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“Weathering the Storm”  
Leading Your Organization Through a Pandemic

Washington, DC (January 26, 2007) In recent years the media has given much attention to the possibility of a worldwide flu pandemic. Estimates of worldwide effects suggest as many as 100 million fatalities. While the likelihood of a pandemic remains a source of active debate, particularly at a time when a potential pandemic virus (H5N1) is active in birds around the world, many researchers agree that we are in an age of “biological susceptibility.” That is, we now face new biological threats—both man-made and naturally occurring—that challenge our current thinking about disaster preparedness.

Unlike public health officials who highlight the medical aspects of biological threats— infection avoidance, treatment and recovery—the authors of a newly released report from the National Defense University’s Center for Technology and National Security Policy— “Weathering the Storm: Leading Your Organization Through a Pandemic”—focus on the broader aspect of maintaining social and economic viability by addressing the organizational readiness of society’s businesses and institutions. Dr. Stephen Prior, senior author of the report, notes that “while you may feel prepared as an individual and have family plans —stockpile of medicines, etc.—the odds are, your organization is not prepared for an extended biological event.” Designed for organizations with diverse interests and cultures, the report is a strategic road map for organizational planning, readiness and management—not only while facing a pandemic, but also in the event of any extended biological threat.

The difference between “ordinary” catastrophes that are isolated in time and space (hurricanes, earthquakes, blizzards), and complex, evolving biological human health crises—pandemic flu, SARS, West Nile Virus, to name a few—is stark, and organizations must formulate distinct plans for such unique challenges. “Rewriting an organization’s hurricane preparedness plan is not adequate to address the myriad of issues involved in ensuring continuity of operations during a pandemic or similar incident,” said Prior. From the creation of a pandemic coordination team within an organization, to techniques for effectively managing and communicating with the workforce, to writing out a detailed plan and testing it using the included “tabletop exercises,” “Weathering the Storm” will enable organizations of all types to prepare for a complex biological event.

There may even be economic benefits from such planning. The report notes that organizations spent over \$600 billion avoiding a Y2K information technology disaster, resulting in streamlined operations and increased profitability. Similar benefits may arise during planning for biological events, by preparing a workforce and workplace for telecommuting and operations with limited staff.

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