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Emergency Management Principles for Prepping

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This article was generously contributed by [David Nash](#) ^[1]



Just like everybody else, I am unique. In the disaster prepper field I am unique in that I am both a diehard personal prepper and a college trained emergency management professional. I did not become one because of the other; my personal preparedness mindset comes from my parents, as well as my internal system of ethics and belief structure. My career path grew out of my military and correction background. However, even though they are separate, I find that my skills in one translate to the other even though the goals of the two are not always identical.

I would like to take a few moments and describe how you can take government emergency management doctrine and personalize it as well as scale it to your needs.

The first thing I grabbed from my training manuals to apply to my personal emergency plan is the all hazards approach. I have seen people jump into panic mode over single issue events like Y2K, 2012, New Madrid, CME, or whatever is going to kill us all on exactly 12 pm Sunday whatever.... These people then run around and throw money at their fear, and then feel taken when whatever disaster failed to occur. But just like government evacuation orders – If they call for an evacuation, and people leave, but nothing happens, the next time nobody wants to evacuate. In the case of Y2K so many people that prepped for it, that once it did not happen they now have a bad taste in their mouths about prepping and won't "fall for that again". With an all hazards approach, rather than spend all your energy prepping for a specific event, you build capabilities that help with ANY event. As I tell my students, When your doing CPR on me, I don't care if my heart stopped because I was electrocuted, was shot, or ate too many hamburgers with too little exercise – I just want you to keep pumping...

The next thing I took was the cyclical nature of disaster and the 5 phases of emergency management. You have a planning phase where perform a risk assessment and then make plans based upon your threats and hazards. Once you begin planning, you move into the preparedness phase where the planning takes shape – you take training to better prepare. The lists you wrote in the planning phase become deep larders and tangible goods. Along with preparedness and planning you need to worry about mitigation. What can you do to make the disaster either less likely or less disruptive? Personally I have to plan for the New Madrid Earthquake, so I make sure my water heater is strapped down, and my shelves of glass mason jars are secured so that the jars cannot fall off and break. Appropriate amounts of insurance are a mitigation step we all can get. When disaster strikes (We don't know WHAT

or WHEN it will happen, but rest assured you will have an emergency at some point in your life) you enter the response phase where you have to deal with your incident priorities of

1. Life Safety (Pull the people from the burning building)
2. Incident Stabilization (Keep the fire from getting worse and spreading)
3. Property Conservation (Put the fire out and save as much of the building as possible)
4. Environmental Conservation (Keep the runoff of water from polluting the creek)

Once the emergency phase is over, recovery mode begins. At some point you have to get back to normal. Even if it's a catastrophic event that ends in TEOTWAWKI, you have to create a new normal. It's critical to understand that these phases blend into each other and the lessons learned from one disaster turn into the planning phase to improve your plan. But keeping the cyclical nature in mind, as you create a plan of action based upon your most reasonable estimate of your hazards you need to test and refine, then retest and refine some more. The more you sweat now, the less you bleed later.

Mutual Aid Agreements and Memorandums of Understands is common among government jurisdictions and agencies. During a disaster everybody wants to help, but knowing who is responsible for what and what their capabilities are is very helpful. Its also important to spell out how damaged or used equipment gets replaced. Two weeks into a multi year grid down disaster is not the time to get into a fight with your neighbor over who gets to use the tractor first. Of course OPSEC is a priority, but no man is an island. The time to network is now.

Have a plan, but be willing to scrap the plan if it does not work. I tell my students that before you can think outside the box, you better understand everything about the box. The very act of planning helps with response. The more you think about your capabilities and what you would do in situations the better prepared your brain is to react flexibly to a situation. Your mind is a wonderful creation, but you have to program it to work. If you're worried about disasters your program it by creating disaster response plans.

The last concept of emergency management I will share today is incident command. This system came out of the California wildfires in the 70's. Military vets turned fire jumpers created a management system called fire scope to deal with the rapidly changing fire situations. After the attacks on 9/11 the lack of communication, coordination, and chain of command was identified as areas we needed improvement on. ICS was then adopted as the national standard and all responders in all disciplines were mandated to be trained to a basic level. Free training in the incident command system is available online at the FEMA training website. The ICS system is a flexible system geared toward emergency events. This flexibility is derived from a few essential concepts:

- There is only ONE overall commander.
- The incident commander is responsible for everything, but can delegate roles to qualified staff based upon incident complexity and size.
- Span of control for optimal leadership is 5-7 individuals under a supervisor.
- Everybody reports to only one supervisor, and everyone knows who their supervisor is.

Obviously there is more to the system, but it allows anyone trained in incident command to rapidly integrate themselves into the command structure because it has clear roles and responsibilities. Knowledge of this system is important because EVERY responder has been trained in this system and it will provide the basis of ANY response. It does not matter if your dealing with a volunteer fireman or a military civil support team, any agency with a role in emergency response has to have this training to receive federal funding. While I don't agree with the mandate, I have seen this system work several times, and the disasters I have worked that were not as successful as others also deviated from the plan more than the others.

The more you understand about the ICS system the more you will know what to expect from the government. The other reason you should learn about this system is that it works if you apply the fundamentals. It does not matter if you're working in a government agency, a local neighborhood preparedness group, or a family these concepts are timeless and reduce confusion.

Besides concepts and theory on emergency management FEMA has also created many courses in disaster preparedness. Many of these are geared to first responders, but at this

time, most of them are available free of charge to civilians. If you visit the FEMA training website the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) has a distant study program, and has classes in Radiological Response, Hazardous Materials, Guides to Disaster Assistance, Active Shooters, Dam Failure – literally almost any aspect of interest to Federal emergency officials. I have personally taken several hundred hours worth of their courses and while distance education is not as good as hands on with a qualified instructor, the materials are a very handy and inexpensive resource to put back in your binder.

For neighborhood organization and home preparedness, don't overlook the Citizens Emergency Response Teams. I wish this program would have caught on in more areas, but you can download the training materials for free without any sort of login or identification.

Knowledge is power, and by taking the concepts our federal government has spent billions developing and testing in real life incidents in both large and small scale will give you a head start in creating and employing your own personal preparedness plan.

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[1] David Nash: <http://www.tngun.com/2011/07/emergency-mangement-principles-for-prepping/>

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