



Hazard Reduction & Recovery Center

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“Preparedness for Emergency Response: Guidelines for the Emergency Planning Process.”

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Since the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States, there has been a lot of concern worldwide about the levels of community emergency preparedness. The focus that has been placed on the written plan tends to distract from the process of planning and the original goals of achieving community emergency preparedness. Creating plans for a terrorist incident leads to a lack of awareness of planning for natural and technological disasters by elected officials, policy actors and law-enforcement officials who are in charge of much of terrorism plan construction.

Findings

This paper reviews the concepts of community preparedness and emergency planning, and their relationships with training, exercises and the written plan. A series of 10 planning process guidelines are presented that draw upon the preparedness literature for natural and technological disasters, and can be used with any environmental threat. The study finds that terrorist attacks worldwide are likely to keep putting attention to emergency planning, especially in Western democracies. Emergency planning as a way of dealing with environmental hazards is driven by the goals of hazard assessment and risk reduction. The research finds that the decision to manage a specific hazard and the level of protection wanted draws on technology but also has a political element, such as community resource distribution.

Implications

Not knowing appropriate planning principles is just as dangerous to successful results as wrong knowledge of the threat, lack of necessary safety equipment or failure of the jurisdiction to distribute resources to emergency preparedness and response. A written emergency plan doesn't promise preparedness and plans that were made with a short or no planning process can fail in practical usage. A reasonable interpretation of hazard risk can become a possible emergency response through the ongoing planning process, reflecting sound planning principles. The introduction of terrorist attacks into the category of natural and technical disasters creates new challenges for the processes of planning and management. If the lessons from natural and technological threats aren't considered or if decision-makers are uninformed regarding those lessons, complications will come up.