

**PREPARING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS FOR A  
DISASTER:  
INNER-CITY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS – WHO  
SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD?**

*Michael Greenberger\**

Preparing inner-city communities for catastrophic emergencies requires careful planning, coordination, and implementation. Inner-city communities, i.e., residents living in the core areas of the nation's largest cities, often include low-income individuals, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and a high proportion of children. Many of these individuals do not have the resources that emergency planners often assume are available in the event of a natural or man-made disaster, i.e., surplus food, water, and medical supplies; accessible medical care; adequate private and/or public transportation for evacuation; understandable and appropriate instructions for emergency response; or nearby safe shelter.

As this article shows below, the concerns about these vulnerabilities were evidenced by Hurricane Katrina and other events (such as Hurricanes Rita and Wilma, recent excessive heat waves, tornadoes, and flooding) that focused considerable attention on the harsh adverse effects of disasters on unprepared, inner-city communities. Specifically, the failure of the federal government to respond to the needs of New Orleans' inner-city residents during Hurricane Katrina prompted an immediate and much needed focus on this issue. Yet, the federal government's many post-Katrina analyses and reports, while comprehensive and thorough, do not establish a clear agenda for solving this specific problem. In the absence of this federal guidance and support, states and localities, by and large, do not have the resources to lead and fund their own preparedness efforts for inner-city communities.<sup>1</sup> Thus, very little has been done at any governmental level – federal, state, or local – to focus preparedness efforts on inner-

---

\* Law School Professor, University of Maryland School of Law; Director, University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security. A.B., Lafayette College; J.D., University of Pennsylvania. The author would like to thank Deborah Silver, J.D. and Michael J. McKeefery, J.D. Candidate, for their substantial assistance in preparing this article.

<sup>1</sup> See Megan McHugh et al., *How Prepared Are Americans for Public Health Emergencies? Twelve Communities Weigh In*, 23 HEALTH AFFAIRS 201, 208 (2004) (discussing the lack of funding as a significant preparedness challenge for states and local communities around the country).

city communities that need the most assistance in the event of a catastrophic disaster.

This article details the almost self-evident nature of problems inner cities face in confronting catastrophic emergencies, and how Katrina corroborated the serious nature of this problem. It then critiques several of the federal government's post-mortem reports on Katrina, focusing on the overly generalized recommendations that provide no clear guidance in this area.

This article then proposes a pilot program for preparing inner-city communities in the event of a disaster. This pilot program would be developed in at least one small, well-defined inner-city neighborhood. By starting with a pilot program within a single inner-city neighborhood, the appropriate state or city might be able to find the money to fund such a limited effort. In the absence of public funding, private resources might alternatively be utilized. Private funding might also supplement available government funds. This program would be a cost-effective way in which to create a successful template for preparing inner cities for emergencies that could then be duplicated across the country with minimal effort.

## I. SELF-EVIDENT CONCERNS

Although it is readily assumed in disaster planning that everyone has access to a computer or the Internet,<sup>2</sup> this is obviously not always the case.<sup>3</sup> For example, in terms of notification procedures, under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "Get Informed" section for "Individuals and Families Planning" of the *Pandemic Flu* website, the first place listed for acquiring reliable, accurate, and timely information is a website address.<sup>4</sup> How will individuals for whom

---

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., U.S. DEP'T OF HOMELAND SEC., PREPARING MAKES SENSE – GET READY NOW 4 (2006), available at [http://www.ready.gov/america/\\_downloads/Ready\\_Brochure\\_Screen\\_EN\\_20040129.pdf](http://www.ready.gov/america/_downloads/Ready_Brochure_Screen_EN_20040129.pdf) [hereinafter PREPARING MAKES SENSE] (advising citizens to "watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for information or official instructions as it becomes available").

<sup>3</sup> During a disaster, residents may also experience electrical failures, causing disruption to their televisions or other electrical devices. See e.g., David A. Fahrenthold & Michael E. Ruane, *Record Demand Strains Grid*, WASH. POST, Aug. 3, 2006, at A1 (reporting severe strains on power grids in the Washington area due to record demand and extreme heat).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Services, Individuals & Families Planning, <http://pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html> (last visited Nov. 5, 2006).

access to a computer is limited or non-existent obtain this information? Making a website the first place to gather information exemplifies the incorrect assumption that every individual has the advanced resources necessary to gather information.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, power outages during a disaster may cause the inoperability of televisions, cellular telephones, and computer websites, even if residents may, in fact, have access to these resources.<sup>6</sup>

Alternate methods of notification must be developed, implemented, and tested. These might include neighborhood phone trees, information sheets posted at a local community center, or other pre-determined communication methods, such as battery-operated radios. These methods would be designed to spread information rapidly from a central community location, such as an elementary school, to residents in a particular location, for example, within five blocks of the school. It is also not enough to identify these methods abstractly; citizens must be aware of and familiar with the location of this information and where – and to whom – to report in the event of an impending disaster.

In addition to informing residents about an emergency, notification procedures must also tell individuals how to prepare and

---

<sup>5</sup> Generally, inner-city residents have a difficult time obtaining access to advanced technological services. *See, e.g.*, U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, REPORT TO THE RANKING MINORITY MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CHARACTERISTICS AND CHOICES OF INTERNET USES 10 (Feb. 2001), *available at* <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01345.pdf> (“FCC identified certain categories of Americans who may have difficulty obtaining access to advanced services...conclud[ing] that several barriers might hinder the ability of low-income, inner-city residents to obtain advanced services.” This is due to “the poor quality of the telecommunications plant or of the inside wiring in multiple-tenant buildings, the relatively high price of advanced services, the lower rates of computer ownership among inner-city residents, and the lack of marketing by providers of advanced services to low-income populations.”). *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> This was the case in the August 2003 power outage throughout the northeast U.S. as well as parts of Canada. *See, e.g.*, *Lights Out: Huge Power Failure Hits Major Cities in U.S. and Canada – ‘Cascade’ of Problems Appears to be Worst Since ‘96; Subways, Cellphones Down – No Signs of a Terrorist Link*, WALL ST. J., Aug. 15, 2003, at A1 [hereinafter *Lights Out*] (“In office towers all over the city, elevators went out, lights went off and computers went down. Cellphone service was disrupted . . . TV networks were still broadcasting from backup generators, but few had working televisions to watch the news.”); Jesse Drucker, *Spotty Cellphone Service Frustrates Customers*, WALL ST. J., Aug. 18, 2003, at B4 (“[I]n the nation’s most severe power outage, many [wireless] customers . . . faced maddingly slim chances of calls getting through.”).

protect themselves before, during, and after a disaster. Residents should be given guidance on which emergency supplies (food, water, and necessary materials) to purchase, how to determine the most affordable and durable supplies nearby, and how to store these materials. Simply informing inner-city residents, many of whom have limited financial means, to purchase a plethora of emergency supplies without further guidance is virtually meaningless.

For example, on its *Ready.Gov* website,<sup>7</sup> the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) advises that an individual or family should include the following resources in an emergency preparedness kit: one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food, a portable first aid kit, a battery-powered or hand crank radio, a flashlight with extra batteries, a whistle to signal for help, dust masks, plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place, moist towelettes and garbage bags for personal sanitation, a wrench or pliers to turn off utilities, a can opener for food, and local maps.<sup>8</sup> These may be sound recommendations for families that have access to the Internet and can afford to take such measures. However, these recommendations are wholly unrealistic for low-income families with limited financial means even if these families have access to a computer.

*Ready.gov* is not the only online resource providing sound recommendations for the general population that may be wholly unrealistic for many inner-city residents. Another example is the CDC's recent preparedness guidelines for pandemic flu, which are far

---

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec., *Ready.Gov – Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed.*, <http://www.ready.gov/index.html> (last visited July 11, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec., *Emergency Supply List*, [http://www.ready.gov/america/\\_downloads/checklist.pdf](http://www.ready.gov/america/_downloads/checklist.pdf) (last visited July 11, 2006) [hereinafter *Emergency Supply List*]. The *Emergency Supply List* also lists the following additional items to consider adding to an *Emergency Supply Kit*: prescription medications and glasses; instant formula and diapers; pet food and extra water for your pet; important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container; cash or traveler's checks and change; emergency reference material such as a first aid book or information from [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov); sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person; a complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes; household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper; fire extinguisher; matches in a waterproof container; feminine supplies and personal hygiene items; mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels; paper and pencil; and books, games, puzzles or other activities for children. *Id.* Although these items sound reasonable, low-income, inner-city residents may be unable to afford to acquire these additional items.

more extensive than recommendations for a general disaster.<sup>9</sup> The website advises that individuals store: a two-week supply of water and food; extra prescription drugs; over-the-counter pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins; and non-perishable food, such as ready-to-eat cans of meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, and soups.<sup>10</sup> Again, without further guidance on how to find the most affordable types of these items, as well as how to store these items, it is almost a certainty that individuals with limited financial means will not have adequate access to emergency supplies that they may desperately need in the event of a disaster.

Methods must be developed to assist inner-city residents in determining which supplies are truly necessary to purchase and how to determine the most affordable and durable types of these supplies. This should involve careful review of the federal preparedness guidelines to create tailored and specific lists of items and less expensive alternatives. For example, suppose a family of four purchasing one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days spends \$1.29 for one gallon of water.<sup>11</sup> This is the listed price for a store brand of “Drinking Water – Filtered.”<sup>12</sup> Purchasing water alone for this family will cost approximately \$15. Now, suppose instead that this family was provided with the name and location of an exact type and brand of water to purchase: “Acadia Spring Water” at the same store for \$0.99/gallon.<sup>13</sup> This will yield a savings of about \$3 for that family. Alternatively, buying this quantity of a premium brand of water from a membership warehouse in bulk will cost approximately \$11.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Compare U.S. Dep’t of Health and Human Services, Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals & Families, <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/Individuals.pdf> (last visited Nov. 5, 2006) [hereinafter Checklist for Individuals & Families], with Emergency Supply List, *supra* note 8.

<sup>10</sup> Checklist for Individuals & Families, *supra* note 9.

<sup>11</sup> The figure of \$1.29 was determined by examining the listing price of a store-brand gallon of water at the online grocer Peapod’s website. See Peapod – Online Grocery Store, <http://www.peapod.com> (follow “Groceries for Your Home” hyperlink; provide a Zip Code and follow the “Go” hyperlink; follow the “Browse Aisles” hyperlink; follow the “Beverages” hyperlink; follow the “Water” hyperlink; and the “Non-carbonated” hyperlink) (last visited Aug. 2, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> The dollar amount for purchasing water from a warehouse club was based on pricing obtained from the Sam’s Club website. See Sam’s Club – Bulk Water,

Obviously, individuals make these types of financial choices in everyday life, yet, having a guide with the actual prices, brands, and cheapest alternatives for all of the listed food and water supplies at nearby stores could certainly ease the purchasing process. In the same manner, even guides that list locations, least expensive prices, durability, and suggested quantities for items such as first aid materials and flashlights, for example, would make the process much easier for a family who, for financial or logistical reasons, would not have the inclination or ability to purchase these supplies otherwise.

It is worth mentioning that residents may need assistance with storage of these items once they are purchased. Inner-city residents might not have the physical space offered by an outdoor shed, garage, or other external facility for easy storage of, for example, twelve gallons of water. This obviously will not be a concern for all residents, but for those who may need to find creative dry, cool, and ideal storage spaces within a smaller home, a guide or pamphlet suggesting alternative locations and ideas for storage (such as spreading out the supplies between a hallway closet, underneath a bed, or in a basement) might be useful.

It is also self-evident that evacuation and shelter decisions are difficult for those with limited or no access to private transportation and limited resources.<sup>15</sup> It is not appropriate to just *assume* that everyone knows where to go or how to get out of a city when ordered to evacuate.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, although state and local government partners may provide public transportation for evacuation during a disaster, the locations of emergency bus routes may be different from the normal, designated routes. Prior to a disaster, residents should be aware of and familiar with the location of these temporary routes and particular bus stops. Each neighborhood should have its own map or guide detailing the exact locations of the emergency routes and bus stops in the event that one route is completely flooded or non-traversable. This way, people will know the location of the closest alternative routes and corresponding bus stops.

Certainly, making decisions regarding whether to evacuate or go to a public shelter may also be difficult during a disaster. As is true of evacuation in general, getting to the shelter may be problematic if

---

<http://www.samsclub.com/shopping/navigate.do?catg=2690> (last visited Aug. 3, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Shelter refers to remaining in place to avoid any uncertainty outside. PREPARING MAKES SENSE, *supra* note 2, at 4.

<sup>16</sup> See *infra* notes 24-29 and accompanying text.

the shelter is not located nearby and residents need transportation to the shelter. Individuals may also not be familiar with the location of public shelters. Maps and guides with lists of nearby shelters and existing infrastructure at each shelter would be very useful when determining which facilities will be available at each one. This information would include the availability of showers or bathtubs; access to microwaves, ovens, or other kitchen devices; as well as an idea of the sleeping arrangements at each facility.

These self-evident concerns represent just a few examples of the serious challenges for preparing inner-city communities to deal with catastrophic disasters.

## II. HURRICANE KATRINA

Hurricane Katrina corroborates the self-evident concerns discussed above. The effects of Katrina were staggering and catastrophic. It remains to be seen whether the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, in particular, will ever fully recover from a disaster of this magnitude.

On August 29, 2005, sections of the levee system in New Orleans breached, and approximately 80 percent of New Orleans was underwater at peak flooding, which in some places was twenty feet deep.<sup>17</sup> The hurricane killed an estimated 1,527 residents from the New Orleans metropolitan area, and displaced 770,000 others.<sup>18</sup> Nearly 100,000 inner-city New Orleans residents could not evacuate because they lacked the means to do so. New Orleans' inner-city residents could not afford the costs of emergency lodging, food, and transportation, which could have easily exceeded \$1000 for three days.<sup>19</sup> Lawlessness and desperation abounded generally. At the

---

<sup>17</sup> A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, FINAL REPORT OF THE SELECT BIPARTISAN COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE PREPARATION FOR AND RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA, H.R. REP. NO. 109-377, at 73 (2006) *available at* <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/house/katrina/index.html> [hereinafter A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE].

<sup>18</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, THE FEDERAL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA: LESSONS LEARNED 7 (2006), *available at* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned.pdf> [hereinafter LESSONS LEARNED]; U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS, HURRICANE KATRINA: A NATION STILL UNPREPARED 2-1 (2006), *available at* [http://hsgac.senate.gov/\\_files/Katrina/FullReport.pdf](http://hsgac.senate.gov/_files/Katrina/FullReport.pdf) [hereinafter A NATION STILL UNPREPARED].

<sup>19</sup> The average cost for food, lodging, and transportation exceeding a thousand dollars for three days refers to a family of four. A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18, at 1-5.

Superdome in particular, which served as a designated “special needs shelter,” the electricity and plumbing failed for roughly 20,000 – 30,000 individuals.<sup>20</sup>

Almost five months after the storm, basic services remained inaccessible for inner-city residents: 85 percent of public schools in Orleans parish had still not reopened, and, in the metropolitan area, approximately two-thirds of the retail food establishments, half of the bus routes, and half of the major hospitals remained closed.<sup>21</sup> During the catastrophe, many inner-city residents either lost or misplaced essential documents, such as insurance information, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and medical records.<sup>22</sup> City residents living in nursing homes were especially devastated as many nursing homes lacked adequate evacuation plans and emergency resources.<sup>23</sup>

As further evidence, evacuation attempts essentially failed for those individuals without private transportation.<sup>24</sup> Many were initially caught off guard with minimal warning of the approaching disaster.<sup>25</sup> While thousands of New Orleans residents did not evacuate or seek shelter, roughly 1.2 million Louisiana residents evacuated themselves in private vehicles.<sup>26</sup> It appears that those who had the resources to do

---

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 1-5, 22-7.

<sup>21</sup> LESSONS LEARNED, *supra* note 18, at 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18, at Executive Summary 13-14. Seventy-one percent of the victims in Louisiana were older than sixty, and forty-seven percent of those were over seventy-five. LESSONS LEARNED, *supra* note 18, at 8.

<sup>24</sup> Most of the city residents exclusively relied on public transportation for all transportation needs. See, e.g., John Renne, *Car-less in the Eye of Katrina*, PLANETIZEN, Sep. 6, 2005, <http://www.planetizen.com/node/17255> (discussing transportation patterns among New Orleans residents prior to the Hurricane Katrina disaster).

<sup>25</sup> For example, during the Hurricane Katrina disaster, many individuals were unprepared when Mayor Nagin issued an evacuation order at the last minute. A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18, at 16-6-16-8 (providing a timeline of local preparation prior to Hurricane Katrina’s landfall). On August 26, Mayor Nagin first announced that city officials were monitoring the storm. *Id.* at 16-7. On August 27, Nagin advised citizens for the first time that they should begin to prepare for the storm’s impact. *Id.* At 9:30 a.m. on August 28, just one day prior to Katrina’s landfall, Mayor Nagin finally issued a mandatory evacuation order for the City of New Orleans. *Id.* This late notice meant that residents had a single day to evacuate the area. Individuals with limited access to a television, radio, phone, or the Internet would simply not be able to safely evacuate the area under this scenario.

<sup>26</sup> A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, *supra* note 17, at 64.

so left the area safely.<sup>27</sup> However, neither Mayor Nagin nor Governor Blanco ordered a mandatory evacuation until Sunday, August 28 – nineteen hours before projected landfall.<sup>28</sup> Many citizens believed that had officials ordered this mandatory evacuation sooner, countless lives could have been saved.<sup>29</sup> The frustration felt by residents regarding the lack of evacuation assistance by the government – at all three levels – is exemplified by the words of New Orleans citizens and other concerned parties commenting on the evacuation attempts:

“Why would you get in the public media and ask a city, where 80 percent of its citizens ride public transit, to evacuate? What [were] they supposed to do? Fly?”<sup>30</sup>

“I think, unfortunately, a lot of the destruction that we saw, that persons were unable to safely evacuate, was because they were basically poor.”<sup>31</sup>

“We know that people were not able to evacuate because some people just didn’t own cars.”<sup>32</sup>

These comments evidence some of the key challenges that arise when evacuating inner-city populations: a lack of access to private transportation, a lack of financial means to evacuate on their own, and an inability to leave the affected area safely without additional assistance. Planning for the evacuation of inner-city communities must therefore involve “accounting for those who cannot evacuate on their

---

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 107 (“The Louisiana evacuation for the general population, including contraflow, worked very well. Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and other state officials labeled the implementation of this evacuation as ‘masterful’ and as one of the most successful emergency evacuations in history.”) (quoting *Hearing on Hurricane Katrina: Preparedness and Response by the State of Louisiana Before Select Comm.*, 109th Cong. 67 (2005) (statement of Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Governor of Louisiana) (Blanco: “I am very happy to talk about our evacuation process, because it the one thing that we did masterfully.”)).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 109.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 111.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* (quoting statement of Dyan French, New Orleans citizen and community leader).

<sup>31</sup> A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, *supra* note 17, at 111 (quoting statement of Terrol Williams, New Orleans citizen and evacuee).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 112 (quoting statement of Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director for the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights).

own.”<sup>33</sup> *The New Orleans Evacuation Plan* actually specifically addressed the issue of those without access to transportation. Despite this, the city did not follow the plan and made no attempt to evacuate these people; furthermore, the preparations for sheltering these individuals were “woefully inadequate.”<sup>34</sup>

The Katrina calamity presents sad corroborating evidence of what can happen when a disaster strikes a densely populated urban area and its inner-city residents are not prepared or protected.

### III. LACK OF GOVERNMENTAL GUIDANCE

After Hurricane Katrina, considerable attention was paid to the federal government’s response efforts, particularly the failure to respond effectively to New Orleans’ inner-city residents.<sup>35</sup> The federal post-

---

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 113. The New Orleans Evacuation Plan, in part, states that:

Special arrangements will be made to evacuate persons unable to transport themselves . . . additional personnel will be recruited to assist in evacuation procedures as needed . . . if an evacuation order is issued without the mechanisms needed to disseminate the information to the affected persons, then we face the possibility of having large numbers of people either stranded and left to the mercy of the storm, or left in areas impacted by toxic materials . . . transportation will be provided to those persons requiring public transportation from the area . . . approximately 100,000 Citizens of New Orleans do not have means of personal transportation.

*Id.* (quoting City of New Orleans, Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan 24, 45, 50, 55 (2004)).

<sup>35</sup> *See, e.g.,* A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18, at Executive Summary 2 (discussing the many factors that contributed to the failure of government at all levels to plan, prepare for and respond aggressively to the storm). *See also, e.g.,* Edward Epstein, *As With Katrina, Federal Role Caused Discord*, S.F. CHRON., Apr. 18, 2006, at A13 (stating that President George W. Bush, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, and former Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Michael Brown have been widely criticized for the federal response to Hurricane Katrina); Michael A. Fletcher & Spencer S. Hsu, *Bush: Congress ‘Shortchanged’ New Orleans; Touring Gulf Coast, President Calls for Restoration of \$1.5 Billion for Levee Repairs*, WASH. POST, Mar. 9, 2006, at A1 (discussing the fact that President Bush told the media on March 8, 2006 that “Congress has been slow to provide funding to rebuild housing destroyed by Hurricane Katrina”); Dahleen Glanton, *Americans Helping Each Other; Life’s Essentials, All Donated, Can be Had in a Parking Lot*, CHI. TRIB., Sept. 21, 2005, at C10 (emphasizing the failure of the federal response to Hurricane Katrina by focusing upon a Mississippi church’s efforts to support citizens affected by the disaster); Patrick McGreevy, *Katrina Debacle Prompts L.A. to Prepare for Disasters, Attacks*, L.A. TIMES, Feb. 17, 2006, at B3

mortem on Hurricane Katrina, as applicable to inner-city emergency preparedness, illustrates a distanced and vague approach. For example, recommendations generated for the February 23, 2006 White House Report *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*<sup>36</sup> were meant to ensure “that the harsh lessons of Hurricane Katrina need never be learned again,” even though the authors of this report acknowledged that “[n]o matter how prepared we think we are, we must work every day to improve.”<sup>37</sup> However, of the 125 recommendations in this report, only eight are even arguably applicable to improving inner-city emergency preparedness efforts.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, these eight recommendations deal with community preparedness in the most general way. They do not offer concrete action steps or solutions for better preparedness of inner-city communities or low-income residents.

For example, one of the recommendations is that “DHS should develop *tools* for State and local governments to use in order to prepare, train, exercise, and engage citizens and communities in all areas of preparedness.”<sup>39</sup> While highlighting that “special consideration should be given to persons with disabilities, health problems, language barriers, income barriers, and unaccompanied minors,”<sup>40</sup> the recommendation provides that “tools” refer to “instructor guides and participant handbooks for classroom based instruction, identified standardized skills and capabilities, and strategic planning guidance.”<sup>41</sup> The report suggests that developing these tools at a

---

(discussing that the federal government’s poor response to Hurricane Katrina has prompted some state and local governments to construct their own emergency response plans).

<sup>36</sup> LESSONS LEARNED, *supra* note 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at Introductory Letter.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 87-123. These eight dealt with the following issues: incorporation of non-governmental and private aid into emergency planning, training, exercises, and disaster relief effort; public figures serving as spokespersons to promote citizen and community preparedness; increased grant funding for these efforts; building baseline skills and capabilities for all citizens and communities; development of tools for state and local governments to prepare, train, exercise, and engage citizen preparedness; inclusion of individual and community preparedness into current elementary and secondary education programs; utilization of the DHS Lessons Learned website; and establishment of state tax relief holidays to allow citizens to purchase disaster preparedness supplies. *Id.* at 115, 121-23 (Recommendations #100, 119, 120-125).

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at Recommendations 122 (emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* The recommendation also advises that special consideration be given to contemplate household pets and other animals. *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> LESSONS LEARNED, *supra* note 18, at 122.

national level with key stakeholder partnerships, such as non-governmental organizations, the private sector, emergency responders, and experts on vulnerable populations, “will achieve economies of scale [and] elevate National preparedness without depleting scarce resources at the local level.”<sup>42</sup> This guidance is vague for a number of reasons. First, what information is to be included in these guides and participant handbooks? Does this involve instructing individuals on preparation techniques, survival during a disaster, learning how to cope with the effects of a disaster? Perhaps it covers all of these. However, without more specificity, it is difficult to ascertain what these instruction materials will actually accomplish. Further, the language in the recommendation suggests that there will not be state and local government input on the substance of these handbooks even though these tools are designed for these entities to use.

Without further guidance on these issues, it is difficult to determine what these recommendations actually mean – and whether they are realistic. Furthermore, the federal government must focus – and rightfully so – on the other 117 recommendations that bear no relationship to inner-city preparedness in order to strengthen the overall federal response. As a result, emergency preparedness for inner-city communities essentially seems off of the federal radar screen.

This is exemplified by Congress’ post-Katrina advice that affords no added specificity in terms of emergency preparedness for inner-city communities.<sup>43</sup> For example, in its report *A Nation Still Unprepared*, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs offers seven foundational recommendations and eighty-one building block recommendations,<sup>44</sup> none of which deal specifically with inner-city preparedness, let alone general community preparedness. One recommendation from this report advises that “[a]ll evacuation plans must provide for populations that do not have the means to evacuate.”<sup>45</sup> It further provides that “DHS and DOT [the

---

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> See A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, *supra* note 17; *Hurricane Katrina: GAO’s Preliminary Observations Regarding Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Before the S. Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs Comm.*, 109th Cong. (2006) (statement of David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States), available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06442t.pdf>; A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18. See also U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, GAO Reports and Testimonies Related to Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Reconstruction, <http://www.gao.gov/docsearch/featured/dpr.html> (last visited July 13, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> A NATION STILL UNPREPARED, *supra* note 18, at Recommendations - 1-29.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at Recommendations - 21 (description of Recommendation 45).

Department of Transportation] should make available assistance to state and local governments for the development of these plans to ensure that the nation's most vulnerable citizens are not left behind in a disaster." This recommendation offers, at best, a conclusion without action steps or suggestions on how DHS and DOT should assist state and localities in making these plans. Does this mean simply logistical assistance? Or should state and local governments look to these agencies for additional funding? Also, this advice does not appear to be tailored specifically to inner-city residents who may have different needs when it comes to evacuation procedures than other vulnerable population groups. Finally, the recommendation does not indicate what types of "plans" should be developed – do these plans include how to get to evacuation routes for citizens awaiting pickup or do these plans simply list available evacuation routes. While this recommendation certainly promotes a desired outcome, it does not offer specific guidance or provide for direct funding to ensure that inner-city residents will not be left behind in a disaster.

The House of Representatives' Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina issued its Final Report in February 2006, entitled *A Failure of Initiative*. This report is essentially an elaboration on the findings from the Committee's hearings and investigations over the course of a five month period.<sup>46</sup> While extremely factual and worthwhile as a summary about the efforts of local, state, and federal officials prior to, during, and after the disaster, it does not offer any recommendations for improvement or guidelines for future actions regarding the preparedness of inner-city communities.

States and localities also, as a general matter, do not have adequate funding for preparedness efforts designed specifically for inner-city communities without clear direction or funding from the federal government.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, with the recent reductions by DHS in urban security funds this year in cities such as Washington, D.C., New York, and even New Orleans, some states and localities might actually have decreased funding for existing community preparedness efforts.<sup>48</sup> It will therefore be necessary for all interested parties – state and local government emergency management officials, non-governmental organizations, public health practitioners, representative community

---

<sup>46</sup> A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, *supra* note 17, at 9.

<sup>47</sup> See *supra* note 1 and accompanying text.

<sup>48</sup> See Dan Eggen & Mary Beth Sheridan, *Anti-Terror Funding Cut in D.C. and New York*, WASH. POST, June 1, 2006, at A1.

leaders, and appropriate charities – to work together and take the lead in creating and implementing specific programs designed to help solve the problem.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PREPAREDNESS PILOT PROGRAM**

In the absence of specific guidance from the federal government and the lack of adequate funding to state and local governments, perhaps one method of achieving a solution is to begin a small, community-wide pilot program (or series of pilot programs) within a well-defined inner-city neighborhood that is designed to prepare its residents for a disaster. If successful, these pilot programs could then be duplicated across the country with minimal cost<sup>49</sup> and could stimulate funding for similar efforts in other cities. Such a program should have several of the following key characteristics.

First, the program should have input from all relevant community-wide stakeholders, including state and local government emergency management officials, non-governmental organizations, public health practitioners, representative community leaders, and appropriate non-profit organizations, to collaborate on the most effective and appropriate preparedness measures for their inner-city neighborhoods. This will ensure that these stakeholders comment upon, and have familiarity with, emergency plans as they relate to their own inner-city communities, rather than having individuals outside of these communities impose rules, guidelines, and standards from afar.

Second, the program should contain components based on the particular problems faced by inner-city residents in preparing for a disaster, namely notification procedures, access to emergency supplies, and information on evacuation and shelters. In terms of notification procedures, the program should establish communication systems and notification techniques, including, for example, special telephone numbers or the locations of nearby emergency resource centers that function effectively during a disaster to ensure that inner-city residents receive up-to-date emergency information. This emergency information could also include advice on how to create community

---

<sup>49</sup> The University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security (CHHS) estimates a program of this nature, depending on geographic location, would cost between \$375,000 and \$400,000. This includes the purchase of supplies as well as the organizers' salaries, expenses, and other costs. These estimates are based on budgets prepared for grant applications (on file with author).

call-down lists or telephone trees, how to gather contact information for residents within a particular area, and how to notify residents with pertinent emergency information door-to-door. The program should also include information on how to organize community door-to-door notifications of emergencies in the event of a power failure. This should be accomplished by designating responsible individuals for each block or street who will go door-to-door to get information to all residents of that block or street that cannot get out otherwise. Additionally, the program should provide guidance for using battery operated radios and lists of particular stations for up-to-date news and information. This will be especially helpful for individuals that do not have access to a computer or that experience service disruption to their televisions or cellular telephones due to electrical damage.<sup>50</sup>

The program should create a realistic list of what a family of four would actually need in the event of a disaster. This would include information on the exact quantity of food and water needed to survive for several days. For example, instead of simply telling residents to stock “ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables, protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts, crackers, etc.,”<sup>51</sup> the program could offer specific details such as how many cans of meats, boxes of crackers, or packages of protein bars to buy each day per person, instead of just lists of suggested items.

The program should also help residents determine the most affordable and durable brands and types of emergency supplies. To accomplish this task, the program will most likely involve a component of surveying neighborhood stores, outlet centers, and wholesale membership clubs to find the least expensive, yet durable, materials and supplies, and relaying that information back to the community in an easy-to-read, understandable format of informational maps, guides, and pamphlets. This information should also include the possibility of creating community-wide “co-ops” to buy these supplies less expensively by purchasing in bulk. The program should establish community outreach centers (e.g., schools, community centers, churches, or other nearby public facilities) for those who cannot afford any supplies.

Residents should also learn to create, store, and utilize a “go” kit. A “go” kit is a portable kit that includes information, vital records,

---

<sup>50</sup> See *supra* notes 3, 6 and accompanying text.

<sup>51</sup> See *supra* note 9 and accompanying text.

and supplies needed in an emergency situation.<sup>52</sup> In the event of a disaster, residents can “grab” the “go” kit and have emergency supplies and information on hand.<sup>53</sup> Teaching inner-city residents to prepare and utilize a “go” kit will enable them to move quickly and effectively from residences and work places when an emergency requires evacuation.

The program should also teach residents how to store surplus food, water, and supplies either within their homes, places of work, or community resource centers. Information should be provided regarding storage techniques, such as suggestions of cool, dry areas within a home in which to store food, water, and supplies.

The program should address strategies to ensure, to the maximum extent practical, that residents have access to medical care during a catastrophe.

The program should provide residents with understandable guidance and information about the most effective and safe means of evacuation. Within each neighborhood, emergency planners should formulate and provide to city residents emergency plans that incorporate evacuation procedures and routes, as well as available public transportation sites for residents awaiting evacuation. If individuals know the fastest – and safest – routes to these transportation sites, they will waste no additional time trying to ascertain this information during a disaster. Easy-to-read maps and guidelines should be created and provided to residents.

The program should also provide information about safe and effective means to find public shelters, as well as how to shelter-in-place. In the absence of a mandatory evacuation order by local or state officials, residents may not know when it might be better to find a public shelter or remain in place. In the same manner that residents should be given information on finding evacuation routes and how to get to transportation sites, so too should the program provide similar maps and guides to nearby public shelters. This should include detailed information on what to bring to the shelter, what types of facilities (bathrooms, showers, kitchen, etc.) are available at the shelter, and how to decide when to go to a shelter or stay put in the absence of guidance from local authorities.

---

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center, <http://www.ercm.org/index.cfm?event=DGCfaq&tpc=7&q=46#46> (last visited Aug. 1, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

The program should inform residents of the advantages and disadvantages of remaining in place, including how to choose safe places to stay put, how to create an interior “safe” room if one does not exist in the home, and what types of supplies might be needed to create a temporary shelter within homes, places of work, or other locations.

Finally, once a viable program is created, implemented, and tested in a particular community, it could then be copied and used as a model for other communities around the country. As the initial programs would be designed for small, well-defined areas within a community, this could help ease initial costs. States and local jurisdictions or, alternatively, private non-profit sources, could take the lead by funding these small pilot programs. The success of such models could generate further public and/or private funding for further development. Although a preparedness program of this type may not be the ultimate solution to ensuring *all* inner-city residents are completely prepared for a disaster, it is surely a positive start in an environment where virtually nothing is being done.

## V. CONCLUSION

As the nation’s cities have long been considered prime targets for terrorist attacks, and as recent events have highlighted the unique vulnerability of cities during natural disasters, inner-city residents must be prepared and protected in the event of a disaster. As evidenced in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, the substantial attention that was needed to initiate massive rescue efforts for inner-city residents exacerbated the effects of what was already one of the most damaging natural disasters in U.S. history.<sup>54</sup>

The federal government’s analysis and post-mortem reports from the Katrina experience offered nothing more than highly generalized support and guidance for inner-city emergency preparedness efforts. Without further funding or specific direction from the federal government, state and local governments alone cannot be expected to support preparedness initiatives. Therefore, stakeholders at all levels – state and local government emergency management officials, non-governmental organizations, public health practitioners, representative community leaders, and appropriate private charities – must take the lead and work together to establish cost-

---

<sup>54</sup> A FAILURE OF INITIATIVE, *supra* note 17, at 7 (concluding that “[n]ot only would [Hurricane] Katrina become the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history, it would also prove to be one of the deadliest”).

effective pilot programs that incorporate all the necessary components for inner-city communities in order to be prepared for a catastrophe. The preparedness programs should then be used as templates for the development of similar models throughout the nation.