

Health communication



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Health Communication during Hurricane Sandy Question In October

Hurricane Sandy delivered a substantial blow to the coastal areas of Eastern United States, claiming more than 125 lives from the lower beaches of Florida, to the coastal communities of New York City and New Jersey.

Technically, Hurricane Sandy wrecked the most havoc along cities in the East Coast, especially New Jersey and New York. Destruction of coastal communities in New York and New Jersey occurred on October 29, 2012, leading to approximately 100 casualties in the two cities alone (CDC, 2012). Based on the hurricane's timeline, preliminary public advisories were issued as early as October 22nd. However, official advisories and disaster preparedness alerts were issued five days later; specifically on 28th October, practically few hours before the heavy storms and strong winds forcefully swept across the East Coast cities of New York and New Jersey.

Admittedly, the massive casualties inflicted by the hurricane on the East Coast can be attributed to the untimely provision of risk communication by the relevant authorities. In a period of only two days from October 22 to October 24, 2012, the FEMA regional office in Miami, Florida had ascertained that the hurricane's strength was growing exponentially. However, issuance of official public advisories was delayed until the hurricane's storms hit a limit of 105 miles per hour (Downing & Smith, 2013). Apparently, delay in issuance of official communication was caused by the bureaucratic nature of coordination between the FEMA National Watch Center and the NOAA National Weather Service. In essence, both the FEMA and the NOAA were avoiding public panic resulting from early issuance of immature information regarding to the hurricane's development (CDC, 2012).

Question 2

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The potential severity of Hurricane Sandy became clear as early as 19th October, 2012 when a wave in the Northern Caribbean Sea transformed from a tropical wave to a tropical storm in a period of under six hours. When the tropical storm reached Southeast Florida on 22nd October, its winds were sustained at approximately 40 miles per hour. By the evening of October 23rd, the growing tropical storm had cruised over the vast distance between Florida's Jupiter Inlet and the Upper Keys, including Craig Key (Downing & Smith, 2013). At 0500 hours on 24th October, it became evident that the tropical storm was headed for cities along the upper East Coast, and that the storm's wind speeds had intensified considerably. As at the evening of 24th October, the storm was upgraded to a hurricane status after winds exceeded 75 miles per hour. In a period of less than 12 hours, the hurricane's speed grew to above 105 miles per hour, and its wind waves extended to a width of more than 800 miles. When the hurricane's landfall hit the East Coast, its magnitude and destruction potential stood at 5.8, out of the maximum 6 on the NOAA scale. In the United States alone, Hurricane Sandy caused a death toll of 125, destroyed more than 10,000 homes, and damaged power infrastructure causing power outages in over 17 states, affecting over 8 million homes (Juan, 2014).

Question 3

When the once tropical storm was promoted to the hurricane status, FEMA and NOAA started issuing risk communication warnings for residents to evacuate their coastal homes in order to avoid loss of lives and property. Warning messages were delivered as early as 27th October, two days before the hurricane's landfall. Besides radio and television broadcasting, messages were delivered through popular channels like social media, especially

facebook and twitter. One message rotating of the facebook page of FEMA said, “ If you think the storm is overhyped and exaggerated, please err on the side of caution.” Apparently, the public was hesitant to honor warning messages, partly because previous warnings had failed to live up to their predictions, and also because massive evacuation exercises are not only costly but also inconveniencing. Fortunately, more than 400, 000 residents from Manhattan’s lower coastal areas honored the warning messages on social media, thus potentially reducing the number of deaths and property damages (CDC, 2011).

References

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