Emergency Preparedness: Life, Limb, the Pursuit of Safety and Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

Since 9-11, emergency preparedness has been the focus on federal, state, tribal, and local levels. Although current research describes emergency management response, many barriers may exist that affect response systems, including the role of first responders, social vulnerability, and the way technology interfaces with these variables. Several factors determine the success of emergency preparedness and its ultimate impact on the health and safety of the community, including social media response, Community Response Grid (CRG) and social networks for older adults, emergency Internet and Community Technology (ICT) training within tribal communities and graduate schools, and programs and innovative emergency management policies for ethnically and racially diverse populations. Negotiating these issues, the character and incidence of emergency technology benefits the adult experiencing an emergency by: a) obscuring the constructs of social and class hegemony; b) mitigating future emergency problems when new procedures and policies that depend on ICT are rendered; c) examining barriers that could hinder lifesaving emergency procedures; and d) creating a community identification and a community collaborative bond so disadvantaged communities are responded to in an expedient manner.

Keywords: Adult Learner, Digital Divide, Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security, Social Vulnerability, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Data is being processed every moment of every day at a voracious pace. Private citizens, and the private and public sector rely on this technology-driven data to make a multitude of decisions. And, to make this situation even more intricate, technology designers are upgrading and changing both the software and hardware components with great rapidity. And, an integral piece of hardware that is going through a brisk evolution is the silicon chip, which assists computers in processing speed (National Research Council, 2006). It is therefore imperative that the adult e-learner understands and conforms or adapts to these changes. And, it is even more important to ensure safety that the adult e-learner adapts to this new technology as it applies to emergency preparedness.

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When emergencies are being categorized, there are many kinds that could be quickly conjured up including, but not limited to: floods, medical epidemics, toxic and/or biological transmissions, fire, hazardous material spills or leaks, nuclear disasters, rock or mudslides, hurricanes, tornadoes, snow storms, transportation accidents, and terrorist threats. According to Turoff et al. (2004), “By definition, an ‘emergency’ means that an event has occurred that makes it impossible for an organization to ‘conduct business as usual’” (p. 12). The question then becomes, how do we deal with these threats in order to mitigate safety problems the populace might have to encounter.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Formation of Homeland Security

During 9-11, the United States was attacked in a unique and lethal way, a situation in which we were not on the ready. Responders were in place, but they were managing an emergency that no one had ever seen before or could have envisioned. So, it seemed logical at this juncture to revisit emergency preparedness policies and practices. And, after this heinous event, was born the Department of Homeland Security. The mission to protect the homeland is to synthesis the emergency response in a trustworthy manner, “…in the face of sudden and potentially catastrophic emergencies” (Weick, 1993). Bellavita (2008) offers that emergencies handled by the Department of Homeland Security include the abatement of: terrorism, catastrophes caused by terrorism, natural and man-made hazards, jurisdictional and social unrest, national security, with the possible restriction of civil liberties, should this culling back of public rights be necessary during or after one of the aforementioned circumstances.

Inherently, the responsibility of Homeland Security is to secure and protect the infrastructures that support our nation, inclusive of financial centers, energy hubs, transportation systems, border control, and communication capacity (Reiter & Rohatgi, 2004). At the helm or base of all these infrastructures is Information Communications Technology (ICT), which “…plays a major role in preventing, detecting, and providing early warning of attacks” (Reiter & Rohatgi, 2004, p. 16). In order to prevent cyber disruption, the technology infrastructure also needs protection, which is referred to as “cryptographic protocols” (Reiter & Rohatgi, 2004, p. 16). ICT and Transportation System Technology (TST) are used to investigate and maintain the following: “Intelligence and warning, border and transportation security, domestic counterterrorism, critical infrastructure and key assets, defending against catastrophic threats, and emergency preparedness and response” (Chen, Wang, & Zeng, 2004, p. 329). ICT and TST have been reformatte within yet another umbrella system called Intelligence and Security Informatics (ISI) in an attempt to synthesize information (Chen et al., 2004).

It is the view of Turoff et al. (2011) that technology systems be synthesized within an information systems approach. It has been recommended that an Emergency Response Management Information Systems (ERMIS) would allow a more effective and efficient emergency management system that relies on software and a community of developers and practitioners that would augment the monitoring, auditing, and reporting of emergency incidences (Turoff et al., 2011). Turoff et al. do offer a caveat in that the users of the technology information system must truly understand the system prior to an event, because this will mitigate “…the training problem on the mechanics of the system…” (p. 9).

Kim (2002) suggests that database information management systems may be a key to ensuring safety and emergency preparedness. Database technology is defined as “…software and methodologies for modeling and storing large volumes of data of arbitrary types and structures and responding to queries and update requests against the data” (p. 43). A problem that exists with databases is that they may contain erroneous information, are not updated properly, and cannot be networked with other
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