

DISASTER RESEARCH CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

MISCELLANEOUS REPORT

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EMERGENT CITIZEN GROUPS IN DISASTER
PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES
An Interim Report

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THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The project has the assistance of an Advisory Committee. While committee members have no direct responsibility for the research work, they do provide advice and recommendations to DRC regarding the project. Current members of the committee are:

Bobby G. Baines
Assistant Director
Disaster Services
American National Red Cross

Allan Franks
Chief, Public Interest Center
Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

James Kerr
Director of Research
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Fred Millar
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This report is devoted exclusively to presenting major but selective findings from the first year of work on the 30-month Disaster Research Center (DRC) study of emergent citizen groups in disaster preparedness and recovery activities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the last 20 years, considerable research has been done on how people behave and groups react at emergency times of natural and technological threats and disasters such as tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, explosions, toxic chemical events, and nuclear radiation. These studies by social scientists have led to improved responses during the emergency time. In recent years, research has turned to problems in the aftermath of disasters and how individuals and organizations had prepared for these mass emergencies. As in the case of emergency-time studies, the work on aftermath preparations for, and recovery from, disaster threats and impacts, is aimed at eventual improvement in crisis planning and management, both at the personal and group level.

In line with this new research interest, DRC obtained a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1981 to study emergent citizen groups (ECG's) in disaster preparedness and recovery activities. The presence of new groups of private citizens concerned with preparatory and post-recovery aspects of actual and potential disasters is an increasingly noticeable feature of American communities. Generally unlike new groups which emerge during the emergency time period, these emergent groups have the potential for long lives; most attempt to influence the behavior of other organizations and agencies, and many have the tendency to evolve from informal emergent groups into established formal associations. DRC has initiated a 30-month intensive and extensive study of such emergent groups. A number of field studies are underway which involve in-depth interviewing of group members, organization officials, and those who interact with them.

DRC researchers have three general goals regarding the study. We want to learn as much as we empirically can about the phenomena of ECG's; we want to integrate and place these findings in a larger context (in a model of some kind); and we want to derive the implications of the model for private citizens and public organizations--what it means for them if the model correctly integrates the empirical findings about the emergent groups we are studying. In other words, we intend to learn about a particular phenomena, to interpret what we learn, and to indicate the significance of our interpretation.

There are three major research objectives. They are: (1) to determine the *characteristics* of ECG's, (2) to identify the major social *conditions* associated with the emergence of such groups, and (3) to ascertain some of the more manifest *consequences* of those citizen groups which do emerge. For purposes of understanding the dynamics of the phenomena, we also will look at the *careers* of ECG's.

Regarding characteristics, we are interested in ascertaining the nature and kinds of emergent groups which develop, including such elements as their structures (e.g., their vertical, horizontal, and network dimensions) as well as the different organized forms they may assume.

Regarding conditions, our concern is with the factors--internal and/or external--associated with the appearance (or non-appearance) and continuation of emergent groups including what circumstances are responsible for when, where, and why emergent groups do and do not appear and survive.

Regarding consequences, we want to look selectively at some of the more manifest external effects of emergent groups, including how they may be influencing public agencies and organizations with which they interact. Our examination of careers involves attempts to ascertain if there are any typical paths in the initiation, formation, and development of ECG's.

This study of ECG's should interest individuals as well as organizations having responsibilities in community-wide emergencies. A most fundamental question is addressed by our research: what organized role can interested citizens play in making disaster policies? As such, our work deals with an inherently significant public policy issue which, however, has generally been ignored. To the extent actual and potential individual victims have been studied, this study aims to the focus has been on what happens to victims rather than to see what they may affect. We are looking at possible proactive behaviors rather than just reactive behaviors, and from the perspective of actual or potential sufferers rather than from the viewpoint of helpers only.

The work will provide information to citizens on how they may best organize themselves to have effects on disaster preparedness and/or recovery. On the other side, governmental and other public and private groups who deal with citizens should, as a result of our study, be better able to understand the situation in which they have to operate. Furthermore, if we take seriously the principle advocated by researchers that plans should be adjusted to people and people should not be forced to adjust to plans, an obvious implication is that there must be knowledge of what concerns potential victims with respect to actual or possible disasters. This study will provide some such knowledge. While the study is focused on American Society it is probable many of the findings are valid for other urbanized and industrialized societies.

FIELD WORK PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

During the first year of the research, field work has focused on studying approximately three dozen ECG's, which are listed elsewhere. Data obtained from most of these groups will be used in the systematic analysis planned.

Our research objective necessitated sampling ECG's, deciding on contacts in the communities being studied, determining the kind of information we required, and designing the field instruments. We now discuss these matters, including some of the problems encountered.

Locating ECG's for study was the first field task. As a pre-requisite we defined the term, "Emergent Citizen Group." In the early stages of the project, ECG's were conceptualized as consisting of private citizens who were informally or formally organized at the local community level to pursue either general or potential disasters. This indicates that our interest lies only in relatively recent private citizen groups, and not those organizations whose members are now part of formal associations or well-established social movements. We excluded ECG's which operate on other than a local basis; thus, we do not study primarily extra-community oriented groups (whether at a regional, state, or national level). Our focus is on those local groups which appear *before* or *after* a disaster and not those which emerge *during* the emergency time period, such as search and rescue teams. Under "disasters" we include all actual and potential incidents as enumerated in the federal disaster law, but we also include those ECG's who might be attempting to get certain currently marginal threats (e.g., toxic wastes, landslides, etc.) defined as within the scope of the law.

In the first few months of the project, an increasing list of ECG's for possible study was assembled from a variety of sources:

- earlier DRC work on other research projects;
- advisory board suggestions;
- a survey of most of the major collective behavior researchers in the United States;
- public organizations;
- private sector; and
- ECG's identified by other ECG's.

The largest number of ECG's for possible study were identified by federal, state, and local community agencies whose responsibilities usually involved contact with citizen groups. Some private sector sources (such as public interest groups and national citizen organizations concerned with environmental problems) also provided some names; but as a whole, the private sector was a surprisingly disappointing source of information. Also, as the field work progressed, ECG members and local community officials were asked about their knowledge of other groups.

On the basis of the master list which was assembled, certain ECG's were tentatively selected for field study.

SELECTION CRITERIA

- a balance of natural vs. technological or human-created agents (with a limit of 8 groups associated with a particular kind of agent)
- a variety of potential agents
- a representation of different geographical locations and a broad continuum of rural to urban settings
- priority to areas vulnerable to disasters

An effort to sample on the basis of pre- and post-impact origins of ECG's did not prove empirically viable; thus, initial studies were conducted in certain localities in California, Texas, and Kentucky, to insure that if such localities were hit by disasters during our study, we would have base line data available on the ECG's in those particular areas. To avoid unique aspects of a particular locality, a decision was made not to include more than five ECG's in any given state, and no more than two ECG's in any particular community (defined as a different legal jurisdiction). Specially sought, but with limited success, were earthquake oriented ECG's and ECG's consisting primarily of minority group members.

Before sending a team into the field, tentatively selected ECG's were evaluated to see if they were appropriate for the Center's research. Long distance calls were made to known group members, as well as to other local sources, such as mass media personnel, officials in disaster and emergency agencies, county extension agencies, and other knowledgeable informants. Inquiries led to the elimination of some groups because, for example, the imputed ECG turned out to be otherwise, or the ECG, in some respect, did not meet our prior criteria.

It was initially decided that at least four categories of persons would normally be contacted at the local level:

- 1) all key or core members of the ECG;
- 2) a selected range of peripheral members;
- 3) key public and/or private officials dealing with the ECG;
and
- 4) relevant mass media personnel in the community.

Most such persons were interviewed in depth when a DRC field team went to the specific locality, and usually some personal contact was made with representatives in each of the four categories. As much documentary data as possible was collected; this ranged from group newsletters and minutes of meetings to articles of incorporation and copies of group letters. Mass media accounts of group behavior (some of them going back to group origin) were often available. In a few cases, it was possible for DRC field workers to do participant observations in group meetings or other ECG activities.

Two interview guides were developed for open-ended, in-depth interviewing: 1) a guide for ECG members, and 2) a modified guide for other persons in the community (i.e., for community officials, mass media personnel, etc.). The guides draw from the basic dimensions of the

framework we are using, namely, the career, characteristics, consequences, and conditions involved in the ECG being studied. Generally, we wanted to know:

- 1) the history of the group from its inception to the present, including any incorporation activity;
- 2) the structural and functional composition of the group, including its major interactions with other groups;
- 3) what effects--if any--the group has had in its community;
- 4) to which local organizations the group was salient and legitimate; and
- 5) how certain conditions, such as the availability of resources and mass media attention, has influenced the group origin, development, and survival.

The perspective sought is that of the interviewee (be this a core or peripheral group member, a community official, or someone from the mass media). The interview guide is intended to assure adequate topic coverage, while at the same time allowing the interviewee to talk spontaneously and in an unstructured fashion.

In addition, all persons interviewed are asked to fill out a disaster probability scale for their area, i.e., to make an assessment on a 0 to 5 scale of the probability of their area being hit by one of 21 different kinds of possible natural and technological disaster agents. Another scale attempts to gauge the perceived relative influence of 29 different kinds of community agencies and organizations (including the ECG itself) on the problem focus of the ECG being studied. In some selected cases, a mail "vested interest" survey questionnaire has been administered.

The field team also has a documents checklist enumerating the kinds of (usually) written materials which should be sought from the ECG being studied, mass media, governmental agencies, and private organizations otherwise contacted in the community. The checklist includes budgets, legal briefs, radio station tapes, task force reports, and disaster plans, to name a few.

As of the date of this report, field operations have gone well. Almost all ECG's selected have cooperated fully. Agreement to allow tape recordings has been all but universal except for an occasional member of an anti-nuclear plant ECG (but even they have provided untaped interviews). The great majority of non-ECG officials and individuals contacted have been very cooperative in providing information and documentation. For any given ECG, typically about 20 field contacts are made, of which at least a dozen are usually tape-recorded open-ended interviews.

The material gathered in the field is also systematically processed when it is brought back to DRC. This insures that any gap in information is noted so that missing data can immediately be obtained via phone calls or by mail, and also to make certain that data which is to be mailed to DRC is actually received. For security, the data is stored in DRC files separate from other Center files, and is not available other than to Center personnel working on the project.

For each ECG studied, a quick and brief field team report is prepared. This is an internal DRC document not available to anyone other than the DRC personnel working on the ECG study. The field trip report describes the nature of the community and past disaster threats and/or experiences of the locality. But it primarily concentrates on the career or history of the ECG studied, as well as its characteristics, conditions, and consequences. The field report also contains a general evaluation of the data the field team has obtained, as well as any other relevant observations. The field reports are all based on field impressions and observations and are primarily intended to provide an initial start towards the systematic case study discussed elsewhere in this report.

LIST OF COMMUNITIES IN WHICH EMERGENT CITIZEN GROUPS HAVE BEEN STUDIED

Not all of the ECG's in the communities indicated below will be included in the final sample from which the data will be drawn for the systematic data analysis planned. Those excluded will be those ECG's in communities used for pilot study purposes, or which otherwise proved not totally appropriate for the DRC research objectives. The disaster agent focus for the group is also indicated.

Barbourville, Kentucky---Floods
 Baytown (Houston area), Texas---Hurricanes
 Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania---Floods
 Blountville, Tennessee---Hazardous Wastes
 Bumpass Cove, Tennessee---Hazardous Wastes

Cardington, Ohio---Tornado
 Centralia, Pennsylvania---Coal Bed Fires
 Cincinnati, Ohio---Landslides
 Cincinnati, Ohio---Nuclear Plant
 Cleveland, Ohio---Nuclear Plant

Deer Park (Houston area), Texas---Hazardous Wastes
 Fairfield, Ohio---Floods
 Galveston, Texas---Hurricanes
 Grand Island, Nebraska---Tornado
 Gulf Shores, Alabama---Hurricanes

Hall County, Nebraska---Tornado
 Harlan, Kentucky---Flash Floods
 Knoxville, Tennessee---Hazardous Wastes
 Laguna Beach, California---Landslides
 Los Angeles, California---General Disasters

Menlo Park (San Francisco area), California---Earthquakes
 Mentor, Kentucky---Nuclear Plant
 Mobile, Alabama---Floods
 Montgomery County, Maryland---Nuclear Research Reactor
 Oak Ridge, Tennessee---Synfuels Pollution

Oakland, California---Earthquakes
 Pacifica (San Francisco area), California---Landslides
 Pasadena (Houston area), Texas---Hurricanes
 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania---Air Pollution
 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania---Landslides

Toledo, Ohio---Nuclear Plant
 Vincetown, New Jersey---Water Pollution
 Wayne, New Jersey---Radioactive Wastes
 Wilmington, Ohio---Hazardous Wastes
 Woburn, Massachusetts---Air Pollution

Woburn, Massachusetts---Hazardous Wastes
Yellow Creek, Kentucky---Hazardous Wastes