



FEMA



Personal Preparedness in America: Findings from the 2009 Citizen Corps National Survey August 2009 (Revised December 2009) - Summary Sheet -

Background: Disaster preparedness became a renewed priority for our Nation as a direct response to the devastation of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Following the tragedies of that day, government at all levels has embedded stronger collaboration with nongovernmental civic and private sector organizations and the general public in policies and practices. The Citizen Corps grassroots model of community preparedness has spread across the country, and Americans have been asked to become fully aware, trained, and practiced on how to respond to potential threats and hazards.

Purpose of Survey: To evaluate the Nation's progress on personal preparedness and to measure the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relative to preparing for a range of hazards.

Research Conducted by: FEMA's Community Preparedness Division and Citizen Corps

Dates Survey Fielded: The 2009 Citizen Corps National Survey was fielded from April 2009 to May 2009. During the survey fielding, there was an H1N1 influenza outbreak that was reported repeated in the national news. An analysis of the potential impact of this outbreak on survey responses will be provided at a later date.

Sampling Size: 4,461 U.S. households

Research Questions:

- To what extent are individuals prepared for disasters? What barriers do individuals perceive in preparing for disasters?
- What is the perception of vulnerability to different types of disasters? How do people perceive the utility of preparedness?
- In which stage of the Stages of Change model (Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance) are individuals relative to disaster preparedness?
- How does disaster preparedness differ by demographic characteristics?
- What is the perceived social responsibility for reporting suspicious behavior?

Key Findings:

To What Extent Have Individuals Gathered Disaster Supplies?

- 57% of individuals reported having "supplies set aside in their home to be used only in the case of a disaster."
- 34% of individuals said they had supplies set aside in their car.
- 45% of individuals indicated they had set aside supplies in their workplace.
- If participants indicated they had set supplies aside in their home, they were then asked to list those supplies:
 - The supplies most frequently mentioned included a supply of packaged food (74%) and bottled water (71%), with many fewer individuals mentioning other essential supplies such as a flashlight (42%), first aid kit (39%) or portable radio (20%).
 - Less than half of the respondents (44%) reported updating their supplies once a year.

- When asked directly, 71% of respondents reported having copies of important financial documents in a safe place, yet only 1 % specifically mentioned the documents unaided as part of their household disaster supplies.

To What Extent Do Individuals Have a Household Emergency Plan?

- 44% of individuals reported having a household emergency plan “that included instructions for household members about where to go and what to do in the event of a disaster.”

How Familiar Are Individuals with Their Community’s Disaster Preparedness Plans and Protocols?

- 50% of respondents reported familiarity with alerts and warning systems.
- 38% of respondents reported familiarity official sources of public safety information.
- 59% of respondents said they had a child attending a school outside of their home, including day care or part-time kindergarten, said they were aware of the details of the emergency or evacuation plan of their children’s school, including where the school planned to evacuate and how to get information about the child in the event of a disaster.
- Respondents also reported being least familiar with community evacuation routes (58%) and shelter locations (54%).
- 48% of the respondents were familiar with how to get information regarding a public health emergency such as the H1N1 virus or swine flu.
- Only 34% of respondents were familiar with information regarding local hazards in their area.
- In early May, following news of the Spring 2009 H1N1 pandemic, participants were asked about the sources from which they received information regarding the pandemic.
 - Results showed that 86% of respondents received information from a local media source, followed by an individual’s workplace (25%) and an individual’s school or childcare facility (23%).

What Is the Extent of Volunteer Support for Emergency Responders/Community Safety?

- 23% of individuals stated they had given some time in the past 12 months to support emergency responder organizations or an organization that focuses on community safety, such as Neighborhood Watch.
- 34% of participants indicated that they had volunteered to help in a disaster at some point in the past.
- The most frequently mentioned organizations for which individuals had volunteered their time included Neighborhood Watch (41%), fire/police/EMT (30%), and The American Red Cross (10%).

Do Individuals Know What To Do in the First Five Minutes After Specific Types of Disasters (Natural, Radiological, Explosion, or Chemical Release)?

- 53% of individuals expressed confidence in their abilities to know what to do in the first 5 minutes of a sudden natural disaster such as an earthquake or tornado.
- Reported confidence levels were significantly lower for manmade disasters such as radiological explosions or dirty bombs, the release of chemical agents, or other explosions or bombs (20%, 26%, and 31% confidence, respectively).
- Individuals reported the least confidence in their abilities to handle an explosion of a radiological or dirty bomb, or release of a chemical agent (59% and 50% nonconfidence, respectively).

What Is the Extent of Participation in Preparedness Drills/Exercises?

- While 42% of individuals reported having participated in a workplace evacuation drill, only 27% had participated in a workplace shelter-in-place drill.
- Even fewer individuals had participated in school- or home-based shelter-in-place drills (14% and 10%, respectively).
- Only 14 % reported having participated in a home evacuation drill.

How Many Individuals Have Received Training in Preparation for a Disaster in the Past 2 Years?

- 37% of respondents had attended first aid skills training. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training was the next most common response (36%).
- Approximately 1 in 8 individuals (13%) had attended training as part of a Community Emergency Response Team or CERT.
- Most individuals taking preparedness classes or emergency training attributed their motivation to a mandatory function of their job or school (48%). The second most common response was for the concern and safety of family or others (21%). Some respondents (14%) also reported taking preparedness training because family or friends did.

How Does Perceived Preparedness Compare with Actual Preparedness?

- Even those who reported being prepared were lacking some critical elements of preparedness, e.g., over one third who said they “have been prepared for at least the past six months” did not have a household plan, nearly 80 % had not conducted a home evacuation drill, and over 70% did not know their community’s evacuation routes.

What Barriers Do Individuals Perceive in Preparing for Disasters?

- The most commonly mentioned primary reason for not preparing was the belief that emergency responders such as fire, police, or emergency personnel would help them (29%).
- Other primary reasons included lack of knowledge (24%) and lack of time (26%).

What Are the Barriers to Taking Preparedness Training?

- The most common reasons given were that it was difficult for them to get information on what to do (31%), they had not had the time (22%), or they hadn’t thought about it (18%).
- Other responses included the respondent reporting that they already knew how to be prepared (12%) and being physically unable to get to training (5%) as barriers for taking preparedness training.

Who Will Individuals Look To For Help During the First 72 Hours?

- A large majority of individuals (70%) indicated that they would rely on household members most, while 61% expect to rely on fire, police, and emergency personnel.
- Respondents also expect to rely on people in their neighborhood (49%), nonprofit organizations (42%), faith-based communities (39%), and state and federal government agencies, including FEMA (36%).

Do Individuals Expect to Need Help During an Evacuation?

- 42% of individuals said they would expect to need help to evacuate or get to a shelter in the event of a disaster.
- Individuals who indicated they would need help in an evacuation were asked an unaided follow-up question about the kind of help they would need.
 - Over half of respondents reported needing help with transportation out of the area (50%), while a quarter reported needing information on the evacuation route.
 - Respondents also reported needing help from state or federal government agencies (9%) and not having a place to go after the evacuation (8%).

What Are Individuals’ Perceptions of Risks of Different Types of Disasters?

- Of the four specific types of disasters investigated, a natural disaster such as an earthquake, flood, hurricane, tornado, or wildfire was rated as the disaster most likely to occur.
- 40% of individuals reported thinking that a natural disaster would *ever* affect their community.
- Only 14% of individuals felt a terrorist act would *ever* occur in their community.
- These low levels of perceived susceptibility were also echoed in the responses related to a severe disease outbreak and hazardous materials accident (28% and 23%, respectively).

What Is the Perceived Severity of the Impact of Different Types of Disasters?

- For the same four types of disasters: a natural disaster, an act of terrorism, a hazardous materials accident, and a severe disease outbreak, the survey asked if the disaster occurred in your community, “how severe do you think the impact would be to you.”
 - Over half of participants (59%) believed that the impact of an act of terrorism in their community would be severe (rated a 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale), followed by a natural disaster (50%).
 - One-quarter of individuals perceived that a contagious disease outbreak would not be very severe (25%) and 31% of individuals did not believe a hazardous materials accident would be severe.

What Is the Perceived Utility of Advance Preparation for Different Types of Disasters?

- 82% of individuals felt that preparation, planning, and emergency supplies would help them handle a natural disaster.
- 11% of individuals believed they could handle a natural disaster without advance preparation.
- In response to dealing with an act of terrorism, 59% of individuals felt preparation, planning, and supplies would help them.
 - This lower level of response efficacy for a terrorist event (lack of belief that recommended preparedness measures will mitigate the personal impact of a disaster) is coupled with relatively high levels of fatalism, with over one-third of individuals (35%) reporting the belief that nothing they do to prepare would help them handle an act of terrorism.
- While participants indicated greater response efficacy related to threats such as a severe disease outbreak or hazardous materials accidents (73% and 65%, respectively), about 2 out of 10 individuals believed that nothing would help them respond to those threats.

What Is the Perceived Effectiveness of Advanced Preparation on Handling a Disaster?

- Individuals felt that preparing for a natural disaster would help them the most (67%), compared to other types of disasters (45–52%).
- The disaster with which most individuals felt preparation would not help much at all was a terrorist attack (34%), compared to a natural disaster (13%) and a severe disease outbreak (24%).

How Does Disaster Preparedness Differ by Demographic Characteristics?

What Is the Potential Impact of Disability on Disaster Preparedness?

- 15% reported having a physical or other disability that would affect their capacity to respond to an emergency situation.
- Another 14% of survey participants indicated they lived with and/or cared for someone with a physical or other disability.

What Is the Potential Impact of Gender on Disaster Preparedness?

- In general, men reported greater levels of preparedness and confidence in their abilities to handle the situation. This was also reflected in the finding that fewer men expected to need help in the event of an evacuation.

What Is the Potential Impact of Community Type on Disaster Preparedness?

- Overall, rural respondents were more likely to report having volunteered, taken preparedness training, and to feel more confident about their preparedness (or in other words, their ability to respond in the early stages of a disaster and believing that preparing for a disaster could actually aid in reducing harm).
- Suburban respondents overall were less prepared than were urban respondents.
- Suburban residents were equally confident in their ability to respond in the first 5 minutes of a disaster.
- Rural residents also were significantly more familiar with community alerts and warning systems.
- Although urban residents were not as confident in their ability to act in the event of a disaster, they indicated that they were significantly more willing to take a 20-hour disaster recovery training course.

What Is the Potential Impact of Race and Ethnicity on Disaster Preparedness?

- Black respondents were more likely to have higher risk perceptions about disasters; that is, they were more likely than White respondents to believe that the majority of the disasters discussed were likely to occur in their communities.
- Additionally, black respondents were more likely to expect to rely on others (especially their faith-based communities) in the event of an evacuation.
- Black respondents were also more prepared in terms of having participated in a workplace evacuation drill.
- White respondents were more likely to be prepared for the last six months than Black respondents and had stronger beliefs in their own responsibility to report suspicious behavior.
- Non-Hispanic respondents were more likely to be prepared across a number of measures, including having a household emergency plan and having important financial and insurance documents in a safe place.
- Hispanics were also more likely to cite reliance on non-governmental organizations as a barrier to being prepared for disasters.

What Is the Potential Impact of Income on Disaster Preparedness?

- Across several constructs measuring preparedness the data indicate a direct relationship between income level and preparedness: as income increased so did measures of preparedness.
- Respondents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more were more likely than those with a lesser income to have disaster supplies in their cars, a household disaster plan, communicated this plan with others, volunteered to help in a disaster, taken a preparedness training or CPR course, communicated the importance of preparing to someone else, and believe that preparedness would actually help them handle a disaster situation.
- Conversely, those with lower household incomes were less likely to have taken preparedness measures and indicated an increased need for help in an evacuation.
- Individuals with lower household incomes were less likely to have been prepared during the past six months, and they were more likely to cite cost as a barrier to preparing than were those with higher incomes.
- Furthermore, individuals reporting lower household incomes were also more likely to have different attitudes about preparedness than those with higher incomes.

What Is the Potential Impact of Education on Disaster Preparedness?

- The data show that individuals with some college experience were overwhelmingly more aware, prepared, and confident in the benefits of disaster preparedness.
- Individuals with no college education were less prepared among all the measures previously mentioned.
- Furthermore, people with no college experience perceived two significant barriers to personal preparedness: reliance on emergency responders and a lack of knowledge about how to prepare.
- Also, people with no college experience had a greater perception that several types of disasters would occur in their community.
- Both groups (those with some college and those with no college experience) predicted a reliance on others in the first 72 hours of a disaster: individuals with no college experience predicted they would rely on people in their neighborhood, nonprofit organizations, and state and federal government agencies.

What Is the Potential Impact of Age on Disaster Preparedness?

- The data suggest that the most prepared age group was individuals 18 to 34 years old and 35 to 54 years old. The primary barrier to being prepared reported by these groups was an anticipated reliance on emergency responders.
- There were some nuances among these two more prepared groups, however.
 - For example, the 35- to 54-year-olds were more likely to be in the *action* stage of the Stages of Change model; whereas, the 18- to 34-year-olds were more likely than other groups to be in the *precontemplation* stage.

- Also, individuals 35+ years old were more likely to feel it was their responsibility to report suspicious behavior.
- Adults 55+ years old were less prepared among some of the measures mentioned earlier. The data do suggest, however, that older adults are aware of community groups and plans.

What Is the Potential Impact of Employment on Disaster Preparedness?

- Overall, employed individuals were more likely to take part in various training programs and volunteer opportunities than unemployed individuals.
- Also, employed individuals were more likely than retired individuals to be in the *contemplation* phase of the Stages of Change model; whereas, retired individuals were more likely to be in the *precontemplation* stage.
- Retired individuals were also more likely to experience more barriers to taking disaster preparedness steps than those who work full-time.

What Is the Potential Impact of Volunteerism on Disaster Preparedness?

- Individuals who had volunteered to help in their community or during a disaster were more likely to have a disaster supplies and a household plan in place, were more willing to prepare for disasters, and had more confidence in their abilities to prepare for disasters.
- Individuals who had volunteered to help during a disaster were also more likely to be in the action stage of the stages of change model.
- Finally, individuals who have volunteered in the past were more likely to have participated in various training programs.

What Is the Potential Impact of Religiousness on Disaster Preparedness?

- Those who considered themselves to be very religious felt that disasters would have a great impact on them personally, and in the event of a disaster they would rely heavily on their faith communities, household members, and local nonprofit organizations.
- Very religious individuals were also more likely to participate in home shelter-in-place drills and have a household emergency plan.

What Is the Willingness to Report Suspicious Behavior?

- Only 14% of individuals reported that they had seen any suspicious behavior or circumstances in the past 12 months. Almost all of the respondents (96%) reported feeling that they had a personal responsibility to report such behavior to the authorities.
- When individuals who had seen suspicious behavior or circumstances were asked what they did in response to the behavior, 7 out of 10 respondents (70%) reported having taken some proactive action (called police or neighbor/friend) in response to observing the behavior/circumstance.
- However, 14% reported not taking any action. These individuals chose to wait for someone else to report the behavior (1%), left the area (2%), or did nothing (11%).
- The majority of individuals who observed suspicious behavior and took action reported their observation to the police or a tip-line (64%). “Other” responses (13%) included intervening or confronting the perpetrator, and observing or taking notes.

Summary and Recommendations:

The following recommendations are based on specific findings from the 2007 and 2009 Citizen Corps National surveys and are intended to assist researchers and practitioners in increasing personal preparedness, civic engagement, and community resilience.

- Individuals’ high expectations of assistance from emergency responders may inhibit individual preparedness. Communicating more realistic expectations and personal responsibilities is critical.
- Too few people had stocked disaster supplies, and most supplies were incomplete. More emphasis is needed on the importance of stocking disaster supplies in multiple locations, and more specificity is needed on critical items to include, such as flashlights, radios, batteries, first aid kits, and personal documents.

- Greater appreciation for the importance of household plans and knowledge of local community emergency procedures and response resources is needed. Individuals who reported being prepared lacked critical plans and information.
- Practicing response protocols is critical for effective execution. Greater emphasis on drills and exercises is needed.
- An awareness of vulnerabilities to natural disasters motivates individuals to prepare. Most individuals, however, did not believe their communities will ever be affected by any type of disaster.
- Perceptions of the utility of preparedness and confidence in ability to respond varied significantly by type of hazard. Because all-hazards messaging may dilute critical differences in preparedness and response protocols, preparedness and response education should include a focus on hazard-specific actions appropriate for each community.
- Social networks, such as households, neighborhoods, the workplace, schools, and faith-based communities, and the concepts of mutual support should be emphasized.
- Focusing on individuals in the contemplation and preparation stages for personal preparedness may yield greater results. Messaging and community outreach efforts should be designed to support those already considering taking action.
- Individuals' strong interest in attending training courses and volunteering should be harnessed through social networks. Training and volunteer service should be linked with a responsibility for educating and encouraging others to prepare.
- Specific sociodemographic characteristics correlated with attitudes toward and actions for preparedness. Insights into these differences offer the ability to tailor outreach efforts to targeted audiences.
- Individuals believed they had a personal responsibility to report suspicious behavior, but greater collaboration between citizens and law enforcement is needed.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

- Findings from this study have important implications for the development of more effective communication and outreach strategies to achieve greater levels of preparedness and participation.
- While the federal government and national leaders must continue to emphasize the importance of preparedness from a national platform, it is clear that effective strategies for preparedness must be implemented at the community level and through social networks. DHS and FEMA national policy and guidelines issued since September 11, 2001 have recognized the importance of government collaboration with nongovernment sectors and the importance of supporting grassroots efforts such as Citizen Corps.
- In addition to the analysis of the Citizen Corps National Survey provided in this report, FEMA's Community Preparedness Divisions plans to conduct more in-depth analysis of the 2009 survey results and to continue to review other surveys in the public domain. Areas of planned exploration include:
 - Further examination of the demographic characteristics of groups who share similar beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors relative to preparedness.
 - Evaluation and potential review of the Citizen Corps Personal Disaster Preparedness Model, especially in light of findings that indicate stark differences in the perceived utility of preparing for natural vs. manmade disasters.
 - An in-depth examination of the impact of the H1N1 influenza pandemic on individual preparedness and shifts in attitudes and behaviors related to infectious diseases, and public outreach specific to H1N1.
- There are also many other areas of needed research to understand more fully the complexities of motivating and sustaining personal preparedness and participation. Areas for future research include:
 - An exploration of different perceptions of hazard types and how perception affects preparedness, to include terminology such as "disaster," "terrorism," "pandemic flu," and "preparedness."

- A clearer assessment of the most critical knowledge, skills, and supplies needed for effective personal response, to include an examination of survivor and nonsurvivor behavior in actual events. Understanding response will, in turn, inform appropriate areas of emphasis for preparedness training and education.
- How sociodemographic factors relate to preparedness and how outreach strategies should be tailored to achieve the greatest impact for targeted audiences.
- Qualitative research such as focus groups or interviews to explore more fully how individuals understand the issues of threat, self-efficacy, and response efficacy and to explore internal and external barriers and motivators to preparedness.
- Testing specific messages, spokespersons, and social marketing strategies that will have greater impact on individuals' understanding of their role in preparedness and willingness to engage in preparedness activities, to include targeted audiences from sociodemographics segments and from the Stages of Change model.
- An exploration of better ways to deliver training and to practice response skills through multiple and varied types of exercises.
- How social networks such as neighborhoods, the workplace, schools, and faith-based communities can be better used to institutionalize preparedness information, training, and drills, and how civic leaders from these sectors can be more fully engaged in government-led community resilience efforts.
- Civic engagement and personal responsibility are rooted in the founding ideology of our Nation, and these principles have deep and abiding implications for our continued national resilience. Comprehensive assessment of personal preparedness in America must be multifaceted, adaptive, and enduring. It requires investment and leadership from all sectors. In the end, it is the toll on human life and on our way of life that makes resilience such a crucial endeavor. We must work together to strengthen social capital, we must learn from each other and learn to help each other, and we must continue to pursue a culture of preparedness through the active participation of all.