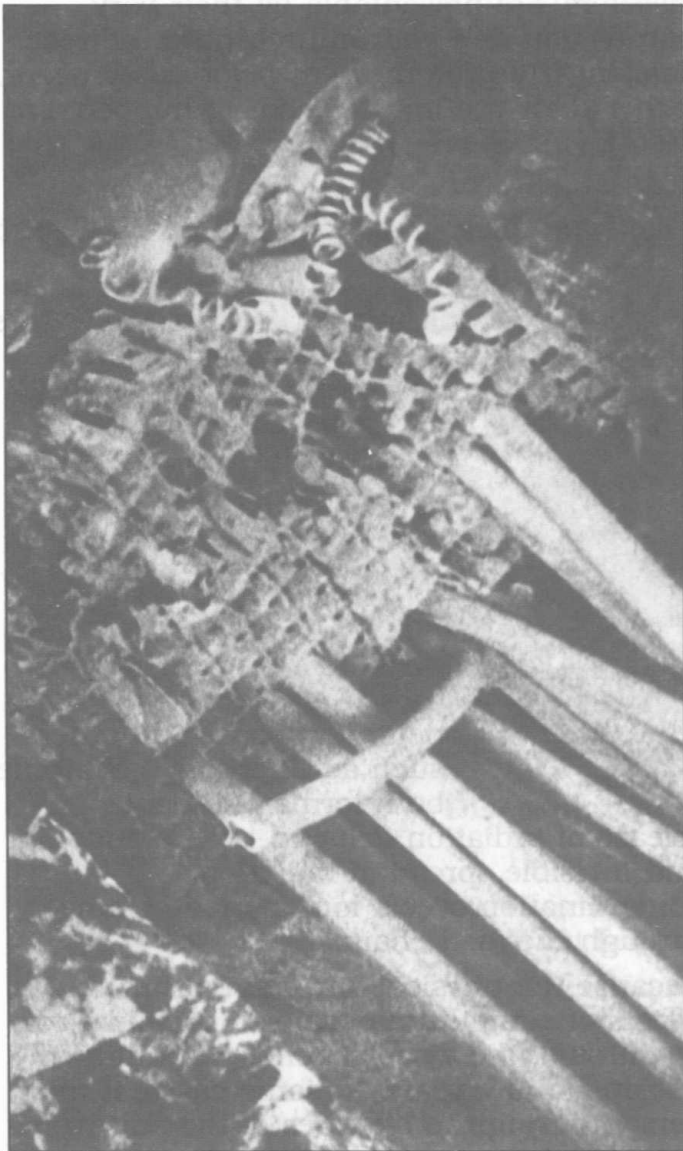


# 4. CARING THROUGH PREVENTION OF HUMAN-CAUSED DISASTER

“Plan discussion/action programs in your church around issues related to human-caused disasters.”



Technological disasters involve failures of society's protective systems and can be prevented. Above, the partially-melted reactor core in the Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, nuclear accident.

## Prevent Disasters Whenever Possible

A new attitude about the inevitability of human-caused disaster has emerged from some of the most poignant images of the past:



- traumatized residents were evacuated from the area around the crippled Three Mile Island nuclear reactor near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania;
- residents were relocated from contaminated communities at Love Canal, and later, at Times Beach, Missouri;
- a chemical cloud felled thousands in Bhopal, India;
- the Chernobyl nuclear reactor caused death and spread contamination across a wide swath of the Northern Hemisphere;
- oil spills such as at Prince William Sound, Alaska;
- the Edison, New Jersey, gas explosion.

From these and other incidents comes the recognition that both life and livability are endangered by human-caused events that are technological—not natural—in origin. These events involve failure of society's protective systems and could have been prevented.

# Prepare to Care:



Church World Service/Mel Lehman



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Human-caused technological or environmental disasters, such as civil strife or toxic-waste contamination, unlike natural disasters, are preventable by their very nature. You and your church have a direct challenge to prevent them before they occur, rather than waiting for them to happen and then trying to respond.

## The Tragic Legacy of Human-Caused Disaster

Human-caused disasters differ in their form of occurrence and in their course. Some, like Bhopal, India, and Edison, New Jersey, are

**Recycling is not only a first step to protect the environment; it also reminds us of our wider ecological responsibilities.**

acute events involving catastrophic release of poisons that have dramatic and visible short-term effects. Other incidents, such as Love Canal, involve a long period of “incubation” during which toxins spread undetected through residential neighborhoods. Still others, such as Chernobyl, combine both forms—an acute

**Technological disasters are fully preventable. We must work now to prevent disasters that could harm our children for a lifetime.**

release of radiation followed by the ongoing and invisible spread of radiation contamination over a long period of time through the food chain.

Because the physical and mental health effects of acute human-caused disasters can be chronic, the disaster tends to be drawn out over many years. In some cases, it may persist during the lifetimes of the survivors and even become a tragic inheritance for the next generation(s). (See “Chernobyl: The Invisible Catastrophe Continues,” Church World Service/World Council of Churches publication.)

## What You and Your Church Can Do

Think globally and act locally. Recycle materials in your home and church. Conserve water and energy. Call on the many available resources to plan your actions to make a difference in our world.



Churches can work to build racial and ethnic harmony and help prevent strife in the community. Above, officials related to Church World Service after the Los Angeles civil disturbances in 1992.

Plan discussion/action programs in your church around issues related to human-caused disasters: physical/mental/spiritual health, ethics, civil rights, land use, public trust, corporate responsibility, stewardship of God's creation, and our complicity in environmental degradation. Check with your denomination for resources or contact Church World Service.

### Discussion starters:

1. Have you ever been the victim of a human-caused disaster?
2. If so, what factors helped you cope with the experience? What factors hampered your ability to cope?
3. In your community or region, are there human-caused disaster situations that you know of? If so, what is the role of government? Environmental groups? Your church? What do you think each of their roles should be?
4. Do people in your community anticipate the possibilities of human-caused disasters and take preventative action?
5. What lifestyle changes might minimize human-caused disasters?
6. What actions can you take in your community? What actions can your congregation take?
7. What guests might be invited to meet with your congregation or organization to talk about these issues to help plan action you can take to make a difference?

## How Church World Service Can Help

Show the 20-minute video, "The Three Parables," (with a study/action guide) available from the Church World Service Disaster Resource Consultant in your state/territory or from Church World Service Disaster Response/New York.

Call on the Church World Service standing Technological/Environmental Disaster Task Force with expertise in the following areas of human-caused disaster: medicine, psychology, sociology, human rights issues in disaster response, the law, union-labor relations, biology, physics, chemistry, architecture, hydrology, insurance, government, media, children's issues, and pastoral care.

Resources through Church World Service also include shared experience from interfaith response groups, such as the Interfaith Center for Environmental Stewardship, founded in 1979 by the interfaith community of Western New York in response to the human suffering which continues today from the hazardous-waste crisis of Love Canal.

See Manuals:

**Human-Caused Disasters: Prevention, Mitigation, Response**

**Emotional, Spiritual and Pastoral Care for Disaster Survivors and Care-Givers**



Andrea Wolf for Church World Service

Organize discussion groups in your church to plan ways to prevent human-caused disasters. To stimulate discussion, show "The Three Parables," a 20-minute video.