

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY BERNARD J. LUSKIN

# Where should our disaster managers be trained?

**T**he significant role that disaster and emergency professionals can play has been underlined “in spades.” We are now re-defining what is to be done to protect ourselves, our families, employees, campuses and our nation.

All the recent unwelcome attention to repairing damage has raised new awareness of prevention. We are rightfully becoming more wary of surprises and “incidents without precedent.” If an event’s scale, scope and impact are far beyond past occurrences, we can find ourselves without sufficient experience to deal with it. The 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb blasts, the 9/11 World Trade Center attack, and the Katrina flooding of New Orleans are examples of incidents without precedent.

## What can be learned in a classroom?

“How we handle the worst case scenario management of an expected incident that is beyond any we have ever known, is causing a fundamental change in how we must prepare for this type of event,” states Leonard Marcus, director, health care negotiation and conflict resolution at the Harvard School of Public Health.

“Many executives and politicians aren’t prepared for the public outrage that so predictably follows nearly all major disasters. A small investment in professional development can result in emergency management training that goes a long way toward turning a frog into a prince,” says Rick Reed, former director of Emergency Services for Santa Clara County, California.

We can learn much from the actions of Rudy Giuliani after 9/11 and Ray

Nagin during and after Katrina. Handling the media during an incident of major magnitude is a sophisticated challenge and may have significant bearing on the response and result.

## More emergency management classrooms are needed

Captain Gregg Walsh, a terrorism expert with the New York State Police told me that there are too few academic programs. “While counter-terrorism was primarily a federal law enforcement responsibility prior to 9/11, now all emergency management personnel, plus all willing citizens, are considered part of the response team,” says Walsh.

Community colleges have taken a leadership role in training first responders. At the university level, there is work to be done in preparedness, planning and leadership training. “We are actively considering new master’s and doctoral level competencies in crisis and emergency management” says Dr. Judith Kuipers, president of Fielding Graduate University.

In 1995, there were just five academic programs in emergency management in universities and colleges. In 2006, there are 120.

## Existing academic programs in emergency management

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“There is an overwhelming demand for cutting-edge emergency management degree programs,” urges Walsh. “Personal and national security is now a permanent part of our vocabulary. College and university leaders across the country have the opportunity for their institutions to contribute in fulfilling this need.”

In that vocabulary are terms like ‘mitigation cycle,’ and ‘multi-hazard planning.’ Seemingly overwhelming complexity must be de-complicated

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to be understood and managed. Anecdotal information about the human experience can be well coupled with skill development in effective communication.

Certainly, the development of expertise comes at a cost. But the words of well-known fire fighter Red Adair are particularly appropriate now. “If you think an expert is expensive, just wait until you hire an amateur.” ■



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