

Disaster cycle



Running head: DISASTER CYCLE**MSSM****Abstract**

This paper deals with the four phases involved in the disaster cycle. Those phases are the mitigation phase, the preparedness phase, the response phase, and the recovery phase. Though there are similarities in some like mitigation and preparedness being done before a disaster and response and recovery occurring after a disaster, they each have their own unique ways in which they assist in the process. I will discuss each in my paper.

Explain and distinguish between the four phases of the disaster cycle (mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery). Ensure you provide specific elements of each and describe when and why they occur.

As stated in the question for the weekly written assignment and in the book, disasters do seem to be repetitive and thus have a cycle. The phases of that cycle are: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. As one can more than likely figure out, mitigation and preparedness occur before a disaster happens. Conversely, the elements of response and recovery occur after a disaster has happened. Taking these four phases into consideration, there are a few basic goals in the process of disaster management. One is to reduce or even totally avoid losses from disasters. These losses can be either bodily harm or harm to physical assets. Another goal is to be sure that there is a quick response to any potential victims from the disaster. Also, there should be a speedy and effective recovery time when the disaster is over with. If inappropriate measures and/or processes are in place, consequences

of damage to property and human life are greatly increased. In this paper, I will discuss the four different phases and elements of each.

During the mitigation phase of the disaster cycle all actions are designed and reviewed to reduce the impact of future disasters. Some examples of this may be building codes and zoning, vulnerability analyses, public education, insuring that proper insurance is covered, and legislation. As previously stated, this phase happens before a disaster happens. Mitigation will depend on the combination of knowledge of the appropriate measures that are used in both the national and regional development planning. How effective this is depends on the information that has been gathered on potential hazards and the measures composed to counteract the potential hazard. The mitigation phase, along with the whole disaster management cycle, includes the shaping of public policies and plans that either modify the causes of disasters or mitigate their effects on people, property, and infrastructure. (Warfield, N/A) There are also certain areas and ideas that should be reviewed when in the mitigation process. These areas can include: developing mitigation goals and objectives; identifying and prioritizing mitigation actions; preparation of an implementation strategy; and documenting the mitigation planning process. Reviewing these processes early on can help insure a more effective process when a disaster does occur. FEMA pre-disaster mitigation programs have shown that communities can do a lot to prevent major emergencies or disasters from affecting them negatively. (Broken Arrow Emergency Management, 2005) Following these processes is a good way to do this.

While in the preparedness phase, organizations, agencies, and individuals assist in developing plans to save lives, minimize the damage from a disaster, and enhance disaster response operations. The goal of emergency preparedness programs is to obtain a certain level of readiness so a response to any unforeseen emergency situation has been strengthened by these programs so that governments, organizations, and communities can work more effectively and efficiently together. An example of preparedness planning could be to hold training exercises or implementing the use of warning systems much like the civil defense sirens that go off monthly. National and regional development plans and how they are both incorporated, play an important role in the preparedness phase. Similar to the mitigation phase, the effectiveness depends on the availability of information on hazards, emergency risks and the countermeasures to be taken, and on the degree to which government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the general public are able to make use of this information. (Warfield, N/A) It is also important to develop some sort of “action plans” during the preparedness phase. Some examples of the plans are:

- Developing and revising disaster plans and hazard analyses
- Writing mutual aid operational plans.
- Training response personnel.
- Improving public information and communications systems.
- Conducting exercises to validate the planning process

The next two phases take place after the disaster/emergency has occurred. In the response phase, emergency actions are taken during both the impact

of the disaster and the short-term effects after the disaster. Search and rescue or emergency relief are examples of actions taken during the response phase. The primary goal of during a response to a disaster is to maintain life and help assist those who are injured to become healthier. Primary response teams are normally assigned ahead of time and in most cases, these people will be the first responders (Fire Department, Police Department, Rescue Squads, and Emergency Medical Service). Some jurisdictions may also assign a certain department that will serve as a back-up to help supplement the first responders that are already on the scene. During this phase is where one might see more of the humanitarian organizations like the American Red Cross involved.

It is also important that there is an integration and coordination between federal and local agencies (as well as agencies from surrounding communities) during the response phase. In conjunction with this, there has been a suggestion of Disaster Response Teams (DRTs) that should be formed with the responsibility of the coordination, communications, command and control of all federal agencies responding to an event with six teams positioned across the United States. Making up this team would be command and staff functions such as administration, planning, communications, operations, finance, logistics and command

The final stage is the recovery stage. This process involves repairing the damages, restoring basic services, and reconstruction after the disaster has struck. Some disasters have much farther reaching time frames of recovery. Hurricane Katrina happened nearly two years ago and although New Orleans and the Gulf Coast states are recovering well, they still have a long way to go

to get back to normal, if that “ normalcy” can even be reached. Some, like Chernobyl are still having lingering affects even after 20 years. Some examples of the recovery phase are temporary housing, federal grants, and medical care. During this phase, the general public also becomes more involved in getting themselves back on their feet and on the road to recovery. This phase continues (for the most part) until all systems are returned to normal or very close to normal. During this time, there will be many opportunities to enhance prevention and increase preparedness, thus reducing vulnerability. Hence the cycle of the phases continues. This is also a good time to document the “ lessons learned” from the event, document what was learned, and help prepare for future disastrous events.

In reading the book, I discovered that there are two basic types of planning. They are long-term planning and short-term planning. The book lists three types of long-term planning dealing with reconstruction, mitigation, and overall general preparedness. As stated before, long term effects can last many, many years depending on how much damage the disaster caused. This begins with a phase know as the window of opportunity, in which public opinion is sensitized to the problem of hazards and disasters to the extent that there is substantial demand for measures designed to increase safety and reduce future risks. (Alexander, 2002, p. 8) A good example of these are the requirements that are now in force at all airports in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Short-term planning involves many different events. There are seasonal events that can be planned for like hurricanes in the Southeast and tornadoes in the Midwest. The severity may be different each time but the

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general time frame of occurrence in constant. Then there are the larger infrequent events like earthquakes and volcano eruptions that occur. This poses a problem because they happen so infrequently that one shouldn't invest a whole lot of time and money for planning but at the same time, there is some probability that an occurrence will happen sometime in the future. The last examples of short-term planning are those events that are unforeseen and are unlikely to repeat. Planning is still possible for these events as lessons can be learned if these occurrences have happened elsewhere and one can attempt to figure the likelihood of it happening in their area.

As I have discussed, the four phases in the disaster cycle each play a role and seeming tie into the other forming a circle that keeps going around. Nobody likes to think an event is going to happen but there should be preparations none-the-less. At the same time, the recovery and response phases should be in good enough shape to handle the disasters once they occur

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