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Disaster preparedness and response is a multi-faceted subject involving everyone. Whether you are a government employee, a corporate administrator, or a community member you have a role to play. Focus typically tends to be on the government perspective of emergency preparedness because they possess the greatest perceived responsibility. The government's goal is to protect the public once the disaster has occurred as well as keeping the public informed throughout the disaster cycle. With the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management for example, they are responsible for the emergency alert and warning systems that communicate the threat of a disaster and any evacuation instructions. Additionally, the Emergency Management department oversees the communications team (911 dispatchers, AlertSF, etc) and the duty officer program. Partnership is essential and every segment of the disaster preparedness and response system is important and vital. The San Francisco Department of Emergency Management works in collaboration with first-responders, federal programs like iPause, USGS, and University of California Berkeley to continuously plan and train stakeholders. These partnerships and tools allow for efficient hazard assessment and thorough training.

The business perspective of disaster preparedness is a little different in that the hazard assessment has a smaller scope than the government perspective. Businesses are concerned with property protection, keeping workers safe, and preserving operations. Business preparedness measures might include purchasing insurance, conducting drills, and obtaining emergency generator(s).¹ In the case of Carmela Hinderaker, the Director of Business Continuity for C&S Wholesale Grocers, her company is unique in that they are considered essential because they supply basic necessities. Non-essential companies may be forced to halt operations during and after a disaster. Either way, the business must be prepared for the ways in which the disaster will impact the business, the employees, and the consumers. As to be expected, business preparedness measures differ greatly depending on the size of the organization, the resources and incentives at its disposal, and whether they own or lease the property they operate from.¹ There are both internal (employee safety) and external (OSHA, local government regulations, etc.) pressures for businesses to adequately prepare and respond in the face of a disaster. Hinderaker emphasized during her interview that it is imperative to connect with partners and key leadership prior to an event in order to respond more effectively.

It can be a little more difficult to prepare for a disaster on an individual level because, depending on the individual's role at the time and the details of the disaster, disaster preparedness is often voluntary on an individual basis. Since there aren't the same federal consequences for being unprepared on an individual level as there are on a business level, the incentive to be prepared is decreased resulting in a general lack of resources or training. Sociodemographic, health status, and organizational factors can influence how individuals prepare and respond to a disaster.² Additionally, as discussed in the interview with Peter Miller, people can freeze up during a disaster and their emotions might paralyze them from acting logically. Dr. Gershon's study showed that it took six minutes on average to initiate egress after becoming aware that the World Trade Center was hit on 9/11.² An individual's perception of the risk played a big role in their confidence during the disaster and their sense of urgency to evacuate. This variability in individual beliefs, perceptions, sociodemographic, and health status means that there is heavy reliance on external forces for guidance during disasters. At the individual level, the main goals seem to include seeking out accurate information and managing emotional responses. The more information that government agencies and businesses provide to individuals in advance, the better off they will be logistically and emotionally. Collective behavior still might shift in the heat of the moment, in accordance to emergent norm theory but planning will help to reduce variability of response and general confusion felt by the community. In the end, responsibility is shared by everyone during disaster preparation and response but the areas of focus are slightly different.

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References

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