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"Planning for Uncertainty: The Case of Local Disaster Planning."
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The decision to use good disaster preparedness practices can reduce repeating problems in community disaster management. The obstacles to using these practices include the lack of experience with disasters and lack of an effective planning process. Limited knowledge and pressure to act usually results in a quick choice of policies or programs that planners end up regretting. The research on individual and organizational decision making with uncertainty strengthens the idea that argues uncertainty as an issue in planning. When major emergencies interrupt urban life, authorities must be prepared to offer an organized and protective response.

Findings

This study investigates whether effective planning makes up for lack of experience in promoting the adoption of good practices. Among jurisdictions with little experience, those with effective planning are more likely to adopt good practices than those without it. Process focused planning activities, such as multidisciplinary simulations and task forces, are more successful than technical activities, such as writing standard procedns. The study finds that more experienced jurisdictions recognize that they can't do it all during a hazard event and have to work with the larger community. Localities with low-experience in hazards and high-planning scores decided to use almost as many good practices as the high-experience, low-planning jurisdictions. Regardless of the amount of disaster experience, more involvement in interdepartmental coordination meetings, reviews of responsibilities with elected officials and multi departmental training all result in more use of good practices.

Implications

Uncertain problems can bring about a dependence on strategies with the most familiarity. State and local government can play an important role in encouraging improvements in the process of urban crisis preparedness. Local governments that have little disaster experience can partially compensate for the deficiency with an effective planning process. Organizations can choose to learn how to predict the needs of uncertain future crisis, with planning being a major opportunity that both will bring changes in the way that an organization acts and break the routine of past decision making habits. Communities and planners can reduce mental barriers as well. It's important that planning overcome "groupthink" and other strong psychological pressures that leads people to decide too early that tomorrow and today will be the same.