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New Yorkers' Disaster Preparedness Falls Short, Study Finds

By [ANTHONY RAMIREZ](#)

New York City has been a target of terrorists, a victim of blackouts and prey to hurricanes and other natural calamities. But a new study to be released tomorrow concludes that while about two-thirds of New Yorkers say they are prepared for disaster, few actually are.

About half of New Yorkers could not feed or shelter themselves for three days if the water and electricity suddenly failed, researchers said, and they have not stored the recommended daily gallon of water for each person in the household.

Of those who said they were prepared, many (43 percent) had not packed food that does not spoil or put away spare cash (41 percent). About 30 percent did not have battery-powered radios, according to the study, which was conducted by the New York chapter of the Red Cross and the Center for Catastrophe Preparedness & Response at [New York University](#).

Manhattan is the least prepared borough, researchers found, with 58 percent of respondents lacking a rudimentary emergency supply kit. In Queens, the most prepared borough, 40 percent lacked a kit.

Dr. Irwin Redlener, the director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at [Columbia University](#), said Hurricane Katrina last year and the Sept. 11 attacks were "not wake-up calls, but more like snooze alarms, where we get aroused briefly and then drift back to sleep."

As evidence that preparation saves lives, Dr. Redlener cited one of the worst earthquakes ever recorded, in the industrial city of Tangshan, China, in 1976. Half a million people may have died there — the toll was never clear — but Dr. Redlener said that in the nearby Quinglong District, where officials had an extensive program to prepare for an earthquake, only one person died — of a heart attack.

While disaster experts recommend having an evacuation plan that includes at least two places for scattered family members to gather, only about 13 percent in the survey reported having made such arrangements. Since cellphones might not work and communication could be disrupted, a friend or relative who lives out of state should also have information on the plan.

More than half of the survey's respondents (53 percent) said that if they had to flee New York after a disaster, they would drive or take taxis. The report noted, however, that streets would likely be choked with traffic. Fifteen percent said they would ignore any orders to evacuate.

Timothy Raducha-Grace, associate director of the Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and

Response, said in an interview, "If we had asked more follow-up questions on how people practice their evacuation plans, then those low percentages would probably fall even further."

In the study, 1,000 adults were interviewed by telephone between Feb. 28 and March 15. The study has a margin of error of 4 percentage points.

Safety experts advise people to have supplies to sustain a household for three days. Besides water, canned food, cash and a battery-powered radio, a kit should contain a flashlight, a whistle, iodine tablets for disinfecting water, a cellphone, extra phone batteries and personal items like prescription drugs.

When residents are advised to evacuate, they will also need what officials call a "go bag." That should contain copies of important documents in a waterproof container; credit and A.T.M. cards and cash; first-aid kits; rain gear, blankets and shoes; and, above all, written information on two places to gather in case the family is scattered.

Wendy Rose, a spokeswoman for the Institute for Business & Home Safety, an insurance-industry group in Tampa, Fla., said it was also important for people to consider that seemingly harmless objects like a neighbor's lawn furniture could smash into their homes during a hurricane or that wind-driven rain could wreak havoc if it entered a home through broken windows.

"Until you live it, you don't think of all the ways you'll be affected by a disaster," Ms. Rose said. "I've heard many stories about people who had all their food in their little hurricane kit but no can opener."

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