Chapter 2: THE APATHY FACTOR

An informal party held amidst the rubble of a tornado that struck Topeka, Kansas on June 8, 1966. (Courtesy of the *Topeka Capital-journal,* Topeka, Kansas.)

Disasters are "low-probability events." As such, they compete for attention with the priorities of daily living. Often, getting the public, elected officials, and organizational leaders to sup-port disaster preparedness is just as difficult as developing the disaster counter-measures themselves. This chapter addresses the causes of apathy toward disaster preparedness, its implications, and some methods for reducing it or planning around it.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND APATHY TOWARD DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

One of the social realities to be faced in disaster planning is that the general attitude toward disaster preparedness is characterized by apathy (Drabek, 1987:176). It is important to understand this phenomenon for three reasons:

- to see how it can be influenced,
- to see how it can be circumvented, and
- to develop a realistic appreciation for the limitations it imposes.

REASONS FOR APATHY

Apathy toward disaster preparedness pervades governmental bodies as well as the public at large. Although they will be discussed separately, there is some overlap because governmental priorities

are influenced by those of their constituencies.

Public Apathy

Lack of Awareness

Public awareness of disaster risks is generally poor. Even in communities where disasters have occurred relatively frequently, the public has often failed to demand the most rudimentary protection.

EXAMPLE: *Tornado, White County, Arkansas, March 21, 1952.* Even though White County is located in an area known as "Tornado Alley," only about 7% of the people in the impact area had storm cellars, and less than 40% had any knowledge of the appropriate precautionary or protective actions to take in the event of a tornado (Fritz, 1961:661).

EXAMPLE: *Tornado, San Angelo, Texas, May 11, 1953.* Al-though this city is also located in an area frequently visited by tornadoes, less than 10% of its houses had storm cellars (Fritz, 1961:661).

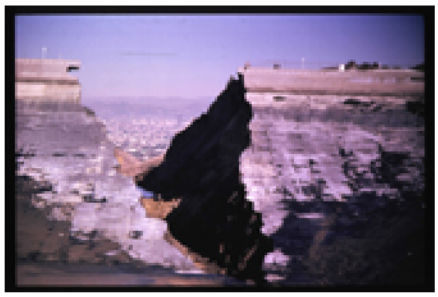

Figure 2-1. San Fernando Valley, California, viewed through a breech in the Van Norman Dam after the 1971 earthquake. (Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles, California.)

EXAMPLE: *Tornado, Grand Island, Nebraska, June 3, 1980. No* trailer parks had group storm cellars, and the residents had to seek shelter elsewhere Quarantelli, 1982c:65).

Similar observations can be made in parts of California notorious for earth-quakes, where residents fail to anchor tall, heavy items of furniture to the wall and neglect to consider earthquake risk factors when buying property (Drabek, 1986:322; Ritz, 1961:661).

EXAMPLE: *Earthquake, San Fernando Valley, California, February 2, 1971.* An analysis of data collected throughout Los Angeles County after the 1971 quake revealed that few persons had made prior disaster preparations (Bourque, 1973:ii). But, even in the high-impact zone *after* the disaster, less than half the population subsequently made preparations of any type (Drabek, 1986:24).

The motivation for choosing where to live is usually dictated by economic opportunities (a better job) or aesthetic reasons (the risk of wildfire is overridden by the breathtaking view) rather than concern about natural or technological hazards (Drabek, 1986:322,358).

Underestimation of Risk

There is a tendency to underestimate the risk of disaster. It is a striking observation that public *perception* of risk shows no correlation to *actual* risk, and that the risks are usually downplayed.

EXAMPLE: Residents of San Francisco, who are very attached to their city, downplay the risk of earthquake damage. The longer they live there, the less seriously they take the seismic threat. Likewise, 61% of the residents in the flood plain in Tucson, Arizona, do not perceive that they live in a hazardous area. Those who are aware that flooding can occur, underestimate the danger (Drabek, 1985b:4-5; Drabek, 1986: 320).

Sometimes even local legends can contribute to a perception of invincibility:

EXAMPLE: *Tornado, Waco, Texas, May 15, 1953.* An Indian legend held that the area was immune to tornadoes. This was even printed in a pamphlet by the Chamber of Commerce (Moore, 1958:3).

Even direct experience with disasters can inadvertently lead to inaccurate perceptions of risk:

EXAMPLE: Because of their past experience with hurricanes, many persons overestimate their ability to survive future storms by taking minimal emergency measures. Careful scrutiny, however, reveals that many had experienced only the peripheral effects of hurricanes or storms that were not hurricanes at all (Drabek, 1986:324; Davenport, 1978:17).

Reliance on Technology

A false sense of security provided by manmade protective devices contributes to the underestimation of risk. Flood control projects are renowned for this effect. Levees and dams reduce the frequency of flooding and often remove inhibitions against living in a flood plain. Eventually, however, a flood will come that will exceed the capacity of almost any levee or dam. Sometimes, greater settlement in and upriver from the flood plain results in decrease vegetation and more pavement. Eventually, the increase in water runoff will exceed the capacity of the flood control system, leading to catastrophic flooding in a now densely populated area (FENL4,,1983d:88,91; Burton, 1968:13; Drabek, 1986:375).

This problem of a "technological security blanket" is illustrated by the Galveston, Texas, sea wall, constructed in the early 1900s. To most citizens of the city, the sea wall is the "end-all" in hurricane protection. However, even though Hurricane Carla came ashore 70 miles west of Galveston, its tides came within, 2 feet of the highest elevation on the island, and the 2 roads to the mainland were under 9 feet of water (Davenport, 1978:3,4,6,17,18).

Fatalism/Denial

The public's attitude toward disasters is often a mixture of "What will happen will happen" and "It can't happen here." People living in high-risk areas accept the threat philosophically ("earthquakes come with the territory") (Drabek, 1986:320, 340).

EXAMPLE: *San Francisco, California, prior to the 1906 earth-quake.* "The earthquake back in 1868 had been a ripper.... There had been fair shakes in 1892 and 1898, too. 'Nothing to worry about, because there's nothing that can be done about it,' was the attitude. 'Besides, a good shake is not half so bad as a twister or a hurricane bearing down on you' " (Bronson, 1959:19).

Social Pressures

In some high-risk areas, flouting disaster threats is considered a sign of bravery and strong character. This is exemplified by persons going to the beach to party and to surf as a hurricane approaches (Drabek, 1986:340).

EXAMPLE: *Hurricane Carla, Galveston Island, Texas, September 11, 1961.* The attitude of many Galveston Islanders, especially the long-term residents, is one of defiance toward hurricanes. This is typified by the statement of a professional man after Hurricane Carla who said that he was "very proud of not having evacuated. His parents had never fled before a storm ... and neither had he." "About 40,000 people (70-80%) stayed on the Island during Carla even though most knew that they would eventually be cut off from the main-land." (Moore, 1964:199; Davenport, 1978:19)

Governmental Apathy

Public apathy, as well as economic restraints, are reflected in a lack of political support for disaster preparedness. Programs have been difficult to initiate or maintain unless they have been demanded by the citizens or mandated by law and paid for by the state or federal government (Tierney, 1985b:73; Davenport, 1978:12). Without federal funding, many government officials have felt that they could only justify the most basic preparedness programs. Sometimes this has been limited to the drawing up of a written disaster plan and assigning the position of disaster coordinator (Seismic Safety Comm, 1979:42; Stevenson, 1981:80). Even when governmental bodies have adopted goals

for disaster preparedness, the resources necessary to accomplish the goals have not always been made available (Drabek, 1986:386).

EXAMPLE: *Earthquake and Fire, San Francisco, California, April* 18-19, 1906. In October of 1905, just a bare 7 months before the quake, the National Board of Fire Underwriters had declared San Francisco's 36 million gallons per day water system inadequate. "San Francisco has violated all underwriting traditions and precedents by not burning up; that it has not done so is largely due to the vigilance of the fire department, which cannot be relied upon indefinitely to stave off the inevitable." Fire Chief Dennis Sullivan had battled the supervisors for years to no avail trying to get the money needed to build a supplementary salt-water system and to reactivate dozens of huge, long-neglected cisterns in the city. When the Great Quake finally struck, it was the fire, not the shaking, that dealt the City its greatest blow (Bronson, 1959:21,92).

EXAMPLE: In a study by Wyner and Mann published in 1983, the implementation of earthquake safety measures of thirteen California cities and counties were evaluated. (Seven of these had recent earthquake experiences.) Only a few jurisdictions had attained even their most modest planning goals, which included such elementary accomplishments as collecting more information on the nature of seismic hazards. Most jurisdictions had not even allocated resources in a manner that would permit fulfillment of the adopted goals (Drabek, 1986: 386).

Even when *federal policy* and regulations promote disaster preparedness, these policies are not self-implementing. The enforcement and application of these policies are often dependent on local government cooperation, which is not always forthcoming (Berke, 1987; Clary, 1985:23). At a time when state and local responsibility for disaster countermeasures has increased, they have been confronted by a number of factors that have limited their ability to raise and spend revenues (Mushkatel, 1985:51).

Opposing Special Interest Groups
Vested interest groups can have a negative influence on disaster counter-measures. For example, the most effective way to prevent flood losses is to avoid building structures in the flood plain (Drabek, 1986:353). However, competition for land due to increasing population and the prevailing American attitude that property owners have the right to develop their land without governmental interference, often inhibit restrictions on land use in flood prone areas (Cigler, 1986:10).

Lack of an Organized Constituency Advocating Disaster Preparedness
While special interest groups such as developers, builders, and realtors, are well organized lobbying factions, coalitions promoting disaster prevention and management are not (Cigler, 1986:10, 12, 14; Petak, 1985:5; Clary, 1985:22; Mushkatel, 1985:51, 53; Kasperson, 1985:11; FEMA, 1984a:17).

Defeatism
An attitude of defeatism sometimes contributes to apathy toward disaster preparedness. Some persons believe that every disaster is so unique that effective planning is not possible Quarantelli, 1979b:2; Quarantelli, 1982b:17; Quarantelli, 1983:104; Quarantelli, 1985:22; Drabek, 1986:58). Others conjure up hypothetical catastrophes of such magnitude as to boggle the mind and paralyze any preparedness effort (Dynes, 1981:iv). Such an attitude may occur when faced with the enormity of preparing for a cataclysmic earthquake or a nuclear holocaust (Seismic Safety Comm, 1979:10; Gratz, 1972:48; Drabek, 1987:55; Blanchard, 1985:3).

Priorities Competing with "Low-Probability" Events
Contributing to governmental apathy is the fact that, in spite of the increasing threat of disasters, they are still improbable events. When crises occur repeatedly at frequent intervals (such as the World War II aerial bombings of London), the target population develops sophisticated mechanisms for dealing with the threat (e.g., air raid wardens and bomb shelters). Peacetime disasters occur so rarely, however, that there is not usually the impetus to make elaborate, time-consuming, and expensive preparations (Barton, 1969:40; Dynes, 1981:72). Those areas that have the most extensive disaster preparedness are the ones exposed to recurrent seasonal threats from floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes (Drabek, 1986:55,178; Barton, 1969:40).

This improbability of occurrence is especially true with respect to *large-scale* disasters in the

United States. In fact, only six disasters in U.S. history have resulted in more than 1,000 fatalities (see Table 2-1) Quarantelli, 1987; Lane, 1984; Houghton, 1986; Grolier, 1985), and only about 10 or 15 disasters per year have resulted in more than 40 injuries (Wright, 1977:193).

Table 2-1. U.S. Disasters with Deaths Exceeding 1,000

1.	April 27, 1865. Steamship Sultana explosion on the Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee. 1,547 killed.
2.	October 8, 1871. Forest fire, Peshtigo, Wisconsin. 1,182 deaths.
3.	May 31, 1889. Flood, Johnstown, Pennsylvania. More than 2,200 deaths.
4.	August 27, 1900. Hurricane, Galveston, Texas. About 5,000 deaths.
5.	June 15, 1904. Fire on the steamship General Slocum, on the East River, New York. 1,021 fatalities.
6.	September 13, 1928. Hurricane, Lake Okeechobee, Florida. 2,000 deaths.

As stated by one renowned disaster researcher, the statistical probability is that when a disaster strikes, it will strike elsewhere-primarily because there is so much "elsewhere" (Drabek, 1985b:4). From 1900 to 1967 there were only 16,619 deaths from natural disasters in the United States (Roth, 1970:442). These figures pale when compared to more routine causes of violent death. For example, in 1967 alone, the number of persons dying in motor vehicle accidents was 52,924 (Nat Safety Council, 1973:12). The infrequency of disaster is reflected in the figures shown in Table 2-2.

Because of the improbability of disaster impact, the expense and effort put out to prepare for it is perceived as an investment with little certainty of return (Barton, 1969:159). In the face of the doubtful benefits of preparing for a catastrophe that may never occur, are competing everyday concerns such as employment, crime, pornography, attaining status among one's peers, or even partaking of leisure activities (Fritz, 1961:661; Drabek, 1985b:4; Drabek, 1986:320). In other words, people are unlikely to give priority of attention to an unlikely future disaster when there are fifteen tasks that have to be accomplished by Friday (Tierney, 1985a:77). This factor is particularly salient in contemporary government where there are so many programs competing for scarce resources (Drabek, 1985b:i; Seismic Safety Comm, 1979:42; Blanchard, 1985:4).

EXAMPLE: When state and local decision-makers were asked to rate the importance of 18 problems that might require governmental attention, the highest ratings were given to inflation, welfare, unemployment, and crime. The lowest ratings were given to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes (Drabek, 1986:385).

The mention of these factors should not be taken to imply that, because disasters are improbable, effective countermeasures are not practical. Rather, it is to point out that motivational issues need to be considered during disaster planning.

Figure 2-2. (A) Galeston, Texas, prior to the hurricane of 1900 and after **(B)** the hurricane. No domestic peacetime disaster has caused more fatalities than this storm. (Courtesy of the Rosenberg Public Library, Galveston, Texas.)

Table 2-2.

Risk	Fatalities per person-hour of exposure
Natural disaster	1 in 100 billion
Smoking	5 in 10 billion
Motor vehicle transport	1 in 1 million
Adapted from Foster and Starr (Foster, 1980:19; Starr, 1969)	

Difficulty Substantiating Benefits of Preparedness

Assessing risks from potential disaster hazards is difficult at best, as is deter-mining the benefits of disaster management and preparedness efforts. This is complicated by the expenditures required to make the necessary studies and the uncertainty, even then, that the answers are forthcoming. Ironically, the very apathy that inhibits disaster preparedness is just as likely to thwart the funding of studies to assess the cost-benefit ratio of disaster preparedness (Petak, 1985:5,6; FEMA, 1984a:47,125; Cigler, 1986; Kasperson, 1985:9,10; Zimmerman, 1985:33). Often, the benefits of preparedness are not visible in the short run, but only after a disaster has occurred. In times of economic restraints, programs whose benefits cannot clearly be demonstrated get short shrift on the fist of budgetary priorities.

Overestimation of Capability

Another reason for complacency toward disaster preparedness is the mistaken belief that the disaster problems can be managed merely by an extension of routine emergency measures. In studying disaster emergency medical services, the Disaster Research Center found this attitude in over half the communities in their sample (Seismic Safety Comm, 1979:9; Quarantelli, 1981a:10; Quarantelli, 1983:101; Sorensen, 1981:27; Barton, 1969:159). However, as discussed in Chapter 4, disasters often pose unique problems for which routine emergency procedures are not well adapted.

The Inter-governmental Paradox

As you move to lower levels of government, the disaster damages experienced from that level's perspective are less frequent. For example, the federal government experiences most all of the disasters that occur in the nation. State government experiences fewer of them, and city governments even fewer. Because any given local government experiences the fewest exposures to disaster loss, it is least apt to perceive it as an important issue (Cigler, 1986:8,13; Drabek, 1985b:4).

The inter-governmental paradox refers to the fact that the local government, which is least likely to see disaster management as a key priority, is most likely to be faced with the responsibility for carrying out the disaster response. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, the trend in the United States has been to place most of the responsibility for disaster response on local government (Cigler, 1986:8, 10; Clary, 1985:23,24). For another, local governments bear a large part of the responsibility because they are the closest to the event and are apt to be on the scene before substantial state or federal resources are available (Kasperson, 1985:13).

Ambiguity of Responsibility

Responsibility for disaster tasks in the United States is spread out among many public and private organizations (Drabek, 1987:105). In addition, disasters tend to cross jurisdictional and functional boundaries involving city, county, state, federal, and special district (e.g., flood control or fire districts) governments as well as private spheres of responsibility. This often results in a situation where no *single* institution, person, or level of government is perceived as responsible for disaster preparedness. Accordingly, disaster preparedness goals and policies of various jurisdictions and agencies are often contradictory, and motivation to get things done is hampered by a lack of accountability (Cigler, 1986:6).

TAKING APATHY INTO ACCOUNT WHEN PLANNING

Apathy results in limited resources for disaster preparedness. It is important to apply the limited interest and resources in such a manner that they will do the most good. In effect, *there is a form of "triage," or priority-setting, that has to be applied to disaster preparedness measures,* and the cost-effectiveness of these measures has to be taken into consideration.

PRINCIPLE
Because of the limited resources available, disaster preparedness proposals need to take cost-effectiveness into consideration.

Prepare for What *Is Likely Moderate-Sized Disasters*

Some disaster planners believe the best planning philosophy is to prepare for the worst-case disaster scenario. They anticipate disasters involving tens of thousands of casualties (Drabek, 1985b:i; Dynes, 1981:75). A variation on this theme is disaster planning aimed primarily at nuclear attack (Gratz, 1972:48). At present, preparedness for nuclear attack, rather than the more common types of natural and technological disasters, is the top planning priority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Thomas, 1988:14). There are, however, several problems associated with planning for disasters of this magnitude:

- They may conjure up hypothetical possibilities of such immensity as to make most despair at ever being able to cope with them (Dynes, 1981:iv,75; Blanchard, 1985:3). In other words, such scenarios amplify apathy.
- Most of the research on disasters in the United States has focused on relatively moderate events involving tens to hundreds of casualties. The applicability of this knowledge to cataclysmic disasters involving tens and hundreds of thousands of casualties is questionable. Although such "cataclysmic" disasters have occurred in foreign countries, the sociopolitical context is so different from the United States that it is unclear whether we can apply lessons learned from them to our own culture and form of government. In other words, while we now know a fair amount about how to plan for smaller disasters, we know little about how to plan for the cataclysmic ones (Drabek, 1985b:3; Drabek, 1986:6). *Therefore, when it comes to applying limited resources to planning, it makes sense to plan for those events for which we have the knowledge to plan.*
- Applying limited resources to prepare for the most improbable type of disaster-the cataclysmic one-is not cost effective. It is also not the best approach when we have not first become proficient at handling small disasters, which are reasonably likely to occur. It is like signing up for very expensive dance lessons before learning to walk.

For these reasons, preparedness for moderately sized disasters may be more realistic and achieve greater acceptance by those who must pay for and carry out the preparations (Lewis, 1980:865; Dynes, 1981:75). This *is not to say that planning for large disasters isn't valuable.* Clearly, California will experience a large earthquake in the near future. However, planning is sometimes carried out for cataclysmic disasters *to the exclusion* of the more moderate and more likely ones. The advantage of a focus on moderate disasters is that the procedures involved are more likely to be *used* and, therefore, learned. They are also more likely to get funded. Furthermore, the skills, training, procedures, and supplies developed for moderate disasters are a logical step toward preparedness for larger events.

On the other hand, a number of the preparedness efforts for cataclysmic disasters have never been used and have little applicability in the types of disasters more likely to occur. An example is the packaged disaster hospitals. These have laid dormant for so long that you may have to question if the equipment and supplies are still usable, or if those who would need them know that they exist, where they exist, how to get them, what they contain, or how to set them up.

Just what is a moderately sized disaster? That answer is less clear. Limited evidence suggests that a disaster large enough to consistently cause inter-organizational coordination problems is one resulting in about 120 casualties (Wright, 1977:190). Since interorganizational coordination is one of the major disaster response problems, this figure seems to be a reasonable yardstick.

PRINCIPLE
Planning should be for disasters of moderate size (about 120 casualties); disasters of this size will present the typical inter-organizational coordination problems also applicable to larger events.

More Common Types of Disasters

Disaster preparedness applicable to the more common disaster events is more likely to receive support. It is easier to sell planning for multiple vehicle accidents than for an earthquake. Serious earthquakes occur in the same locality once in several decades; complex traffic accidents occur several times a year. Likewise, tornadoes, floods, and hurricanes are a more relevant threat than a nuclear holocaust. Apathy is most likely to be overcome by emphasizing those threats that are seen as relevant by the public and elected officials (Drabek, 1987:203; Stevenson, 1981:40).

Predictable Disaster Tasks

Although it is not possible to prepare for every disaster contingency~ there are some problems that occur with such regularity as to be quite predictable. It is these which are the most amenable to planning. For example, almost every major disaster requires procedures for the centralized gathering and sharing of information about the overall disaster situation and the responding and available resources. Procedures are needed for overall coordination (deciding what organizations are going to carry out what tasks and how they are going to interact) and for logistics such as supplies, transportation, feeding, shelter, and communication networks to support the disaster response. Other examples include procedures for integrating and managing unsolicited volunteers, warning threatened populations, handling evacuations, carrying out triage, coordinating search and rescue, keeping unauthorized persons out of the impact area, distributing casualties rationally among the available hospitals, decontaminating equipment and casualties exposed to hazardous materials, dealing with the press, and responding to voluminous inquiries from anxious loved ones and relatives of those thought to be potential disaster victims. This idea of focusing on "generic" disaster tasks most likely to be faced in all types of disasters has been embodied in the concept of "comprehensive emergency management" which the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has used in its "Integrated Emergency Management System" (FEMA, 1984c:I-9; FEMA, 1983a; FEMA, 1985d:1-2).

Some of the tasks likely to be needed can be identified if a formal hazards analysis is carried out. Available methods for doing this are well described in several publications available from FEMA (FEMA, 1983b:9; FEMA, 1984c:11-10; FEMA, 1983a:3-2; FEMA, 1983c:11; FEMA, 1985c;

FEMA, 1985b; FEMA, 1985a). However, it must be realized that present methods of risk analysis are crude at best and can be used as only a rough guide for disaster planning (FEMA, 1984a:47,125). (Appendix A illustrates a method of hazards analysis.)

Make Preparedness Adaptable to a Wide Variety of Circumstances

Adapt to Routine Emergencies

Whenever possible, it is advantageous to adapt disaster procedures for use in daily, routine emergencies (Div Med Sci, 1966; Morris, 1982; Jenkins, 1975). This has several benefits: 1) it may reduce training costs by decreasing the number of procedures that are used only in disasters; 2) it allows those who will need to use the procedures to become familiar with them; and 3) it may improve routine emergency responses (Stevenson, 1981:4,42,44; Quarantelli, 1983:149).

One example is the emergency medical services system in Sacramento County, California. The standard practice there is for emergency medical technicians on the ambulances to assign a triage category to every emergency patient transported on a daily basis. This becomes a part of the radio report to the hospital. The result is that both the emergency medical technician and hospital personnel become familiar with the triage system. In essence, they have a daily triage drill (Lowry, 1983).

Modular Expansion

The flexibility of a disaster plan is enhanced if the disaster management structure is designed to be expanded in stages as the incident (and the number of resources that need to be coordinated) grows in size. If managed well, this can help to minimize the presence of excessive numbers of personnel and organizations and, therefore, simplify coordination (Tierney, 1980: 100). (See Chapter 7.)

Cost-Sharing

Joint training, combined dispatch centers, standardized resource and management procedures, and joint purchasing of standardized equipment can all be promoted as cost-reduction measures applicable to routine emergency responses. They also have been shown to facilitate multi-agency coordination and communication in disaster operations, discussed further in Chapter 5.

REDUCING APATHY

Although apathy is difficult to overcome, it is possible to motivate disaster preparedness.

EXAMPLE: As the result of a research project on earth-quake-related fires, it was projected that San Francisco would be swept by firestorms in the event of another 1906-like earth-quake. With the encouragement of researcher Charles Scawthorn, and buttressed by their own estimations, the San Francisco Fire Department declared that there was a pressing need to increase the city's preparedness. With the support of the mayor, the fire department conducted an information campaign to explain the fire risk and the necessary counter-measures to the public. The media were involved, and a citizens' committee was formed to initiate a bond issue. In November of 1986, they were successful in obtaining a 90% approval of the voters for a $46.2 million bond issue to finance improvements in the city water system, firefighting capability, and an emergency operations center (NHRAIC, 1987a:13).

There are a number of motivating factors that can be used to counteract apathy. Some illustrative examples follow.

Liability

Changing liability related to disasters may help to counter apathy. Recent court decisions indicate that local governments and officials may be financially liable for certain consequences of a disaster if the community was not prepared or did not respond properly (Tierney, 1985b:58; Stevenson, 1981:83; Drabek, 1986:342; Perkins, 1984). With such a change, emergency managers can rightly argue for increased resources to meet these increased legal responsibilities (Adams, 1981b:51).

The trend suggests that governments will increasingly face the threat of successful litigation if

someone suffers damage from a disaster. A loss due to disaster can be recovered in court if the victim can show: 1) the governmental body owed a duty to the victim to avoid, prevent, or lessen such a loss; 2) that the body failed to carry out this duty; and 3) that the loss occurred as a result of this failure (Kusler, 1985:119).
There are several factors that may increase governmental liability in this context (Kusler, 1985:120):

- The courts have recognized broadened concepts of the duties and responsibilities of local governments.
- The "act of God" defense for disaster losses is less frequently accepted by the courts.
- The ability of governments to claim "sovereign immunity" ("The 'king' can do no wrong.") has been substantially reduced.
- The duty of governments to develop disaster countermeasures is becoming more frequently stipulated in legislation.

Recent Disasters
One factor, more than any other, appears effective in reducing apathy-the occurrence of a disaster. This theme surfaces repeatedly in the research literature on disasters. Unfortunately, the interest so generated also decays rapidly, often before it has had time to stimulate significant changes (Drabek, 1985b:5; Drabek, 1986:366; Quarantelli, 1983:138; Seismic Safety Comm, 1979:45; Stevenson, 1981:81).

PRINCIPLE
Interest in disaster preparedness is proportional to the recency and magnitude of the last disaster.

If there is a preparedness program lacking support, one should be ready to take advantage of a disaster to reintroduce it-even if the disaster has occurred elsewhere (Stevenson, 1981:82). While broad-based appeals for support can be based on such tactics, they are most effective if tied to specific needs, with this illustrative disaster exemplifying that need (Drabek, 1987:176).

EXAMPLE: One preparedness director in South Dakota used a movie of a disaster that struck another community. He showed his county commissioners the film, "The Day of the Killer Tornadoes," in an attempt to obtain funding for an emergency generator. The film graphically depicted a blackout in the stricken community's Emergency Operations Center. As a result, the commissioners voted unanimously to budget for the generator (Drabek, 1987:175).

EXAMPLE: *Earthquake, Wittier, California, October 1, 1987.* "Perhaps one of the reasons we have accomplished so much in earthquake mitigation in California is that whenever concern over seismic threat ebbs for too long, the earth rumbles and shakes and warns us that we had better take this threat seriously. As much as we in the mitigation business try to be proactive, to foresee problems, threats, and dangers, and to mitigate their effects, we are not entirely successful when we are working in an atmosphere of near apathy. We try to combat the apathy in the 'off years' by producing some excitement, holding pretend earthquakes in the back lot of Universal Studios, with the tremendous visual and sound effects only the studio can re-create (sic). These events attract media and citizen attention, and they exercise and practice our own response operations. Needless to say, however, their impact pales in comparison to a real trembler .

"Immediately following the earthquake, the usual apathy and inertia were overcome, if only for a brief time. Both the public and government officials were receptive to mitigation messages. Everyone wanted to be briefed, educated, and trained .....

"The day after the quake, councilman Hal Bernson introduced a motion to create within the fire department a division to supervise training the community to prepare for earth-quakes.... Remarkably, this very costly program, originally proposed more than 2 years before, was unanimously approved a few weeks after the quake. In addition several other council motions were

taken, and council action sparked renewed interest in improving the safety and security of the Emergency Operations Center (Mattingly, 1988).

PRINCIPLE
The best time to submit disaster preparedness programs for funding is, right after a disaster (even if it has occurred elsewhere).

Public Education

Public education about the nature of disaster hazards and the practical counter-measures available can help to offset apathy. Education is most effective at times when people are motivated to learn about disasters. For example, the public is more anxious to learn about disasters at the beginning of seasonal threats (e.g., tornado or hurricane season), or after disasters, even nonlocal ones, that have received attention in the news (e.g., the Mexico City earthquake). At these times, they may be more interested than usual in how vulnerable their own community is to disaster threats, how well their emergency services are able to respond, and what practical measures citizens can take to protect themselves. A listing of sources for public education and awareness material is given in Appendix E.

The Media

One of the most effective methods of public education is the mass communications media, particularly commercial television and radio stations (Holton, 1985:17; Wenger, 1985b:17). News accounts emphasizing the lack of and need for improved emergency preparedness increases support for larger operating budgets and helps to make preparedness a higher local government priority (Stevenson, 1981:36). Tornado, blizzard, hurricane, and earthquake media awareness releases have been used effectively to improve public awareness of disasters (Drabek, 1987:198; FEMA: A-70).

School Programs

School programs teaching about disaster hazards increase awareness, not only in the students, but in their parents as well. Evaluation of a junior high school program on hurricane awareness in North Carolina found that approximately 80% of the students obtained parental help in the program's homework assignments (FEMA: A-26). An article in the *Journal of Civil Defense* (12(2):10-13, 1979) gives an illustration of how adults can be influenced indirectly by disaster education directed at children:

EXAMPLE: In 1974, as a school bus was transporting children home, a tornado approached. Although the driver did not know what to do, a seventh-grade student on the bus did. His teacher had reviewed tornado precautions in class that day. The student convinced the driver to stop the bus and get everyone into a ditch. Although the tornado destroyed the bus, none of the pupils was injured (Foster, 1980:187).

A National Weather Service study found that the subject of disaster preparedness is most appropriate for the fifth, sixth, and junior high school grades. It also recommended that the curriculum should not be costly and should contain material addressing local types of hazards as well as those of a more general nature. The material for school programs was more likely to be accepted by schools if it was introduced within existing school curriculum such as social studies or science courses (FEMA:A-74).

SUMMARY

Disasters are "low-probability" events. As such, they are associated with a high degree of apathy. It is important to understand the limitations posed by this fact. The existence of apathy should not be taken as an excuse to neglect or discount the need for preparedness, but, especially in this time of shrinking resources and expanding responsibilities, we must be selective in deciding which aspects of disaster preparedness to emphasize. Programs that are practical, inexpensive, realistic, and applicable, not only to a wide variety of disasters, but also to routine emergency problems, are the most likely to gain support. Even then, however, motivation for disaster planning is one of the most difficult aspects of the planning and preparedness process.

PLANNING CHECKPOINTS

- Does your disaster plan focus on events of moderate size? Ones which are likely to occur in your area?
- Does your disaster training program emphasize common disaster tasks, such as overall coordination, determining what the overall disaster problems are, determining all of the resources present and available, decontamination, search and rescue, patient distribution, management of volunteers handling inquiries about disaster victims, and relations with the press?
- Have you adapted disaster procedures for application in routine emergencies, so personnel can become familiar with them?
- Can your disaster response plan be expanded in stages as the incident magnitude increases?
- Does your community disaster planning include provisions for cost-sharing of resources and training?
- Are your elected officials and organizational leaders aware of the potential liability of failing to develop disaster countermeasures?
- Do you have public education material prepared for dissemination:
  - at the beginning of seasonal disaster threats?
  - after the occurrence of major disasters?
- Do you have arrangements with the media for broadcast of disaster educational material?

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