



12 Myths of Disaster Preparedness

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The biggest obstacles to comprehensive family emergency readiness education are the misconceptions surrounding the true nature of preparedness. For better education, and ultimately better public safety, let's take a look at some of these myths.

Myth #1. If something happens all I have to do is call 911.

Help can only go so far or be there so quickly. Security, like charity, begins at home and the responsibility for your family's safety rests on your shoulders. This isn't to say that families shouldn't call for help when it's truly needed, it's to remind them that they may be on their own for a while, especially if the situation is expansive or severe.

Myth #2. All I need is a 72-hour kit with a flashlight, first aid kit, some food and water, and a radio.

We're not sure where the 72-hour figure came from but it's an extremely minimal amount of time and not very realistic. A more practical goal is to be self-sufficient for a minimum of two weeks (preferably four weeks). Why two weeks? As bad as Katrina was there are numerous disaster and terrorism scenarios that could yield substantially more damage and a disruption of local services for three weeks or more. Also many biological scenarios may cause a two-week quarantine. Avoid the one-size-fits-all simpleton lists and customize yours to your family's unique threats, needs and assets.

Myth #3. My insurance policy will take care of everything.

SWAT teams of insurance agents aren't going to instantly rebuild your life like on TV. Insurance companies will be far more concerned about their own bottom line than yours. In fact, many insurance companies are rewriting policies to redefine some rather common terrorism or disaster-related incidents as being excluded and not coverable. Check your policies closely.

Myth #4. Good preparedness is too expensive and complicated.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem is we haven't made preparedness part of our overall education. We get more preparedness information on an airline flight than we get as citizens. We aren't taught that there are literally thousands of subtle, simple and economical things we can do to drastically improve our emergency readiness. The notion that it might be expensive or complicated has come from companies that aggressively market high-priced unnecessary gear.

Myth #5. We can only form neighborhood groups through FEMA, the Red Cross or law enforcement.

Neighbor helping neighbor is one of our highest civic duties. No one regulates this, and you don't have to get anyone's permission to coordinate your safety with others. Working with these groups gives you some advantages and resources, but not required.

12 Myths of Disaster Preparedness, continued

Myth#6. In a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorist attack, we're all dead anyway.

WMDs might kill larger numbers of people, but that doesn't mean widespread destruction is guaranteed. In fact, for widespread destruction, a top-grade WMD must be expertly and precisely applied under ideal conditions. This does not mean that WMDs are to be ignored or that they're nothing to fear, it's just that mass destruction does not mean total destruction.

Myth#7. Nothing like that could ever happen here.

Though some areas are more prone to certain types of disasters, say earthquakes in California or terror attacks in New York, no area is completely immune. Travelers might travel somewhere and wind up in a disaster they never thought about.

Myth#8. All I have to worry about is my own family.

Technically yes but the more you're able to care for your own family, the more you can and should help others. Once again, neighbor helping neighbor is one of our highest civic duties.

Myth#9. If preparedness were really important it would be taught in school.

Preparedness really is that important but schools only have so much time and budget to teach the topics they already do. This is one of the many things we're trying to change.

Myth#10. I can get free preparedness information on the Internet.

Many free sources contain really good information. However, many of them are nothing more than a rehash of 72-hour kit ideas and contain nothing new or comprehensive. Also it takes time and experience to filter the trash from the treasure. And some of these free sites have information that could cause more problems than they solve. Start with www.ready.gov, but don't stop there.

Myth#11. Full preparedness means I have to get lots of guns and be a survivalist.

While personal security and family safety are valid concerns, the vast majority of people around you will not be a threat. Though looters gained a lot of media attention after Hurricane Katrina, there were far more stories of heroism and of people making new friends through shared adversity. We suggest a balance between personal security needs with the desire to help others.

Myth#12. If something really bad happens, no one will help.

There's no such thing as "no one helping." However, the best thing people can do to is to prepare their families so they need as little outside help as possible. There's always someone needier than you and the more prepared you are, the more you free up assistance resources so they can help those less fortunate.

Remember, when disaster strikes, we're all in this together!

James Roddey