

Are you Prepared? Creating Resilient Park and Recreation Agencies and Communities

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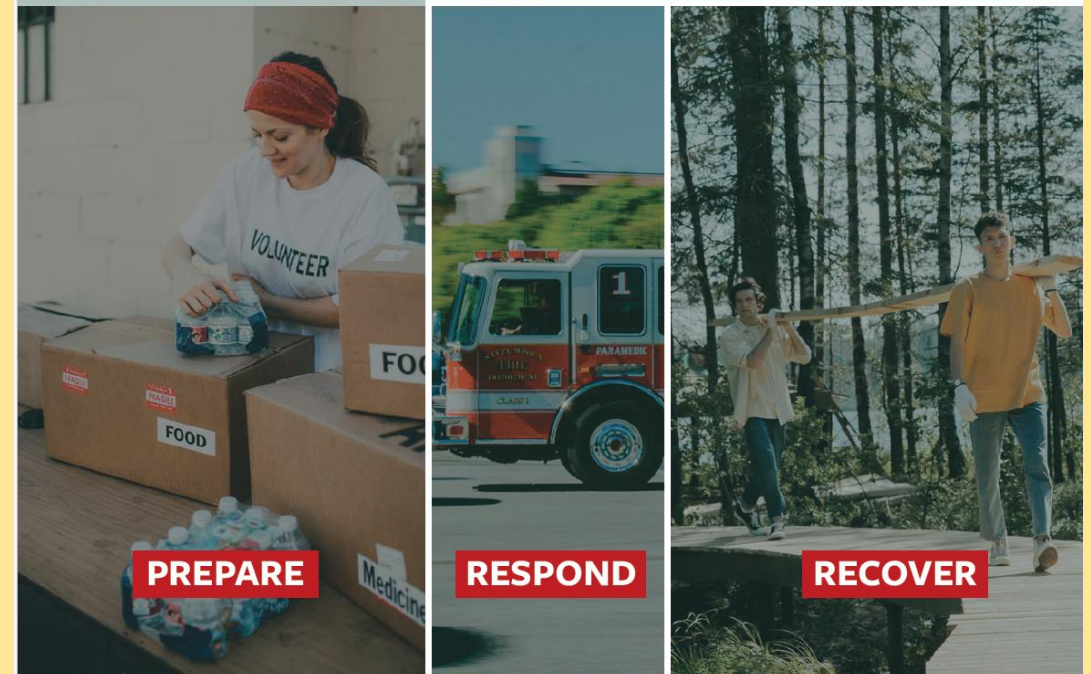
Operation Resiliency Response “Prepare – Respond – Recover”

The mission of GP RED’s Operation Resiliency Response (ORR) Initiative is to ensure that Parks & Recreation (P&R) Agencies are prepared for, effectively respond to, and recover from natural and human-made disasters, including building long term community resiliency strategies.

How to Prepare? Operation Resiliency Response

(ORR)
Agency Planning Manual

(coming 2024)



Climate Change has increased the intensity and frequency of Natural Disasters....



Floods

Vermont 2023



Vermont 2023



Severe Winter Storms – Ice Storms

Ice Storm NH 1998



Ice Storm NH 2008



Severe Winter Storms – Blizzards

Blizzard of '78 - Massachusetts



Blizzard of '15 - Massachusetts



Hurricanes/Nor'easters

Nor'easter Maine 2007



Hurricane Maine 1938



Not immune to others – these, too, can happen here

- Earthquakes
- Tornadoes (Micro-bursts...)
- Non-storm related wind
- Thunderstorms
- Wildfires
- Drought
- Severe Cold
- Severe Heat
- And....the “P” Word



Natural Disasters – bad enough to experience one but...

Cascading Natural Disasters

- Extreme Natural Events
- Cascading Effects: Increase in Progression Over Time
- Generate Unexpected Secondary Events of Strong Impact
- At Least as Serious as the Original Event

Concurrent Natural Disasters

- Multiple Disasters at the Same Time
- As Serious as Each Other
- Complicate Response
- Triage Approach

More Good News....Yes, there can be Cascading and
Concurrent Disasters at the same time
(3/13/20 – 4/10/23 – all disasters were concurrent)

Wildfire – Rains – Flood - Landslide

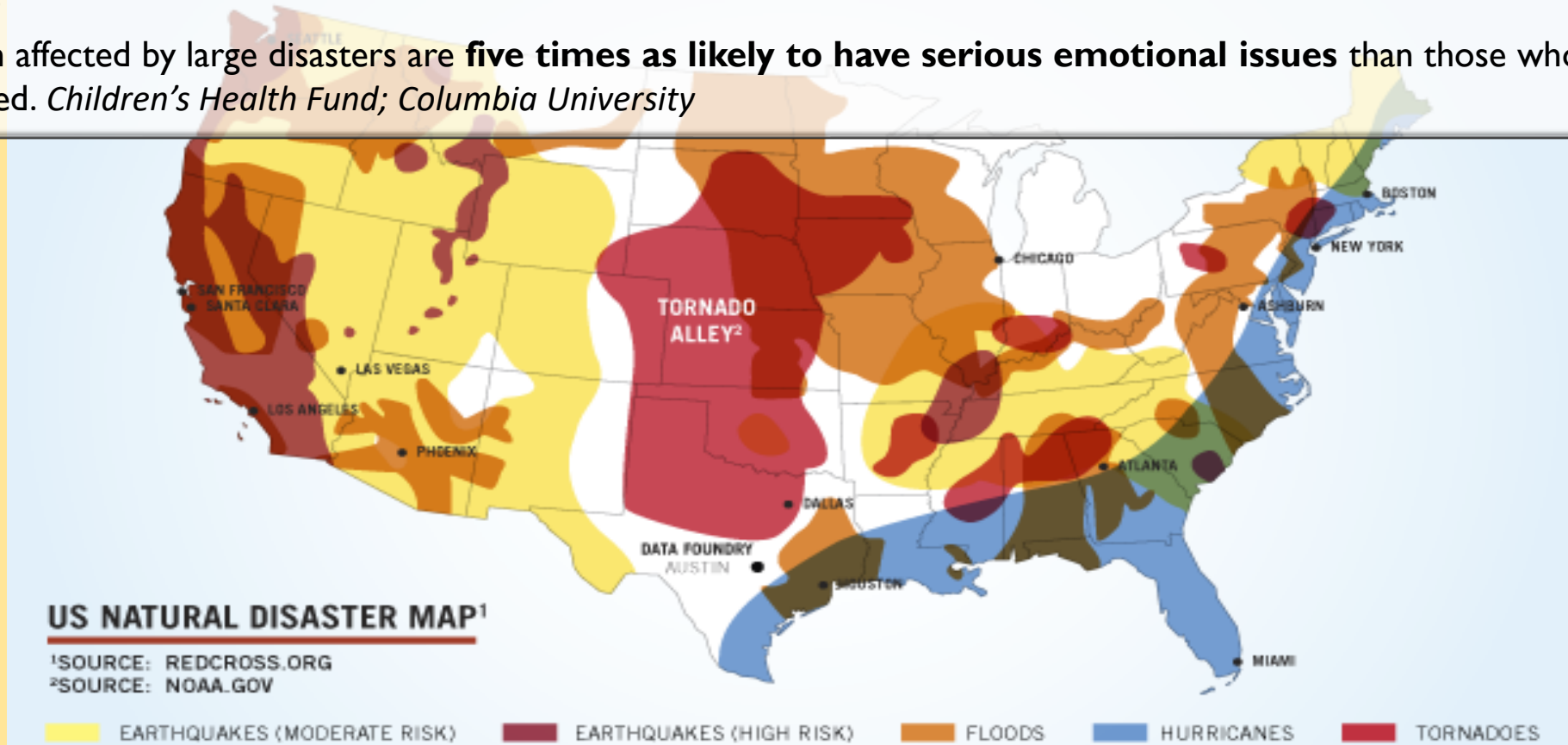


Pandemic

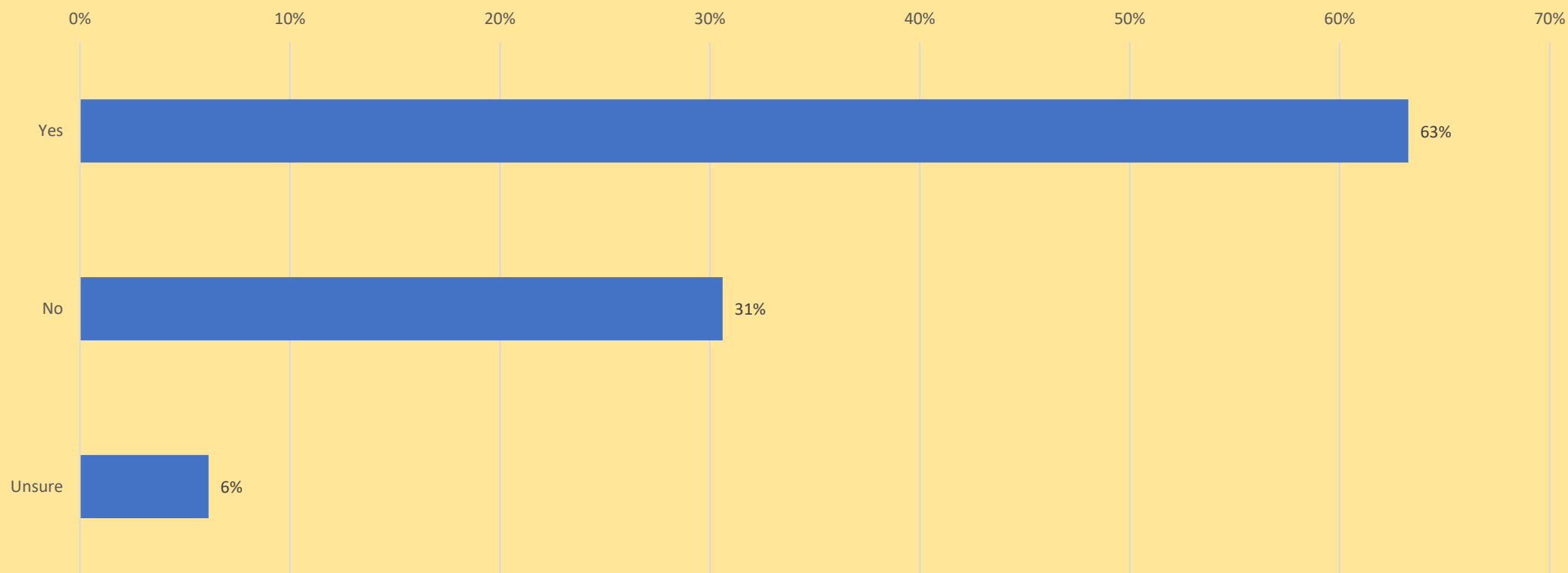


Is Your Community Prepared?

- Disasters can strike **anywhere at any time**.
- Each workday, in the USA **68 million** children are in child care or school, separated from their families.
- **Many communities** lack basic standards for protecting residents in care facilities and schools.
- **More than half** of American families don't have an emergency plan. *FEMA*
- Following Hurricane Katrina, it took **6 months to reunite** the last child with her family. *National Commission on Children in Disasters*
- Children affected by large disasters are **five times as likely to have serious emotional issues** than those who are unaffected. *Children's Health Fund; Columbia University*



GP RED National Survey – have you or your agency been affected by a major emergency or natural disaster in the past 10 years? (100%?)



“I know we should be prepared I just don't know what that means”



Are You Prepared?

- Are you represented on your community's Emergency Management Team?
- Do you have an asset inventory?
- Do you have a department specific Emergency Action Plan?
- Do you know the emergency plans/policies of other facilities your agency uses i.e. schools?
- Are staff/volunteers familiar with those plans/policies?
- Do you have long range plans approved?
- Have you received disaster/emergency training in the past 3 years?
- Does your agency have a specific plan for children who may be at your agency when disaster strikes?
- Does your agency have a specific plan for senior citizens who may be at your agency when disaster strikes?
- Do you have a specific communication plan? (No phone, power, cell coverage?)

GP RED National Survey – Are you represented on your municipality's Emergency Management Team?

In 2023 –

- Yes – 79%
- No – 18%
- Unsure – 3% -

Significant Improvement – Factors?

In 2019

- Yes – 50%
- No – 14%
- Unsure – 36%



Why is it important to be represented on the EM Team? What unique/valuable skills do P&R bring to the table?

- First Aid/CPR
- Planning, implementing special events
- Experience working with large groups of people
- Familiarity with the community
- Experience with creating/implementing EAP
- Training in Risk Management



And....

- Experience in:
 - Facility Management
 - Staff/Volunteer Management
 - Needs of special populations – i.e. children, seniors, special needs
 - Providing food for large numbers of people
 - Dealing with emergency situations
 - Transportation
 - Collaboration/relationships with other departments/entities



GP RED National Surveys – Have you had training for an emergency in the past 3 years?

In 2023 –

- Yes – 53%
- No – 40%
- Unsure – 7%

Improvement over 2019 –

- Yes – 44%
- No – 56%



Whose team are you on and who is on your team?

- Municipal Emergency Management Team
- Public School Emergency Management Team
- Shelter Team
- Full time staff
- Part time staff
- Seasonal staff
- Volunteers
- Community partners

Special Events as training tools

- Command Center – reps from Public Safety, Public Works, EMS
- Familiarity with key personnel
- IAP (Incident Action Plan)
- Communication Systems
- Traffic
- Crowd Control
- Serving meals to the public
- Providing shelter



What is our role in response?

- Determined by Municipality's Emergency Management Plan
- Some communities require you report to the community you live in if you can't make it to the community you work in
- Recreation Center/Community Centers often used as Shelters
- Parks and Recreation professionals become Shelter Managers
- Recreation Services – do they continue in community centers that are being used as shelters?
- How important are recreation services for those sheltered?
- How important are recreation services for recovery/mental health for the individual and for the community?

How important is it to “return to normalcy” for community and individual’s mental health?

- Parks, recreation, trails, and open space play a vital role in the physical, economic, social, and emotional health of the community.
- Essential services - going forward it is imperative to make sure those services are provided at all times - especially in times of disaster.
- Services and activities are crucial to alleviate boredom, improve mental health, reduce stress, build resiliency, and provide places for physical and social activities.
- Key aspects for returning to “normalcy” after an event.



Mental Health

“Sporting activities will seem insignificant during the immediate emergency response phase. But in the weeks and months following a natural disaster, as communities begin the slow process of rebuilding their lives, recreational sports can play a valuable role. They help people cope and re-establish networks or make new social connections” –

The Conversation – “Exploring the mental health in communities devastated by natural disaster”



Essential in a disaster/emergency

“Recreation professionals often act as first responders safeguarding those in their care, assessing the needs of local families and serving as a community stronghold....Recreation programs are critical for helping children cope with crises. They provide children with a sense of stability, comfort and most importantly, the opportunity to play and just be a kid again.”

(Sarah Thomson STC NRPA magazine June 2015)



Mutual Aid Agreements

- GP RED Survey 2023 – Does your community support Police and Fire to support other communities? 78% yes; 8% no; 19% uncertain
- Does your agency have a mutual aid agreement? 33% yes; 23% no; 45% unsure
- Are Recreation Services included in mutual aid agreements? 0% yes; 73% no; 27% unsure
- Should they be? YES



ORR Response Teams

- Corps of Volunteers – practitioners, P&R students, retirees
- Available to respond – shelters, stressful situations
- Provide positive recreation activities to those in stressful situations
- Save the Children – “Child Friendly Spaces”



GP RED National Survey – Would you be willing to accept or provide assistance from another parks and recreation agency? (2023)

- 90% indicated that they would accept assistance
- 10% unsure

- 88% indicated that they would provide that assistance
- 13% unsure

GP RED Survey -Would your community support your deployment to another community to provide assistance?

2023

- 50% yes,
- 3% no
- 47% unsure

What are the barriers to deployment?

- *Training*
- *Budget*
- *Time*
- *Staffing*
- *Liability*
- *Coordination*
- *Resources*

Did the Pandemic change the perceptions of:

- How essential parks and recreation facilities are in the community they serve?
- How essential parks and recreation services are in the community they serve?
- How essential Parks and Recreation personnel are to the community they serve?
- The valuable role Parks and Recreation personnel play in the response to emergencies and disasters?

Parks and Recreation – stepping up during the Pandemic

Emergency Child-Care

Meal Distribution

Vaccine Sites

Virtual and modified programs

Allowing space for students
needing WiFi

Looking out for
vulnerable/isolated populations



But isn't that what we do? No matter what the challenge – pandemic, natural disaster, man-made disaster, or in a hundred different ways –
Every. Single. Day.



How do we ensure our departments and our communities are “resilient”?

- Preparation
- Planning
- Practice
- Policies
- Readiness
- Education
- Understanding roles in response and recovery....
- Mutual Aid
- Assistance
- Rebuilding better
- And Parks, Recreation and Greenspace as prevention



Building Resilient Communities

- Parks, Recreation and Greenspace Planning play an important role in re-building communities for long term resiliency, especially in terms of recovery from hurricanes, flooding and wildfire management.
- According to the National Recreation and Park Association the NRPA magazine article entitled, “Parks as a Solution to Climate Change” –
- “Strategically placed and managed parks and natural lands buffer cities from rising seas, coastal storms, inland flooding and wildfires.
- FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program incentivizes mitigate recreation projects that include nature based solutions.
- Lumberton, NC project creating an 8 mile greenway system in the 100 year flood plain, prone to hurricane flood damage, called the Lumberton Loop. It mitigated future risks and created opportunities for economic development and public health. (FEMA – BRIC Program)

Conclusion

Ensuring Parks and Recreation agencies are prepared for, have a role to play in responding to, return to providing recreation services and opening of recreation facilities as soon as possible following a disaster, is crucial to creating community preparedness, response, recovery and resiliency. Recreation practitioners understand their importance in enhancing the quality of life in the communities served. These efforts are most needed when the “quality of life” is at its lowest.

Acknowledgements

ORR Manual

ORR Coalition

Save the Children

FEMA

NRPA Magazine

Town and City Magazine

Google pics

The Conversation