

New Emergency Management Programs in Schools

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In spite of the social, economic and environmental benefits of urbanization, the phenomenon does come with a potential increased exposure to natural, technological, and/or man-made disasters. Turning municipal conglomerates into colossal metropolises further compounds the delivery of emergency services to the affected constituency, thus indirectly promoting the rise and importance of emergent citizen groups.

Why ECGs Form

Literature demonstrates that emergent citizen groups (ECGs) form because of a lack of pre-planning, ambiguity over legitimate sources of authority, authority structure collapse, perceived inadequacies in organizational performances, and exceptionally challenging or newly-generated disaster tasks.

Disasters have been taking place and affecting communities for as long as civilization itself. Thus, in lieu of appropriately structured emergency management systems (i.e. hazard mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery) it is up to an affected community's citizens to *prevent*, prepare, respond, and recover from these events in spite of demographic marginality or prejudice.

Emergent citizen groups are described as having no preexisting structures – such as group memberships, tasks, roles or expertise that have been acquired prior to the onset of a disaster. We typically find preparedness ECGs and response ECGs where preparedness emergent citizen groups are community-oriented and driven by broader-based concerns such as identifying

technological threats (e.g. nuclear power plant). While response ECGs, of particular interest to this paper, are typically more task-oriented – as we were able to appreciate immediately after Hurricane Katrina, the Mexico City earthquake, the World Trade Center, or the Kobe earthquake response that ECGs have a tendency to form following severe disasters.

In a society where various federal agencies and programs (i.e. National Response Framework, National Incident Management System, and National Preparedness Goal) exist to identify, prepare and alleviate the destructive nature of disasters, it is somewhat understandable that ECGs may be viewed as an irregularity to what is perceived as *structured* organizations. Nonetheless when disasters take proportions that are beyond those of existing systems or programs, thus creating the sudden breakdown of these structured systems, ECGs become an important mitigative component, which should not be ignored.

Spontaneous Nature of ECGs Enable Successful Adaptation

It is therefore the spontaneous nature of these groups that enable them to successfully adapt, improvise, and overcome situations in non-traditionalistic ways. Their lack of pre-disaster cohesiveness and/or organization is probably a major contributor to their success. Most often local constituencies are best suited to know what their disaster-stricken community needs, hence bringing a wealth of communal knowledge that further enhances their ability to effectively respond.

Four Categories of Response Organizations

The Disaster Research Center (DRC) Typology categorizes response organizations into four categories where ECGs fall under the fourth and last category (Type IV) – the other three types relate to pre-disaster organized entities such as police, fire, and emergency management agencies. Type IV response organizations are defined as newly-formed entities that were not necessarily part of a pre-disaster community setting. These groups, according to the typology, consist of residents of stricken areas, which informally converge together in a relatively undifferentiated structure. There is an increased willingness to provide structure to the alleged organized chaos that emergent citizen groups seem to possess. Perhaps structure is befitting to the community-oriented emergent citizen groups (e.g. Neighborhood Watch), but in the case of ECGs, they only come to exist following a disaster and typically disappear once the situation has become manageable again.

Conditions that are favorable to the formation of ECGs include, but are not limited to, a legitimized social setting, a perceived threat, a supportive social climate, pre-existing social ties, and the availability of resources. Contradictory to the latter are the emergent response groups that formed following the Kobe earthquake of 1995, where an outpouring of volunteerism and emergent groups had not been witnessed before, thus creating a noteworthy precedent. One of the

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reasons for Japan's extensive outpour of volunteerism was due to: (1) the severity of the disaster; (2) an influx of much needed psychological and emotional support; (3) intense media attention; and (4) a coincidental break between academic terms, which consequently enabled students to more freely mobilize themselves to the affected area. While these factors may have contributed to the sudden surge in volunteerism, they unfortunately did not provide reasons for the sudden societal change, and affected citizens could have easily remained within the limits of what they were accustomed.

The World Trade Center disaster of September 2001 was another disastrous event where the unlikely emergence of ordinary people and organized entities converged into one united and homogeneous group of responders where communities felt a mutual urge to provide assistance and consolation. It is proven that despite potential social divisions and existing conflicts – cooperation and collaboration among organizational and community actors can co-exist to address a collectively-shared pain, loss and disruption that far exceeds social and/or political differences.

Historically impacted communities have generously been receiving voluntary assistance from directly or indirectly impacted constituency and scholarly research has equally proven the worth and benefits brought forth by emergent citizen groups. Whether it be the added responsibility of overseeing freelancing constituents, the legal ramifications associated to injury or theft, the perception that constituents may behave chaotically, or

simply for their (i.e. emergent citizen groups) lack of formalized training organized emergency response service providers. Police, fire, medical and military remain reluctant to empower such emergent citizen groups. As organized emergency service providers, we unfortunately cannot always remain abreast of impacted community needs. Local government agencies simply do not have the financial and operational means to efficiently address the logistical or administrative requirements that their communities desperately need during and post-disaster.

Understanding the importance of emergent citizen groups can only serve its purpose if organized emergency response service providers allow emergent citizen groups to holistically co-exist within the tenets of emergency management (i.e. *prevention*, mitigation, response, preparedness, and recovery). Doing so would enable organized services to better disseminate their resources to more critically impacted areas within the community.

Introduction of Foundational EM Course in Schools Would Standardize Expectations

Similar to the old principles of mandatory conscription (without suggesting the militarization of our youth) the introduction of a foundational emergency management course at the middle to high school level would standardize communal expectations. Furthermore, sponsoring government ministries, departments, and local school boards would adopt a state or federally developed foundational emergency management program that could be incorporated into a school's existing academic programs as part of a student's social studies program of education.

Knowledge is one of our greatest tools. Becoming aware of hazards and understanding how local, state/provincial, territorial, and federal governments identify and implement mitigative solutions would permit our youth to harbor an awareness that would allow future community stakeholders to maintain sustain-ability and resilience within their communities, thus reducing the impact of disasters. Furthermore, with the understanding of their role and importance of a tiered inclusion within the tenets future community stakeholders can become active participants during the preparedness (e.g. household pre-planning, training, etc.), response (e.g. evacuation, mustering, communal headcounts, etc.), and recovery (e.g. damage/debris assessments, domestic animal care, etc.) phases of emergency management.

Tasks That Could Be Handled by an ECG

Equipped with a better understanding of local government expectations pre-, during, and post-disaster, members of an affected or neighboring community could make better use of their individual strengths and disseminate throughout an impacted community without overwhelming organized emergency service providers. Tasks such as secondary searches, accountability of constituency headcounts per household, establishment and management of temporary refuge (prior to government provided sheltering), preliminary damage assessments, debris assessments and removal, relocation and management of domestic animals, implementation of neighborhood watch programs, and linguistic translation/interpretation – to name a few –

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Recovery Is Now

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sector interests and government representatives is a best practice that should be initiated in the beginning phase of recovery. This will also help you to stay tuned into the community needs and healing process, with information shared on vigils, fundraisers and other community events important to the community.

If FEMA's Individual Assistance program has been activated, Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams (DSAT) will deploy into impacted areas and will attend any community events associated with the disaster to register survivors for assistance programs and provide recovery resources. They will look toward the local jurisdiction for guidance on where to deploy.

Additional Recommendations

While there are many other considerations when planning for recovery, jurisdictions should

develop a plan for these critical functions of the response to recovery transition, so that you may alleviate some of the chaos that will naturally ensue during any major disaster. Additional planning should include: a debris management plan; planning for health emergencies associated with disasters; understanding what you will need from your governing body during recovery; cost recovery planning; rebuilding process development; and long-term housing plans as survivors transition out of shelters. While recovery is a behemoth of a process that you will not soon be done with, you will find that any planning or discussion that you are able to have before the disaster will provide you with confidence, assuage unnecessary stresses, expedite your recovery, and bolster your community's resilience. Whether it's simply a bulleted list of possible facilities and task force leads or a comprehensive recovery plan, your planning will most certainly pay off when disaster strikes. ▲

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could all be performed by emergent citizen groups, thus relieving government agencies and permitting local, state/provincial, territorial, and/or federal governments to concentrate on more intricate issues.

Conclusion

The very concept of an emergent citizen group's spontaneity would not have to change into a structured organization. The core essence of these groups – *their spontaneity* – would simply benefit from having voluntary emergent citizen group members accountable, systematic, knowledgeable, and appropriately equipped to work in unison with organized emergency response service providers. ▲

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