

Issue 1: Summer 2005

Methodological Considerations and Key Findings in Preparedness Research



CITIZEN PREPAREDNESS REVIEW

Community Resilience through Civic Responsibility and Self-Reliance

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Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
National Preparedness Directorate
Community Preparedness Division, Citizen Corps
www.citizencorps.gov

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizen Corps is the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) grassroots strategy to strengthen collaboration between government and community leaders from all sectors to engage the full community in preparedness, planning, mitigation, response, and recovery. To support this mission, FEMA’s Community Preparedness Division has tasked Macro International Inc. (Macro), an Opinion Research Corporation company, to conduct and analyze research and to develop tools for Citizen Corps Councils and others to help achieve greater community resiliency nationwide. The Citizen Preparedness Review (CPR) is published periodically to summarize research findings and to support local efforts to achieve greater community resilience.

Issue 1 explains the methodology used to develop the *Citizen Preparedness Review* database of research surveys and a general review of the research environment, including a typology of the research that has been conducted. This report discusses some of the relevant findings and trends in data and examines why results from similar surveys are often divergent.

“These surveys provide an important understanding of the current level of household preparedness... and underscore that more work must be done to identify the motivators, the barriers, and the levers of change.”

THE SURVEYS

- The *Citizen Preparedness Review* database currently contains 30 surveys, which come from State and local governments, academic and nonprofit organizations, news organizations, and private corporations. A majority of the studies (18 of 30) are national in scope. Nearly a quarter of the studies either over-sampled or exclusively polled New York City respondents.

THE FINDINGS

- A striking finding is that respondents’ perceptions of their preparedness for a disaster (as measured by those who responded that they were prepared or somewhat prepared) are much greater than their actual preparedness, given responses to questions on specific preparedness activities such as having a plan or preparing a kit.
- The biggest barriers to action are the lack of importance that people place on preparedness, lack of time, and lack of information.
- While providing preparedness information appears to be important, it is not sufficient to change the behavior of most Americans. A successful campaign must also convince people that action is important and easy to do.

- The perception of an imminent threat is probably the greatest factor in motivating people to take action.
- These studies support the notion that information may be better received if it is provided by local sources. In general, people trust experts—doctors, first responders, and CDC specialists—over senior government agency administration or elected officials.
- While public trust in the media may be low, television is the first choice of a majority of the public for crisis information, followed by radio. This is problematic because in disasters that affect electricity, people who rely on television and do not have battery-operated radios will be cut off from communications.

These surveys can provide important understanding of the level of preparedness, especially when viewed critically, to focus on specifics of the preparedness actions that are asked. Reviewing findings across surveys also identifies the patterns of behavior that emerge. Importantly, this initial report also underscores that more work must be done to identify the motivators and barriers to preparedness and identify the levers of change.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Community Preparedness Division has tasked Macro International Inc., an Opinion Research Corporation company (Macro), to research, track, and cross-analyze surveys related to household preparedness that have been conducted by other parties. Quarterly reports will be prepared and distributed to summarize the findings.

The purpose of this meta-research is multifaceted. The analysis of other-party surveys will be used to inform the instrument design for the 2006 Citizen Corps Household Survey. The examination of other-party surveys will also provide insight into how to better understand and interpret the data collected by the Citizen Corps and other household survey. This type of cross-analysis provides a deeper understanding of the findings. To date, the research has asked similar questions with varying results, which makes it difficult to make definitive conclusions. By analyzing the survey instruments used (e.g., questions, scale) as well as the survey results, and by comparing results across surveys, Citizen Corps will be better able to understand the results from each individual survey and learn how to interpret and explain the often divergent findings. The collection of all available data sources may uncover information that will prove useful for DHS in developing policy and guidance to achieve greater community preparedness.

The other parties' data collection efforts provide a substantial amount of information about community and individual preparedness, including where people will seek information during and in preparation for a disaster, and some information about their motivations for and barriers to action.

As the first in a series of reports to be provided to Citizen Corps, this report includes introductory text to explain the methodology used for the *Citizen Preparedness Review*. This report also includes a general review of the research environment, including a typology of the research that has been conducted. This report discusses some of the findings and trends in data that are relevant to Citizen Corps and examines why results from similar surveys are often divergent. Subsequent issues of the *Citizen Preparedness Review* will focus primarily on current trends and new findings, but may also include an in-depth analysis of topics not covered in the initial report.

“These data collection efforts provide a substantial amount of information about community and individual preparedness, including where people will seek information during and in preparation for a disaster and their motivations for and barriers to action.”

METHODOLOGY

Macro began developing the *Citizen Preparedness Review* in July 2005. Macro analysts began their efforts by gathering and examining studies that were known from prior research, including the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey. A research strategy was developed that included developing criteria for studies to be included in a database, the method for finding such surveys, and the information that would be collected.

Selection Criteria: The studies were selected on the basis of three main criteria.

1. The study needed to include a household survey. Household surveys were chosen because they were more relevant to the mission of Citizen Corps and paralleled the research that the database was to inform.
2. The study needed to examine individual concerns about or preparedness for a disaster or terrorist attack. This criterion was purposefully broad so that relevant information was not overlooked.
3. All studies collected were conducted after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. It was determined that the events of 9/11 changed the research climate substantially enough to make prior studies less relevant to the current research climate.

Finding the Studies: Though some of the studies included were known from previous research, a great majority were found through a systematic combing of the Internet. Macro used a number of queries on Internet search engines, including combinations of search terms such as the following:

- “emergency preparedness”
- “household survey”
- “disaster preparedness”
- “survey”
- “terrorism preparedness”
- “readiness”

The results of these queries were examined carefully to determine whether they were relevant to the database or contained leads to potentially relevant studies. Upon finding a study that met the three criteria or a lead toward such a study, Macro directed searches to the particular study through the name of the study, the organization that conducted it, or the individual credited for the report. Macro exhausted all available queries in an attempt to find the survey results, study report, questionnaire, and potential contact information. With all queries exhausted, Macro attempted to contact the organization to request missing information.

“The events of 9/11 changed the research climate substantially enough to make prior studies less relevant to the current research climate.”

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

As of August 2005, 30 surveys met the selection criteria—many of which were conducted in multiple years (additional surveys may have been added to the database since this report was written). The surveys come from many different sources including State and local governments, academic and nonprofit organizations, news organizations, and private corporations. A majority of the studies (18 of 30) are national in scope. Nearly a quarter of the studies either over-sampled or exclusively polled New York City respondents. The 2003 Citizen Corps Survey is among the studies included, as well as two surveys that used large parts of the same survey instrument—a study by the Maine Citizen Corps and one conducted by Macro’s London office (both conducted in 2004).

The surveys are fairly evenly distributed over time. There was an increase in survey activity in 2001 and 2002, following the 9/11 attack. There appears to have been a decline in survey activity in 2003, followed by a fairly sharp increase in activity in 2004. Over that time, the types of surveys conducted changed considerably. The earlier studies in the database are primarily national in scope, undertaken by nonprofit/academic organization or news outlets, and they focus primarily on terrorist threats.

The turning point in preparedness research was in 2003. Citizen Corps, Duracell, and the American Red Cross all ran national surveys around that time. These surveys changed the research environment in two distinct ways: They focused more on exploring the particulars of individual and household preparedness, and they shifted the focus from terrorism to all hazards.

Furthermore, the Citizen Corps and American Red Cross surveys, in particular, explored not only what the public had done to increase preparedness but also what motivates and hinders these actions—an important step in the development of behavior change strategies. In 2004 and 2005 there was an increase in local surveys that continued to explore all hazard preparedness in this way.

The current research climate continues to be active. The current landscape includes the following:

- A large number of local governments (from the State of Wisconsin to the City of Long Beach) that are replicating a paper/Internet survey developed by the Oregon Partnership for Disaster Resistance.
- A soon-to-be-released study in Pennsylvania that for the first time will allow researchers to examine the issue of preparedness in a survey rich in demographic data, including characteristics such as housing, transportation, civil engagement, and socioeconomic status.
- The creation of a Public Readiness Index by the Council for Excellence in Government (CEG). This organization is conducting pilot studies and focus groups in an attempt to develop a short and reliable tool for measuring individual/household preparedness.
- A national household study to be conducted by the National Center for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism.

“The turning point in preparedness research came in 2003, when the focus shifted to individual and household preparedness and an all hazards perspective.”

PUTTING THE 2006 SURVEY IN CONTEXT

The *Citizen Preparedness Review* provides an overview of the disaster preparedness research environment. This overview allows Citizen Corps to see how its study fits within the context of the research that has been conducted in the past, that is currently underway, and that will be conducted in the future.

Citizen Corps is determined to understand what motivates and hinders people from taking action toward personal preparedness, and to have the information necessary to develop messages and programs that will effectively increase awareness and household/community preparedness. The determination to unravel this complex subject has created a strong demand for innovation. The result will be a survey that will explore this topic more in depth than any prior survey.

Citizen Corps, unlike other organizations conducting surveys, is also interested in public awareness of local Citizen Corps Councils and the training and opportunities to volunteer that they provide. This is an area that Citizen Corps will want to track over time as it charts the success of organizing communities and getting the word out about personal preparedness and opportunities for participating in community preparedness.

“ Citizen Corps is determined to understand what motivates and hinders people from taking action toward personal preparedness. ”

HOW TO INTERPRET RESULTS

When analyzing the different results from the surveys in the *Citizen Preparedness Review*, it is clear that different surveys have produced very different results using similar questions. Some of the differences can be attributed to differences in the population surveyed or the random error that affect all sample surveys. However, the larger differences are more likely to be a result of differences in the wording of the questions, the response scale, or how the results are reported. To interpret the data from these surveys accurately, it is important to understand these differences.

For example, studies that attempted to measure whether participants had an emergency supply kit yielded a wide range of different results from similar questions. The responses range from 23% (Marist Institute of Public Opinion 2005) to 88% (New York City Office of Emergency Management [OEM] 2005). Both surveys were conducted in New York City and had reasonably large samples. Therefore, the difference lies in how the question was asked.

To evaluate these results, we must look at a number of factors—

Is everybody being asked: The Marist Poll is unique compared to other surveys because the question about the supply kit is a follow-up to the question: “Do you have a family emergency preparedness plan that all family members know about?” Only those who indicated that they had a plan were asked the next question: “Does your family’s emergency plan include all, some, or none of the following: at least two days of food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place for family members in case of evacuation?” Ninety-seven percent of those asked the question had all or some of the items listed. The question, however, was only asked to 35% of the respondents.

What is being reported: The New York City OEM Survey asks: “Do you have emergency supplies in your home that include all, some, or none of the following: three days of drinking water and non-perishable foods, a first-aid kit, a flashlight, a battery-operated radio, and personal hygiene items?” The results indicated that 36% of respondents had all of the items, and 52% had some items. In reporting on the survey, the *Daily News* hailed, “Nearly nine out of 10 New Yorkers now stock emergency supplies in their homes in case of a terror attack or other disaster, according to a survey released yesterday,” when in fact the number of respondents with complete supplies was lower than the national average.

How specific is the question: The America Prepared Survey (2003) asked: “Do you have a readily accessible emergency kit that includes all of the following in one place: supplies of food and water, a first-aid kit, battery powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries, and any items such as prescription medications that are essential to your family?” Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they had all of these items. The question in this case is very specific: “Do you have all the items and are they in one place?” The 2003 Citizen Corps Survey was less specific in asking: “Does your household have an emergency supply kit at home to be used only in the case of a disaster?” As a result, this survey recorded that more Americans had kits (50%).

Are there significant differences in the sample: The Duracell Study (2003) used a question similar to the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey with very different results (39% with kits compared with 50%). In part, this difference is likely a result of a difference in sampling. The Duracell Study targeted 10 large cities, and is therefore an urban sample. Many surveys, including the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey, have shown conclusively that urban residents are significantly less prepared than non-urban residents.

Despite the differences in how preparedness is measured in these surveys, the data reveal recurring themes that could be informative in formulating policies and designing futures studies.

The Studies

“Preparedness may be most accurately measured by asking people to describe what actions they have taken, without prompting them with potential responses.”

A NOTE ON THE SOCIAL DESIRABILITY EFFECT:

The social desirability effect is a well-documented phenomenon in which survey respondents indicate that they have done something because they think it is the socially desirable response. This effect is stronger in face-to-face and telephone interviews and with subjects who are socially sensitive.

It is safe to say that all measures of preparedness are likely to be affected in some way by social desirability. That is, a certain percentage of respondents may say that they have taken measures because they think it would cast a negative light on their character if they indicated that they did not. Short of going door-to-door for visual confirmation that preparedness measures are in place, it is impossible to know the magnitude of the bias.

However, unless the question somehow stimulates a social desirability response or the topic is particularly socially sensitive, the bias is not likely to be large and should not exceed 5%.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data from the surveys in the tracking database can provide information on a number of important topic areas, including the following:

- **Preparedness**
How prepared are people?
What actions have they taken?
- **Motivations**
What motivates people to become more prepared? To attend training classes?
To volunteer?
What hinders people from taking action?
- **Communications**
What mode of communications is most effective?
Where will people seek information about preparedness or in case of an emergency?
What are the preferred means of receiving information?
Whom do people trust?

HOUSEHOLD PREPAREDNESS

A recurring theme throughout the studies is household preparedness. Questions about preparedness range from the particulars of a household’s disaster plan to the respondent’s self-reported sense of preparedness. These studies all address the issue of preparedness in different ways, thus making analysis difficult. Because of the quantity of information, this report will focus on a sample of recent surveys.

The 2005 New York City OEM Survey offers the most recent attempt at measuring preparedness. The survey first asked participants how prepared they feel for an emergency such as natural disasters, fires, power outages, or an act of terrorism. Forty-nine percent of respondents indicate that they feel prepared or very prepared. The survey continued with more specifics. More than half of respondents (55%) indicate that they feel informed or very informed about what to do in the event of an emergency. However, only 14% indicate that they have a household emergency plan that includes two meeting places for family members, multiple exit routes, an out-of-State contact, and copies of the plan they can carry with them—37% have some elements of the plan. The survey also asked whether respondents have emergency supplies, including 3 days of water and nonperishable food, a first-aid kit, flashlight, battery-operated radio, and personal hygiene items. More than a third (36%) report having all of these items—52% report having some of these supplies. Only 16% indicate that they have a “to-go” bag of supplies, including copies of important documents, emergency contact information, cash, bottled water, snack food, a flashlight, a radio, prescriptions, and a first-aid kit.

The 2004/2005 Puget Sound Regional Survey asked respondents whether they have established a plan in case of a natural or manmade disaster. Though 45% indicate

that they have a plan in place, in a follow-up question, less than half of these respondents (47%) have developed and implemented a home escape plan. Many of these respondents indicate that they have talked about a plan but not taken any action (16%), or in fact, have no plan but have taken CPR, First Aid, or an emergency implementation class (17%), or have stored supplies (12%). The survey also asked all respondents whether they would know what to do if they were told to shelter in place in case of a chemical spill or biological threat— 44% indicate yes (up from 38% in 2004). In a follow-up question, 70% of these respondents indicate that they would shut off their heating/ventilation system, close the windows, and go to a room with few windows. Nearly half (49%) of parents indicate that their children know what to do during an emergency if the parents are not present. Roughly the same percentage (48%) indicate that they have discussed an emergency plan with their children.

The 2004 King County Survey took an item-by-item approach to preparedness by asking: “Which of the following have you done to prepare your household for a disaster or emergency?” The results were as follows:

“A striking finding is that perceived preparedness is very different from specific measures of household preparedness.”

2004 King County Survey

Item or Action	Percentage Yes
Have a flashlight available in the house	94%
Smoke and/or carbon monoxide detectors	93%
Home fire extinguishers	77%
Took classes	67%
Food and water stored for use in the event of emergency	62%
Put together a kit for the car	59%
Developed a home escape plan	54%
Water heaters, etc. have been strapped down (earthquakes)	53%
Extra clothes and blankets have been stored	48%
Established a plan to communicate with family	22%
Selected a family meeting place	16%
Conducted home fire or evacuation drills	16%
Other	4%
Nothing	1%

The survey also asked respondents to rate their perceived level of preparedness on a scale of 0 to 10. The survey summary only reports the extremes, with 11% rating their preparedness level 0–2 (“not well prepared”) and 9% rating their preparedness level 9 or 10 (“very well prepared”).

The 2004 National Center for Disaster Preparedness Study is the most recent national survey in the database. In this survey, respondents were asked if they had a family emergency plan that all family members know about. Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicate that they have a plan. Those who indicate that they have a plan were asked whether it includes at least 2 days of food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting for family members. Two-thirds (66%) of those who indicate they have a plan or nearly a quarter of the total population surveyed (24%) indicate that they have all of these items in their plan. These figures were virtually identical in the 2003 study.

The 2004 American Red Cross Survey asked whether anyone in the respondent’s household had recently taken a list of actions to prepare for a catastrophic disaster. Almost half (47%) indicate that they or someone in their family has been certified in First Aid or CPR in the past 3 years. A somewhat smaller percentage (42%) has put together an emergency kit including 3 days of water and food, first-aid kit with family’s prescription medications, battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries. Just less than a third (32%) indicate that they have a family emergency plan, including a meeting place and emergency contact information. The American Red Cross survey also asked respondents to rate their perceived level of preparedness for a disaster such as

an earthquake, a hurricane, or a terrorist attack—22% of respondents indicate that they are very prepared and 58% indicate that they are somewhat prepared.

The 2003 Citizen Corps Survey also measured household preparedness. The survey first asked respondents to rate on a 5-point scale how prepared they and their households are for three types of disasters: a terrorist event, a natural disaster, and a household emergency. The results are much lower than those of the 2004 American Red Cross Survey—a difference that is primarily the result of a difference in scale (4-point labeled vs. 5-point anchored).

2003 Citizen Corps Survey	
Event	Percentage Prepared (4 or 5 on a 5-pt. scale)
Terrorist Event	20%
Natural Disaster	28%
Household Emergency	54%

This survey also asked whether the respondent had an emergency plan that included instructions about where to go and what to do in a disaster situation. Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicate that they have such a plan. The survey then asked respondents whether their household had an emergency supply kit for their home, car, and work. The results are as follows:

Type of Kit	Percentage that Has
Home	50%
Car	34%
Work	41%

Respondents were asked to list items in their emergency kit and to indicate what actions they have taken in the past 2 years—35% of respondents indicate that they have taken some action.

Respondents were also asked whether they had received any preparedness training in the past 2 years. Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicate that they have attended CPR training, 37% have received First Aid training, and 10% have received Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.

DIFFERENCES IN HOW PREPAREDNESS IS MEASURED

There are many differences between these surveys in how preparedness is measured, and consequently, the results vary greatly. Despite the differences, the data reveal recurring themes that could be informative in formulating policies and designing future surveys.

The most striking finding is that perceived preparedness is very different from specific measures of household preparedness. In nearly all cases, the proportion of those who have taken appropriate preparedness measures is much lower than that of those who indicate that they are prepared. The 2004 American Red Cross Survey results, for example, indicate that 80% of Americans say that they are very or somewhat prepared for a disaster, though only 42% have an adequate kit and 32% have a disaster plan. The results are similar for nearly all of the other surveys.

Another related finding is that people may report taking steps toward preparedness, but when asked follow-up questions, it is revealed that their actions are inadequate. In the 2005 Puget Sound Regional Survey, 45% of respondents indicate that they have a disaster plan in place. When questioned further, many respondents admit that they do not actually have a plan implemented, but have talked about it or have taken other actions such as receiving training or storing food and water—21% of respondents actually have a plan in place. The results are even more striking when respondents are not prompted with potential responses. In

the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey, respondents were asked to list the items they have in their disaster kit. Though 50% of the respondents indicate that they have a home kit, only 54% of these respondents have bottled water and 41% have a flashlight. Very few respondents list all of the items needed for an adequate supply kit.

These results reveal a challenge for the design of these surveys. They indicate that surveys should be specific about what is meant by a disaster kit or plan; yet such specificity may overstate preparedness by feeding into social desirability. Preparedness may be measured more accurately by asking people to tell the interviewer what actions they have taken or supplies they have gathered, without prompting them with potential responses. The researcher can then gauge preparedness by comparing these responses to the standards prescribed by the preparedness advocacy community.

Another interesting finding is that many people have items that will assist them in an emergency, but which they do not associate with a disaster kit. The 2004 King County Survey is the only survey that asked all respondents about the supplies they have. Sixty-two percent of respondents indicate that they have food and water stored for an emergency (more people than those who report having kits in most studies) and nearly all respondents have a flashlight in the home. This finding seems to indicate that some people are preparing themselves by storing materials but do not identify them as a kit or perhaps do not store these supplies in one place as is intimated by the term “kit.”

2003 Citizen Corps Survey	
Item in Kit (Respondents with a kit)	Percentage with Item in Kit
First-aid kit	64%
Bottled water	54%
Packaged food	45%
Flashlight	41%
Batteries	21%
Portable radio	14%
Personal items	10%
Actions Taken in Past 2 Years (Respondents who have taken action)	Percentage that Has Taken Action
Assembled disaster supply kit	58%
Put together/practiced a disaster plan	18%
Became more aware of surroundings	6%
Held household evacuation or other drills	4%
Other	30%

KEY FINDINGS

- The largest barriers to action are perceived lack of importance and lack of time.
- The perception of an imminent threat is the greatest factor in motivating people to take action.
- Campaigns must convince people that preparedness is important and easy to do.

MOTIVATIONS AND REASONS FOR TAKING OR NOT TAKING ACTION

The 2005 New York City OEM Survey asked respondents the main reason they would not be prepared. “I am not sure what to do” is the most frequent response (28%), followed by “I don’t feel at risk” (23%) and “I have not had time to prepare a plan” (21%)—5% indicate that they are not physically able to prepare.

The 2005 Puget Sound Regional Survey asked a similar question to those who have not made a disaster plan. Forty-three percent say that they have not taken the time, 16% indicate that they are too busy, and 14% say that they do not think anything serious will happen. This survey also asked the same respondents what would motivate them to make a plan. Nearly a third (31%) indicate that knowing it would keep their family safe would motivate them, followed by a disaster happening in the area (21%).

The 2004 Virginia OEM Survey questioned all respondents on why they would not take actions to prepare for an emergency. Seventeen percent of respondents say that there is no reason not to take action and 5% indicate that they are already prepared. The main reasons for not preparing follow a similar theme—15% indicate that a disaster is not likely, 8% say it does not seem important, and 3% say that they think they will have time when the threat is imminent. A substantial percentage of respondents indicates that they do not have enough money (4%) or they do not know what to do (2%). This survey also asked respondents what might motivate them to act. More than a third (34%) of respondents indicate that an imminent threat from a storm is the main reason they would take action, followed by a past experience with a disaster (15%).

The 2004 American Red Cross Survey asked those who had not taken initiative to receive information or training on disaster preparedness what some of the barriers are. One in five (20%) indicate that they do not know where to go for such information or training. Nearly an equal percentage of respondents indicate that they are not concerned or that they do not think it is important (19%), and 18% indicate that they are already prepared.

The 2003 Citizen Corps Survey also asked respondents who do not have a kit in their home why they do not. Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents indicate that they do not think it was important, followed by not having the knowledge (7%), not having the time (6%), and not having the money (4%). Of those who have taken action, 28% indicate that they were inspired by the events of 9/11, 16% cite events in their own life, and 13% cite concerns for their own or their household’s safety. Unlike other studies, the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey also asked the reasons for seeking or not seeking training. Nearly half of those who received training indicate that they did so to satisfy a workplace or school requirement—31% sought training because of concern or general interest. Those who do not have training cite lack of time (19%), lack of interest (16%), and difficulty in finding opportunities (14%).

The results of this analysis show that the biggest barriers to action are the lack of importance that people place on preparedness, lack of time, and lack of information. In many studies, lack of information is the weakest of these three barriers. This indicates that, while providing preparedness information is important, it is not sufficient to change the behavior of most Americans. A successful campaign must also convince people that action is important and easy to do.

This analysis also indicates that the perception of an imminent threat, such as a storm, is probably the greatest factor in motivating people to take action. Personal experience and the desire to protect one’s family also play strong roles.

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Preparedness Communication: A handful of studies in some way explored the issue of preparedness communications—to understand the information needs of respondents and their preferences for how they seek and receive information.

The most recent study that addressed these issues is the 2005 Puget Sound Regional Survey. The survey asked respondents with a plan to indicate where they have sought information. One in five respondents indicate that they sought information on the Internet (20%), with television being the second most common response (17%). The survey also asked the respondents without plans: “What would you be most likely to do in order to learn about establishing a plan for yourself and your families in case of a natural or a manmade disaster?” Seeking a brochure is the top response (23%), followed by the Internet (22%), and friends and family (20%). Government agencies are rated low at 7%, down from 14% in 2004. Respondents were also asked what would be the most helpful information to have. Nearly half (46%) of the respondents indicate that a checklist would be most helpful, followed by 22% who would find a Web site most helpful—7% would prefer classes and training.

The 2004 eTown Study shows that very few people have talked about preparing for an emergency with anybody but their family, friends, and to a lesser extent, neighbors. Only 10% of respondents have been contacted with information about preparedness and roughly the same percentage has been contacted about opportunities to volunteer.

The 2003 Citizen Corps Survey asked what would be the best way for an organization to provide information about disaster preparedness. In the national survey, regular mail was the most common response (41%), followed by TV or radio (24%) and local newspaper (15%)—only 6% indicated that the Internet was the best way to provide information.

The 2004 CEG Study produced different results. The survey asked: “If you wanted to prepare for a terrorist attack, learn about the latest threat, and receive guidance on security precautions, which of the following would you turn to first?” Television was the most common response (53%), followed by Government Web site (18%) and news Web site (13%)—only 1% indicated direct mail. The results are different from those of the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey, particularly relative to the importance of direct mail. The questions are, however, very different. The CEG study asked where the respondent would seek information, while the Citizen Corps study asked about the best way to receive information. The question of the CEG study also specifies “the latest threat,” which respondents may interpret as requiring event-specific information.

The 2003 American Red Cross Study indicated that a third (33%) of respondents have received preparedness information in the past 12 months. When asked to name a source of disaster or emergency preparedness information, the American Red Cross is the most common response (42%), followed by the fire department (8%), and local government (5%)—26% of respondents indicated that they do not know a source for such information. This study also shows that 45% of parents received disaster information from their child’s school and that 55% received formal information or training from their employers.

KEY FINDINGS

- Two-thirds of the public indicate that they are not receiving preparedness information.
- Direct mail campaigns and brochures are the most effective ways to provide preparedness information.
- It is necessary to contact the public more than once to remind people to take action or to update their plans.

KEY FINDINGS

- Logistics are best communicated through local officials.
- In general, people trust experts over officials.
- Television and radio are the top choices for emergency communications.

The 2003 FCW/Pew Study indicates that 12% of respondents sought information on the Internet about how to prepare for a terrorist attack.

The 2002 Oregon Study asked whom people would most trust for preparedness information. A university or research institution is rated the highest (40%), followed closely by utility companies (39%), the American Red Cross (38%), and a Government Agency (34%). This survey also confirms the 2003 Citizen Corps Survey in finding that direct mail is rated the most effective way to receive preparedness information (49%), followed by a fact sheet/brochure (38%), fire department/rescue (31%), and Internet (21%). This study has been or is being replicated in a number of local and State communities, although the results are currently unavailable.

These results indicate that direct mail campaigns are likely to be an effective way to provide preparedness information. The data show that pamphlets and brochures are also likely to be effective and may be more so if they include a checklist. These studies also confirm that more needs to be done to inform the public of what they should be doing. If 33% have been contacted with preparedness information, as one study suggests, 66% are not receiving the message. Furthermore, it will be necessary to contact the other 33% again to remind them to take action or to update their plan and maintain their supplies. These studies show some indication that citizens trust and will seek information from local fire departments and officials. This supports the notion that information may be better received if it is provided by local sources.

Crisis Communication: A number of studies explore issues related to crisis communications. These studies focus on whom people would trust most to provide information in an emergency and where they would seek information. It is important to note that four of the five surveys in this analysis are terrorism-specific—two specific to bioterrorism. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to a natural disaster.

The 2004 King County OEM Survey asked who would be the best type of person to communicate important information on the television or radio in case of a serious disaster. Respondents indicate that a real first responder would be the best choice (mean 8.2 on a 0 to 10 scale), followed by a Red Cross representative (7.6) and a local government official (7.2).

The 2003 National Center for Disaster Preparedness Study also addresses this issue by asking how much respondents would trust information from organizations in case of a terrorist attack. The results reflect a predominant concern with bioterrorism: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) rates the highest (84%), followed by a doctor with expertise in bioterrorism (83%), the Surgeon General (76%), and the National Institutes of Health (75%).

In 2002, the Harvard School of Public Health asked two similar questions in the context of a bioterrorism attack. It asked whom the respondent would most trust in the event of such attack.

A senior CDC scientist was the most common response (43%), followed by the head of the Department of Health and Human Services (16%) and the Surgeon General (13%)—7% indicated that they would not trust anybody. It then asked whom respondents would trust for information about where to go if they thought they were exposed to a biological agent. The most common response is again a senior CDC scientist (28%), but this time the next most common response is a city or State health commissioner (26%).

Similarly, the 2002 Robert Wood Johnson Study asked respondents to rate their trust in different individuals and organizations to provide information about where to go in the case of a bioterrorism attack. A doctor received the highest rating (74%), followed by a local hospital (65%), the local Red Cross (55%), and the local health department (51%)—only 25% would trust the media and 37% would trust the head of the DHS.

The 2003 FCW/Pew Study indicates that 71% of the population was very or somewhat confident that the Federal Government would quickly provide accurate information in the case of a terrorist attack.

It is important to analyze the trust issue in context of the studies and the climate when they were conducted. With the exception of the King County study, all of the studies are terrorism-focused—two are specific to bioterrorism. Many of these studies were conducted at a time when the fear of bioterrorism was high. These results, therefore, should not be interpreted in the context of an all-hazards perspective.

Regardless of the perspective, there are some general lessons that can be learned from this analysis. People have a tendency to trust local sources when they are asked to take action, such as where to go if they think they have been exposed to a bioterrorism agent. Therefore, it appears that it is better to communicate logistics through local officials in case of a disaster. In general, people trust experts over officials. Individuals appear much more likely to trust doctors, first responders, and CDC specialists than they are to trust Federal Government department heads or elected officials. While public trust in the media may be low, television is the first choice of a majority of the public for crisis information, followed by radio. Though in many disasters it will not be possible to communicate through this medium, when possible (e.g., a bioterrorism attack), television is clearly the most powerful tool for emergency communications.

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**The Citizen Corps mission is to bring
community and government leaders
together to involve community members and
organizations in
all-hazards emergency preparedness,
planning, mitigation, response, and recovery.**

Community Preparedness Division
U.S. Department of Homeland Security/FEMA
Suite 640, Techworld Bldg. N.
500 C. St. SW
Washington, DC, 20472
202.786.9922 fax
CitizenCorps@dhs.gov
www.citizencorps.gov