Chapter Objectives

- Define the concepts used for disaster & grasp the similarities & differences among them
- Understand & distinguish the traditions of hazards, disaster, & risk
- Explain the importance of Comprehensive Emergency Management
- Know key theoretical perspectives for understanding disaster behavior
- Understand current political & social definitions of disaster
- Explain the emergence & importance of using a multidisciplinary approach to emergency management

Defining Disasters

- What is a “disaster”?
- Multiple definitions exist
- Classic definition for disaster is an:
  - “…actual or threatened accidental or uncontrollable events that are concentrated in time & space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society undergoes severe danger, & incurs such losses to its members & physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted & the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society, or its subdivision, is prevented (Fritz 1961, p. 655).”

Defining Disasters (cont.)

- Disasters:
  - Are social events
  - Must cause social disruption for a specific group of people
  - Create the need for outside help
  - May be only a perception that an event may take place

Types of Events

- Everyday life/Emergency:
  - Predictable day to day events, e.g. housefires
- Disaster
  - Events that disrupt day to day activities within a community
- Catastrophe
  - Events that disrupt day to day activities not only in a community but wide geographic region. Resources become difficult to obtain, & aid beyond political boundaries are necessary

A Continuum of Disaster

- Emergency: Routine, Predictable, Handled Locally
- Disaster: Community Disruption, Local Capacity Overwhelmed, Outside Help Needed
- Catastrophe: Regional Impact, Infrastructure Compromised, Aid Slow to Arrive
National Governors’ Association Report 1979

- Outlined “comprehensive emergency management” (CEM)
  - Defined as: “a state’s responsibility & capability for managing all types of emergencies & disasters by coordinating the actions of numerous agencies.”
- Includes all four phases of EM
  - Preparedness
  - Response
  - Recovery
  - Mitigation
- Applies to all risks (“all-hazards approach”)

Disaster Life Cycle

- Activities that eliminate or decrease a disaster impact

Getting ready for a disaster

Getting back to normal

Dealing with the impact of a disaster

National Governors Assoc. Report 1979 (cont.)

- All-Hazards Approach
  - Hazards must be approached across the four phases of EM
    - Must be managed across all phases
    - Must be coordinated at all levels & with all participants
  - Same set of issues arises across disasters
    - Communication & coordination problems

Hazards, Disasters, & Risks: The Hazards Tradition – G. White (cont.)

- Formed the Natural Hazards Research & Application Information Center mid-1970s at the University of Colorado
- Multidiscipline approach toward hazards
  - Geography
  - Sociologists
  - Economists
  - Engineers
  - Geologists
- Current disaster planning includes hazard analysis

Hazards, Disasters, & Risks: Disaster Tradition

- Disaster tradition grounded in preparedness & response activities
  - Most of this is from civil defense activities
- National Opinion Research Center (NORC)
  - Led by Charles Fritz, sociologist
  - Initial focus on human behavior during war & “response time” activities
  - Found that disasters did not cause mass panic, looting, hysteria
  - Actually resulted in good behavior
Hazards, Disasters, & Risks: Disaster Tradition (cont.)

- Disaster Research Center (DRC)
  - Formed in 1963 at Ohio State University by Henry Quarantelli, Russell Dynes, & Eugene Haas (all sociologists)
  - Focuses on organizational response to disasters
  - Has trained thousands of grad students
    - Alumni have helped to design/develop academic programs in disaster management
  - Has studied over 600 events worldwide
  - DRC continues today at the University of Delaware

Risk & Risk Perception

- Originally the work of (social) psychologists
- Originated after Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979
- Focus on:
  - How people see risk (probability of an event taking place)
  - Perception
  - Understanding
  - How risk influences people’s behavior
- Study of EM draws on 3 different traditions/perspectives
  1) Disasters
  2) Hazards
  3) Risk
- All perspectives can be used simultaneously to better understand the disaster process

Broader Perspectives

- No single perspective has emerged/dominated the field of disaster research
- Three major theories
  1) Emergent Norm Theory
  2) Systems Theory
  3) Sociopolitical Ecology Perspective
- All three provide different views to understand hazards, disasters & risk

Emergent Norm Theory (cont.)

- New Norms
  - Altruistic behavior
    - Neighbors helping neighbors
    - Volunteers from surrounding communities
    - Donations
    - Decrease in crime
- New Structure
  - Expansion of volunteer organizations
  - Change in the tasks of an organization (companies)
  - New groups & organizations form
    - Spontaneous search & rescue groups
  - Change in structure (gvt.)

Systems Theory (Mileti 1999)

- Based on the interactions of the built environment, physical environment, & people
- When one part does not work well, the others are affected

- Source: Phillips 2009, with permission.
**Systems Theory (cont.)**

- Systems approach allows us to see:
  - How the different environments interact
  - How to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, & recover from disasters
  - How to help those more likely to be victims

**Sociopolitical Ecology Theory**

- Focuses on the human system, but more detailed
- Looks at:
  - Competition for mitigation resources in a community
  - Patterns of disaster victimization
- Highlights that certain groups more likely to be disaster victims, such as:
  - The poor
  - Ethnic minorities
  - The elderly

**Current Issues**

- **Political Definitions**
  - Amounts & types of aid determined by:
    - How events are defined
    - Whether or not the president declares a disaster
    - No set factors to declare a disaster
    - Politics can affect the presidentially declared disaster process
      - May 1953 – Jan 2007
      - Average of 31 declarations/yr or ~2.5/mo.
      - Jan 1993 – Sep 2005
      - Average of 48.2 declarations/yr or 4/mo.

- **Current Issues (cont.)**
  - **Slow vs. Fast Moving Views of Disasters**
    - Disasters often viewed as sudden events
    - However, not all disasters occur quickly or w/o warning
      - Long-term changing weather patterns
      - Environmental disasters
    - Events harder to define due to longer time-periods
      - Challenges many conventional notions of disaster

- **Current Issues (cont.)**
  - **Non-Traditional Events**
    - Emergency Operating Centers (EOCs) & Emergency Managers (EMs) provide capabilities/ expertise for other events
      - Athletic events
      - Protests
      - Riots
      - Space shuttle Columbia recovery
Current Issues (cont.)

- **Multidisciplinary Views of Disasters**
  - Different social sciences provide key perspectives on:
    - Individual behavior
    - Group behavior
    - Organizational behavior
    - Political behavior
  - Engineering & hard sciences assist with issues such as:
    - Building standards
    - Geology
    - Meteorology
  - Emergency managements must know about & include many different fields for their jobs