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Nation

Homeland Security Details Gaps in Preparation

by Pam Fessler

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[All Things Considered](#), June 16, 2006 · Most American cities and states are not ready for a major disaster, a new report to Congress says. Nearly five years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks -- and 10 months after Hurricane Katrina -- the Department of Homeland Security found major shortcomings in emergency planning, as well as a lack of coordination and antiquated response guidelines.

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Report: States, Cities Not Ready for Catastrophes

Read the Report

The Homeland Security Department's analysis cited preparedness gaps in 131 state and city emergency-response plans.

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Nearly five years after the Sept. 11 attacks and 10 months after Hurricane Katrina, most American cities and states remain unprepared for catastrophes, a government analysis concludes.

The shortcomings in emergency planning, including antiquated and uncoordinated response guidelines, are cause "for significant national concern," the Homeland Security Department found.

Although emergency plans appear to be stronger in 18 states along the nation's "Hurricane Belt," the analysis cited preparedness gaps in 131 state and city emergency response plans. Planning for evacuations also remain "an area of profound concern," the review found.



Two children play near their house in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, May 9, 2006. The neighborhood remains devastated from Hurricane Katrina. After the storm hit, President Bush ordered a review of state and city emergency-preparedness plans. Getty Images

"We rely to a troubling extent on plans that are created in isolation, are insufficiently detailed and are not subject to adequate review," concluded the department's

160-page review of findings and annexes that was delivered to Congress on Thursday evening.

"Time and again, these factors extract a severe penalty in the midst of a crisis: precious time is consumed in the race to correct the misperceptions of federal, state and local responders about roles, responsibilities and actions," the review found. "The result is uneven performance and repeated and costly operational miscues."

President Bush ordered the review of state and city emergency plans in a speech in New Orleans on Sept. 15, weeks after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city. It analyzes response and evacuation procedures for all 50 states, the nation's 75 largest cities and six U.S. territories.

Lack of Planning for Those with Special Needs

Documents made available to the AP did not cite individual cities or states, and a Homeland Security official suggested that portion of the report would be released later.

The analysis criticized the states and cities in several key areas, including:

- Failing to address emergency needs for sick, elderly or poor people unable to help themselves.
- Being too slow to issue disaster warnings and other alerts to the public.
- Failing to designate a clear chain of command during major disasters.

"Most review participants have demonstrated that they are able to successfully manage commonly experienced incidents, yet are not fully prepared for a catastrophic event," the review concluded. It called the gaps cause "for significant national concern."

Hurricane-Prone States Better Prepared

But the report found that the 18 hurricane-prone states, from Maine to Texas, appeared to be better prepared for disasters than the rest of the country.

Those states hugging the Atlantic and Gulf coasts were judged by peers to have emergency plans "that were more likely to be rated sufficient... than other states," the review noted. Plans by

Hurricane Belt states to manage resources, health and medical issues, and communications were "noticeably stronger" in comparison, it found.

Similarly, cities in these states also were rated more likely to be prepared to issue warnings, manage resources, distribute emergency public information and mass care.

But there was a major exception: The cities were judged as comparatively not sufficient in planning for evacuations.

The review is the latest in a series of government and expert analyses since Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29. Nearly all have found lacking preparedness levels for large-scale

disasters. The Sept. 11 commission and other panels also have found shortcomings in preparedness for another terrorist attack.

The latest report was released as the Senate sent President Bush a \$94.5 billion emergency spending bill that included funds for new aid for Gulf Coast hurricane victims.

The review noted several failings on the federal government's part, citing a need for clearer guidance and up-to-date preparedness data to state and local officials. It also urged better collaboration with private businesses to help evacuate disabled people and with charities and other non-governmental services to stockpile aid for disaster victims.

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