Emergency management planning

Name

Institution affiliated

Date

Introduction

Natural disasters make up some of the world’s toughest challenges. Specifically, these are naturally-occurring hazards resulting from earth’s processes. The most common examples include earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. In New Orleans, hurricanes and floods are the most common and high-risk disasters. This is due to the city’s proximity to a large water body and its poor terrain in relation to the sea level. Hurricane Katrina is one of the deadliest natural disasters to ever hit the city of New Orleans and the US at large. Many people died, and others were badly injured and displaced. Properties worth billions were destroyed as the city floated on water (Brinkley & Brewer, 2006). This incident served as a wakeup call for the residents and leaders of the city to have a disaster management plan. Essentially, an emergency management plan outlines the various actions that will be taken to prepare the city for another hazard, and improve recovery.

Members of the planning committee

The planning committee should be multidisciplinary in nature. It should include various professionals and non-professionals from the city’s leadership, state leadership, and the federal level. Also, various non-governmental agencies and professional organizations must be included. Representatives of members of the public should also be engaged. Specifically, the following groups of persons should be represented in the committee:

* Disaster management and recovery professionals
* Representatives from the Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Louisiana Emergency Preparedness Association (LEPA)
* Association of Contingency Planners (ACP)
* New Orleans Hospital Association
* New Orleans Tourist and Information Bureau
* New Orleans Fire Department
* Department of Homeland Security representative
* Local leaders e.g. City’s mayor, Governor, and senate office
* The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)
* Other NGOs like Red Cross

Component parts of the plan

The planning stage usually allows the various actors to look at the hazard from multiple perspectives. It provides a skeleton of what should be done before, during, and after a disaster. One of the component parts of planning is setting of objectives. This is done in light of the various phases of emergency management. For example, the committee will set objectives for mitigation, response, preparedness, and recovery. Also, planning will include hazard and risk assessments. This includes collecting data on the possibility of hurricanes and floods occurring based on the city’s terrain and closeness to risk factors. It will also include determining the risks that the city will be exposed to and ranking them.

Communication planning is another component. This involves determining the communication equipment and personnel for the dissemination of information before, during, and after the disaster (Herrmann, 2007). Also included in planning is capacity building plan. This provides an opportunity for the committee members to outline ways in which disaster management and recovery can be improved. Disaster drills will also be discussed by the committee to determine their applicability and potential benefits as far as disaster management is involved.

The planning process will also include allocation or roles and responsibilities among the committee members. Every member should be allocated a role in the entire process of emergency management. This, too, must be done with the phases of emergency management in mind. For example, the committee should be able to come up with a prevention and mitigation plan, preparedness plan, evacuation plan, response plan, recovery plan, training plan, etc. and the various individuals responsible for every plan. Additionally, identification of emergency management assets and budget must be done at this stage (Herrmann, 2007).

Agencies to be involved in the various parts of plan development

Throughout the planning process, disaster management and recovery professionals will provide guidance based on their expertise and experience on what to do at every step of the way. They will give recommendations on how to identify risk factors and how to mitigate them to keep probabilities of hazards occurring low and increase the chances of recovery. Representatives from the Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness, FEMA, and LEPA will be engaged in identifying the assets required for the plan and delivering the federal and state objectives for disaster management and recovery.

New Orleans Fire Department will help in staging disaster management and recovery drills to the team members. This will help them have a feeling of the entire process of emergency management. DHS will provide information on the security aspect of the disasters. For example, they will give information on how many people are likely to be affected when these hazards actualize. They will also provide the link between the city’s leadership and the state and federal governments as far as hurricanes and floods prevention, response, and recovery is concerned.

Healthcare professionals will help in understanding risks from public health perspective. They provide insight on the possible risks to health when hurricanes and floods occur. They will also be part of response and evacuation team. The local and state leadership will be crucial in the communication plan. They will be in charge of communicating the plans to city dwellers and getting their support in ensuring the plan is a success. They will use their influence to get support from the locals as well as from other agencies and individuals elsewhere in the country.

Subject matter experts

Subject matter experts are people who command knowledge and expertise in a particular area. When it comes to hurricanes and floods, these are people who commence competencies when it comes to city and urban planning, climate change, disaster recovery planning, evacuation, communication, rehabilitation, healthcare provision, etc. (Rathore et al., 2012). In this plan, engineers will be one of these individuals. They will be involves in developing strategies and frameworks for planning the city in such a way that it can withstand floods and hurricanes. They will give their opinions and do the actual construction of barriers that will keep water out of the city and also allow water to flow out (Brody, Kang & Bernhardt, 2010). Further, they will help in protecting people from other risks that can arise as a result of floods and hurricanes. For example, they will help to develop plans for protecting people from electricity. They can also design and build floating bridges that will be used to keep people safe from floods.

Fire fighters will also be important in training the various actors on evacuation and protecting people from further danger. They will also help in preventing and mitigating fire risks that may arise from flooding and electrocution. Disaster management specialists have the knowledge of response and they will therefore be involved throughout the process. They have a good understanding of the evacuation process, and they will be resourceful in ensuring people are safe from the risks. Also, they will be educating members of the public about safety tips during disasters. Healthcare professionals will be needed to treat those injured and provide rehabilitation as part of the recovery process. Effective synergy between the various subject matter experts is highly desired to ensure success.

Specific actions to be taken in preparedness and mitigation, response, and recovery

Prevention and mitigation

These include any activities that prevent the hazard from actualizing or reduce the chances of an emergency situation from occurring. They are also the activities aimed at reducing the impacts of risks that cannot be permanently avoided (Baird, 2010). Some of the specific actions to be included in this phase include construction of barriers to minimize flood water. For example, the city engineers should lead in construction of flood walls, pumps, and gates throughout the city. Improving the drainage systems is another action that should be done. Additionally, the planning committee should train civilians on safety tips when disasters occur as a way of reducing casualties. Contractors should be directed to design foundations of building so that they can withstand floods and hurricanes.

Preparedness

These are activities directed at increasing the capacity of civilians to withstand floods and hurricanes when they occur. Specifically, rescue teams must be located at all corners of the city and instructed to be alert all the time. Evacuation plans should be continuously communicated and improved. Also, evacuation drills should be staged occasionally to sharpen the actual evacuation activities. Floaters should be procured in time and located at various points throughout the city. Safe rooms should also be built to facilitate evacuation. Food, water, and clothes should be procured and stored to be used during disasters.

Response

These are activities aimed at saving lives, preventing further casualties and destruction of property. For example, the actual evacuation activities, treating the injured, keeping children warm, searching for those trapped in mad and under buildings, giving food and clothes, etc. are some of the response actions that will be taken. These activities take place throughout the disaster until as many people are possible are safe and further damage contained.

Recovery

These are actions taken to restore normalcy or create a better environment for people after the disaster. Example of activities include reuniting families what lost track of each other due to the disaster, offering financial assistance to survivors so that they can pick the pieces and start all over again, reconstructing major infrastructure, paying claims to insured properties and individuals, offering rehabilitation and counselling services, etc.

Major challenges to be encountered when responding to the hazard

Disaster response is more than just reconstructing infrastructure and restoring the city’s beauty. While it involves that, it goes beyond to include restoring the functions of communities, families, and other such institutions. Put simply, disaster response includes restoring both infrastructure and the social units that aid support for physical and mental prosperity (Chandra & Acosta, 2009). Thus, it requires a multidisciplinary approach to ensure that true recovery occurs. It is not easy to always get hold of all the expertise and resources needed to ensure effective response. Accordingly, one of the challenge that is likely to be faced is lack of adequate trained personnel to drive the various phases of emergency management.

Another challenge is lack of access to timely and accurate information. Disasters usually break down communication channels making it difficult to coordinate response efforts. For example, the response team can have difficulties knowing the number of people trapped in flooded buildings and their locations (Oden et al., 2012). Another challenge has to do with keeping civilians calm. Often during disasters, it is difficult to keep people calm and cooperative. This is because people are usually too overwhelmed and worried about their loved ones. Many times, they become so uncooperative and end up exposing themselves to further risks and interfering with response activities. Another challenge is the development of diseases as a result of the floods. Floods usually lead to development and spread of communicable and waterborne diseases (Du et al., 2010). These diseases put strain on the limited resources used in responding to the disaster. They also lead to further causalities and stall the progress of the response team.

Solutions to these challenges

One of the things to do to reduce the impact of inadequate response personnel is to train more people during preparedness and prevention phase. The available specialists should be used to train more people who will help during the response phase. For example, idle youths should be trained for free on how to help in times of floods and hurricanes. Also, civilians should be trained on basic safety strategies so that they can use these tips to keep themselves safe and also help others during disasters. What’s more, if civilians are trained on basic drills, they become cooperative and are less likely to stall the efforts of rescue team.

Access to information and communication can be improved by having alternative communication channels. For example, they can use radio devices to communicate when TV stations cannot work. They can also use the internet to get information and coordinate their activities. In fact, there should be a communication center that is located at a safe zone. The military and police officers can be used to contain people and keep them calm. Also, some civilians can be trained on how to assist in calming people. Diseases should be included in the plan. Emergency and portable triage centers should be spread across the city to diagnose and treat infections as they develop.

Short- and long-term recovery goals of the community following floods and hurricane

One short-term goal is to reunite families and promote healing at the family level. This may involve reuniting lost children to their parents and finding homes for those that lost their parents. Another goal can be to find temporary shelters for those whose houses are destroyed. Also, food and medical care provision should be given to bring life close to normal. Long-term goals should focus on infrastructural development and capacity building. For example, it should focus on reconstruction or roads, drainage systems, flood walls, etc. Also, permanent homes for survivors should be given in the long-term.

Conclusion

Planning for floods and hurricanes emergency management requires a multidisciplinary approach. Not only does it require disaster management and recovery professionals, but it also requires the input of various governmental and nongovernmental agencies, subject matter experts, leaders, and civilians. The plan should have various parts like communication plan, roles and responsibilities, and emergency management plans. Each of these parts should be managed by the various members of the team. The plan should also include specific action programs that will be undertaken in the various phases of emergency management. Some challenges to be anticipated in responding to floods and hurricanes include lack of sufficient personnel, communication challenges, public fear, and diseases. These challenges can be controlled through effective planning to expand human resources, having a communication center, and involving healthcare professionals. Short- and long-term recovery goals range from restoring families to infrastructural reconstruction.

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