

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO RECURRING AND NONRECURRING FLOODS¹

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Abstract

Analysis of community response to recurring and nonrecurring floods has significant implications for flood preparedness programs. Comprehensive flood preparedness takes advantage of the most adaptive characteristics of public response to floods. In dealing with the community subjected to a flood, perhaps for the first time in recent history, lessons from recurring flood communities can be utilized in enhancing adaptive response. Conversely, the adaptive aspects of response to nonrecurring floods can be used to increase adaptive behavior in areas where floods recur with some regularity. This paper examines the nature of this cross-over effect and its implications for community preparedness programs.

Introduction

Flooding may well be one of the least problematic hazards confronting human society. While it effects a large proportion of the population, frequent experience with floods and its relatively predictable nature, reduces the band of uncertainty associated with community exposure to floods. Rossi *et al* (1983) describe the victimization rates for various hazards. Flood victimization by region of the country ranges from a high of 31.7 in the Middle Atlantic States, to 10.7 victimizations per 1,000 households in the Pacific States. Like emergency preparedness officials, people use their database of (emergency) experience in responding to the impending hazard. Rogers (1984) concludes that the experience of living near nuclear power plants has a direct impact on our attitudes about their operation, safety and acceptability. A minimal linkage between prior experience with various hazards, and perception and recognition of other hazards has been suggested (c.f. Rogers, In Press). This paper addresses the general issue concerning the use of experience with a single hazard in making an adaptive community response. To what extent can emergency preparedness take advantage of the

1. This research was partially supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Cooperative Agreement No. EMW-K-1024). This paper has not been reviewed by FEMA and in no way reflects the views or policies of the Agency. The Author accepts full responsibility for the contents herein and gratefully acknowledges the support, comments and criticisms offered by colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh and the Association of State Floodplain Managers Ninth Annual Conference.