders of charitable organizations are paid too much, percentage points from August 2004, compared to 46 percent last summer.

In short, the main Katrina effect on charitable organizations in general is no Katrina effect at all. The lack of such a surge appears due to two factors: (1) guilt by association with government (the Red Cross reports that one quarter of Americans think it is a government agency, a misunderstanding due in part to the fact that 12 of the organizations 50 board members are appointed by the president), and (2) stories about organizational weaknesses that may have prevented the disbursement of relief to the actual victims of the disaster.

## Recommendations for Reform

"The State of American Preparedness" and "Katrina Effect on American Preparedness" reports illustrate for immediate action to strengthen public confidence in the key institutions on which Americans rely for information and direction during disasters. Americans have been watching their local and federal institutions a great deal lately, and many do not like what they have seen.

The following recommendations are based on the simple notion that there is no substitute for actual preparedness in addressing public disquiet. In simple terms, the proof is in the performance. Local and federal institutions need not wait for the next catastrophe to prove their mettle, however. They can demonstrate their preparedness through a host of means, including exercises, outreach, needed reorganizations, and ongoing training. The more they prepare, the more they will be seen as prepared, and the more confidence will rise.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS

As the post-Katrina survey clearly shows, Americans have limited confidence in the federal government's ability to respond to catastrophic events. The federal government cannot rebuild confidence overnight, but can take immediate action to reassure the public that helping people prepare, not defending bureaucratic turf is the number one priority in coming months.

1. **Reogranize to mission, not turf.** Congress should give the president limited authority to create a Citizen Preparedness Directorate within the Department of Homeland Security. Such a directorate would have authority to develop inter-agency plans, deploy and redeploy resources, and oversee government-wide activities to better prepare individual citizens and federal, state, and local agencies for a wide range of catastrophic events. Without displacing existing efforts within departments such as Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Commerce, Interior, and Labor, and within agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, such a directorate should provide needed coordination and oversight to

eliminate unnecessary duplication, while assuring that the nation is prepared to meet a range of hazards in coming years.

2. **Assure a steady supply of talent.** Congress should also give the president greater authority to strengthen the federal government's human capital in the preparedness effort. Such strengthening should include, but not be limited to, improving the recruitment, retention, training of a host of specialized workforces involved in preparing for catastrophic events, including acquisition, logistics, science and engineering, and health care professionals. Although the current personnel reforms in the departments of Homeland Security and Defense are still in development, Congress should authorize further research and development in new personnel systems that can both withstand judicial scrutiny and assure rapid redeployment of federal employees to respond to specific events.

3. **Reform the presidential appointments process.** Congress should undertake significant and long-overdue reform of the presidential appointments process to assure that key positions are filled rapidly with qualified personnel. Congress can do so by reducing needless questions in the antiquated security clearance forms, while streamlining the unnecessarily detailed financial disclosure forms. In addition, Congress should reduce the number of presidential appointees significantly to assure that vacancies at lower levels of the political hierarchy do not produce delays in the federal response to catastrophic events.

4. **Tell the truth about the range of threats being faced.** Too many Americans simply do not know enough about what they are up against. Yet, as the July New York University survey shows, they clearly react different to alternative scenarios of disaster—16 percent of Americans said they would volunteer to help following a bombing of a local supermarket or shopping center, for example, compared with only two percent following the release of a deadly disease or virus. Different hazards require at least some information about different reactions.

5. **Discipline the growing list of emergency management training programs so that being an emergency/disaster management professional has real meaning to the public.** Universities, colleges, community colleges, and vocational schools are creating a host of certification and degree programs in the field of emergency management, but much of the growth has taken place without any accrediting oversight or common goals. As a result, if you have seen one emergency management curriculum, you have likely seen just one emergency management curriculum. The field of emergency management needs to discipline itself so that the profession comes to mean something to citizens.

6. **Make evidence, not hunch, the coin of the realm.** Too much of the conversation about preparedness has been driven by long-established ideas about how the public consumes information before, during, and after a disaster. But as the New York University studies suggest, public attitudes may be changing. Knowing more about how the public gets and processes information is essential for designing strategies for reaching all corners of a community.

## STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS

Local governments, charitable organizations, and private businesses play an extremely important role in assuring preparedness. Americans not only get their primary information at the local level, they will always think locally when it comes time to take action in crisis. Thus, even as the federal government strengthens its ability to monitor, fund, and plan for multi-state events, state and local governments must bear much of the responsibility for creating the infrastructure to move quickly once catastrophe strikes.

1. **Be clear about who "owns" the emergency preparedness task.** Without reading too deeply between the lines of the October New York University survey, Americans did not have a clear sense of just who was responsible for what in New Orleans and the Gulf States. Certainly, citizens cannot know just where to turn for help if there are too many agencies involved. Although there is ample room for great diversity in disseminating information on preparedness to hard-to-reach communities, the information should focus attention on where citizens should turn for information after a catastrophe, and where that information will be found—e.g., television, radio, internet, perhaps a 511 disaster information number, etc.

2. **Practice, practice, practice.** More

training creates high performance, but also generates news stories about readiness. Too many communities are waiting for disaster to strike to mount their first exercise. Plans are not enough, and may actually work against execution if they are so complicated that they cannot bend and flex against reality.

3. **Make the emergency management function as visible as possible within state and local governments.** Too often, the function is buried within a fire or police department, with all that means for public visibility for the director of emergency management. To the extent possible, the director of emergency management should be a visible, well-known figure in local government and the media, meaning someone who can be easily identified as a trusted source of information.

4. **Draw upon the Department of Homeland Security playbook.** Local governments should think hard about creating a government-wide office of preparedness, which the Department of Homeland Security just created to enhance cooperation between all units involved in disaster education, funding, and preparedness. Creating a government-wide preparedness unit in the mayor's or city manager's office is easily done, and could reassure citizens provided that a talented professional is selected to head the operation. Cronyism has no place in such an appointment.

5. **Create a local command center.** Local governments should also give close consideration to the Department of Homeland Security's decision to create a department-wide operation unit that acts a command center during actual disasters. Structured to involve stakeholders across a region, such an operations center could improve reaction times, while minimizing finger-pointing during and after an event. However, such a command center is doomed to failure unless local governments put a single individual in charge of actual decisions.

6. **Build local capacity for response around all sectors, including private businesses, charitable organizations, and faith-based organizations.** Not only are these non-governmental agencies often the first to arrive at a disaster, they are essential educators of the public. The low level of confidence in local business is particularly troubling given the fact that they have such influence over employee time and focus. Local businesses must be partners in preparedness, and should work together toward joint training activities for their employees. Similarly, local charities and faith-based organizations can provide needed insights into closing the preparedness divide, as well as providing long-overdue training to the pockets of poverty and isolation that produced so many victims of Hurricane Katrina.

## Conclusion

Most Americans think catastrophe will happen just about anywhere but home. Although most have enough canned goods and bottled water to last a few days, the vast majority place their faith in their local police, fire, and charities to tell them what to do. The problem with Katrina is that many simply citizens did not listen, communications were cut off, and the local governments evacuated with the public, leaving few behind to deal with the looting. If anyone had rehearsed for a category five hurricane, it did not show.

What the nation needs most right now is a robust response system that can bend and flex to the unique circumstances of a given event. Such a system must be alert to impending catastrophe, agile in implementing well-designed plans for response and recovery, adaptive to surprise events such as the collapse of the New Orleans' levees, and aligned so that all responders can pull together from Washington on down to the very first responder who shows up at a site.

The first pillar of a robust response system is alertness to what lies ahead. As Katrina surely suggests, the nation faces many possible catastrophes, some that can be predicted, others unexpected but inevitable. What makes a high-performing response system different from the hastily-invented system now operating in the Gulf States is that it is constantly scanning a wide range of scenarios of the future to discover potential crisis. Katrina gave fair warning, but terrorists most certainly will not.

The second pillar of a robust response system is agility, which often resides in recruiting, training, retaining, and redeploying a talented, flexible workforce. Too many local governments have yet to complete even the most basic training on how to respond to a small-scale catastrophe such as a terrorist bombing at a local shopping center,

let alone an attack on a chemical refinery.

Agility also resides in making sure first responders can talk to each other on equipment that can survive a major catastrophe. It is one thing to have a plan in place, and quite another to actually execute it. Doing so requires an agile network of signals that can tell first responders where to go and what to do.

The third pillar of a robust response system is adaptability. Although no one can be prepared for every eventuality, a robust system provides enough flexibility in dollars, equipment, and duct tape to bring innovation to bear on unexpected events such as flooding and massive fatalities.

The fourth and final pillar of a robust response system is alignment of all organizations to a central plan. There are not only too many cooks in the kitchen, as New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin complained the day his levees collapsed, but too many recipes for action. Each one of the plans was no doubt drafted with the best of attentions, but they rarely blend together into a seamless whole. Having an aligned system means deciding who is in charge under which circumstances, then communicating that decision to the public.

Creating this kind of robust response system requires time, money, constant rehearsal, and concentration. More importantly, government and its many partners cannot be part of a robust system if they are not robust organizations themselves. They must strengthen the same four pillars of high performance that have allowed companies such as Intel, Marriott, Volvo, and even the Rolling Stones to stay ahead of the surprises they face. The nation should commit to a robust preparedness, response, and recovery system, and get ready to spend the money to build it. The recent Homeland Security Department reorganization plan is designed to do just that. State and local governments would be wise to follow the lead.

## CCPR BACKGROUND

In response to the events of September 11, 2001, Congress and the Department of Homeland Security provided New York University with federal funding to develop a university-wide, cross-disciplinary center to improve preparedness and response capabilities to terrorist threats and catastrophic events.

Drawing on each of its fourteen schools, NYU formed the Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response (CCPR) and initiated research projects that address issues including public health preparedness, legal issues relating to security, first-responder trauma response, and private sector preparedness.

NYU CCPR works in close partnership with the Department of Homeland Security, its Office for Domestic Preparedness, the New York City Police Department, the Fire Department of the City of New York, and the New York City Office of Emergency Management.

For more information, please visit www.nyu.edu/ccpr

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- Large Scale Emergency Surge Response (LaSER)
- Program on Law and Security
- Public Infrastructure Support for Protective Emergency Services
- Public Safety Trauma Response
- Telecommunications in Catastrophe Preparedness and Response
- The International Center for Enterprise Preparedness

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