



The Native Family

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS HANDBOOK



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**DISASTER
 PREPAREDNESS
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DEDICATION

This handbook is dedicated to the memory of all Native American and Alaska Native people who have perished in natural or human-caused disasters.

And to the Late Ben Due. He was a member of the Washington State Emergency Management Division from 1971-1998, before joining the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), where he worked until his passing in 2012. Ben was an esteemed community relations leader, who coined the phrase “neighbor helping neighbor” assisting thousands of families affected by disasters, with incomparable caring and compassion.

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FOREWORD

Today more than ever, natural disasters and human-caused threats to Native American and Alaska Native lands and communities have intensified the need for its citizens to prepare.

There are currently 567 federally recognized Tribes in the United States, living on more than 300 reservations. For families living in Indian Country, ever-increasing disaster incidents that damage homes, businesses, farmland, livestock, drinking water, wildlife, fish, and drinking water, underscore the urgency to safeguard the health and well-being of Native communities.

Additionally, future prospects for reductions in emergency resources, already inadequate in many Native communities, widens the gap in response and recovery services. Past experience shows that people want to prepare, however, preparedness messaging often over-emphasizes the physical part of preparing, like getting a disaster kit, while missing the important aspect of educating people about why they need to prepare.

To help address the resilience gap, Preparedness Matters joined forces with Native stakeholders to develop *The Native Family Disaster Preparedness Handbook*. The purpose of the handbook was to provide a “one stop” source for Native families who may not have access to, or familiarity with the disaster process. The handbook attempts to bring together the vast amount of complex preparedness information into a complete, easy to understand resource guide.

Knowledge is power, and the more people understand about local risks, hazards, and how disasters impact their personal lives, the more likely they are to make better decisions about how to prepare, survive, and recover.

The handbook empowers Native families to pursue preparedness as a personal matter rather than as a mere convenience option. Knowing what to do before disaster strikes is the most important link in the chain of survival.

The Native Family Disaster Preparedness Handbook was designed to be a living document, and can be used to enhance the community preparedness efforts of emergency managers and others. Most importantly, the handbook is a foundational primer for preparedness actions to help build resilient Native communities.

SECTION 1

Disaster Impacts on Native Communities

Native communities continue to suffer from the economic and traumatic consequences resulting from the damage to their homes and businesses and disruption of their lives. Many residents remain frustrated, fearful, and uncertain about their ability to cope with future disasters.

Every day, thousands of Native American families are exposed to great danger from natural and human-caused disasters. Throughout the country, Native populations have been hard hit by the impact of major disasters such as the Missouri River Flood which struck the Omaha Tribes of Nebraska, the Wildland Fires of the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington, and the ranchers and residents on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota where a blizzard in 2013 caused hundreds to lose their livestock, homes, and culturally significant items.

The prospect for future catastrophic events and local/regional emergencies will place further burdens on the already stretched resources of emergency responders and disaster relief agencies. State and local public health and human services agencies continue to be overextended in their efforts to meet the demands of increased disaster trauma, and its long-term consequences on survivors.

A 2012 Heritage Foundation report, *After Hurricane Sandy: Time to Learn and Implement the Lessons in Preparedness, Response, and Resilience*, summarizes the need for underserved community preparedness: Do No Harm! “Do no harm” is a simple concept.

When it comes to preparing for disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, it takes on profound importance. Whether it is the

DO NO HARM

“It means that the system cannot erode the ability of people to first take care of themselves, so that first responders can focus on those who are endangered, injured, and cannot care for themselves.”

person, family, community organizations, or the private sector, the primary role is to do no harm.

What does this statement mean exactly? People who have more difficulty staying safe and healthy during a disaster are considered “at-risk”.

This can include physical restrictions or limitations that make them more likely to need the help of others in a disaster event, or can include those who lack access to services they would need in an emergency, such as transportation or lodging.

Disasters affect almost 250 million people annually and the numbers are rising. By 2017, this figure could grow by more than 50% to an average of over 375 million people.

In the United States, every:

- 55 minutes a residential fire occurs
- 4.7 seconds wildfires destroy an acre of forest
- 182.6 days an act of terrorism occurs
- 219 days a hurricane occurs
- 1.1 years a nuclear plant emergency occurs
- Day earthquakes less than a magnitude of 2 occur
- 22.8 hours a mudslide occurs

The loss of life and property is especially hard felt in Native communities, many of which have significant numbers of people living below poverty, including disabled, the elders, and children.

Many Native communities already lack access to cellular or broadband infrastructure and those that do have it further have limited access to computers or smart devices, limiting access to valuable information on how to prepare and respond to disasters. For Indian Country residents, major disasters and even routine emergencies can threaten their very survival, as many struggle to cope with the challenges of daily living.

Although socioeconomic factors may contribute to the gap in disaster preparedness among Native populations, improving readiness is still an achievable goal. Government agencies often lack consistency when

addressing the urgency for preparedness by sending mixed messages about the need to prepare.

On one hand, emergency organizations promote preparedness by admonishing people to “get a kit, make a plan and be informed”, while focusing resources into response because people don’t prepare. It’s a paradox that is often confusing, because so many people don’t take the time or make the effort to get ready, and most just don’t know how.

More funding to support local preparedness efforts should be a priority. General Russel Honore, who led the recovery effort after Hurricane Katrina, stated that for every dollar spent on preparedness it saves six to nine dollars on the cost of response.

So whom do individuals rely on in a disaster? A study by FEMA (2013) *Preparedness in America: Research Insights to Increase Individual, Organizations, and Community Action*, indicates overwhelmingly it is family members that will have to care for each other in a disaster.



Emergency managers should work with neighborhood associations to provide training and tools that would support neighbor-helping neighbor.