

Preparedness: The Personal Responsibility of Everyone

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On Sunday May 25, 2008, the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* published an opinion piece in its *Perspectives* section, entitled “A Nation Unready”. Written by John D. Solomon, it discusses how even the September 11, 2001 attacks have not spurred most of us into preparing for emergencies. These emergencies don’t just include a terrorist attack, but more probable scenarios like a fire, disease pandemic (think, a very ugly strain of the Flu) or a natural disaster (think, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, flood...). All of these issues have the potential for serious impact on our business, your business and your families’ lives.

Granted, we live in Florida and for those of us that were around in 2004 & 2005, we have a memory of Hurricanes Charlie, Francis, Jeanne, Ivan & Wilma. However, unless we were DIRECTLY affected, the urgency to plan & prepare for a disastrous situation lessens which each passing day. We’ve breathed sighs of relief in 2006 & 2007 when our state was not affected in any meaningful way by tropical storms. With the past 2 seasons relatively calm, how many of you have a personal and business disaster plan in place? How many of you have worked out what you would do if you were displaced from your home or place of business? How many of you have determined how you might conduct business in the aftermath? How many of you have chosen alternate meeting sites for your family in case of catastrophe near or around your home? Remember, you shouldn’t expect your land line phones, mobile phones, or email to work. This encompasses those pieces of modern technology we have all come to rely upon.

Discussing these issues on a national scale, Mr. Solomon quotes 9/11 Commission Chairman Thomas H. Kean when he says:

· “*The weakest part of our homeland security plan is the citizen... Addressing that is very, very important*”.

The problem is in the fact that too many citizens rely on a government agency to help them in the aftermath of a disaster...and too often, that help doesn’t come fast, nor is it a complete solution by any means. As Mr. Solomon correctly points out, history has shown that individuals will rise to the occasion in an emergency. At the same time, offering them training, information, support & encouragement to prepare IN ADVANCE means they’ll be in the best position to help not only their community — but their family and THEMSELVES. Given this, Mr. Solomon points out “**10 suggestions for achieving a more prepared public**”:

1. **Make public preparedness a priority, or it won’t happen:** “...of 300 people asked, only 9 had family plans, in a roomful of first responders...”
2. **Make preparedness part of 21st century citizenship:** “...being prepared may be the most significant contribution many citizens can make...”
3. **Don’t laugh at Duck & Cover:** “...we need to get back the preparedness ethic from our past...”
4. **Knowledge is power:** “...public education could help mitigate the impact of a catastrophic disaster, according to many emergency officials...”
5. **We should tell the children:** “...going through kids makes it more likely that adults will follow, as preparedness may take a generation to take hold...”
6. **Try the carrot and the stick:** “...the government uses the bottom line (\$) when it wants to influence behavior...”
7. **Bring in business to help make the sale:** “...it’s time to engage the private sector in advancing civilian preparedness...”
8. **Use 21st century technology to prepare for 21st century emergencies:** “...make Americans more aware of capabilities and how to use them...”
9. **Everyone should learn the drill:** “...how will you get information and communicate with YOUR family?...”
10. **Create a National Preparedness Day:** “...briefing citizens, conducting drills, filling emergency kits

are just some of the activities...”

ALERT Protective Services management met in mid May 2008 to discuss these important issues and how we would prepare for, execute during and react in the aftermath of an emergency. Our discussion took into account a number of subjects, including:

- How we would handle our most important resource – our employees before, during & after the crisis.
- When we'd put our plan into action & communicate the specifics to clients & employees.
- How management would communicate during & after the crisis.
- Alternate base(s) of operations in the aftermath.
- Stages & steps to support client needs, based on how they are affected.
- How we would recruit additional employees to react to various client needs.

Our plan covers the company as a whole but is also geared to individual clients based upon their potential needs leading up to, during and after a disaster. I encourage each of our clients & employees to embrace the concept of preparedness and take advantage of the many resources for planning purposes, especially those on the internet. For your convenience, I've listed several here, along with their purpose:

- **Florida Disaster.org**, containing information on the State Emergency Response Team (SERT): <http://www.floridadisaster.org/>
 - This site has MANY resources and has planning tools for many disaster situations.
- **Emergency Management Institute**, offering courses & other education on disaster response: <http://www.training.fema.gov/>
 - This is a site put together by FEMA: (Federal Emergency Management Agency) with many good links.
- **National Hurricane Center** website, containing information on all tropical disturbances & forecasts: <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>

ALERT offers consulting services in *Disaster Planning* and *Risk Management* and can help you further prepare your business and community. More information is available upon request on our consulting services and the source article from Mr. Solomon. Another interactive discussion involving Mr. Solomon is available via the internet on the Washington Post's website, at this address: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2008/05/16/DI2008051603186.html>.



Jason Hamilton is an owner in the *Stoneybrook at Venice* community and is the Vice President & Managing Partner of ALERT Protective Services, a Sarasota-based security, patrol service, security consulting and investigations company. Jason is a *Certified Protection Professional (CPP)* as awarded by *ASIS International*, the world's largest organization for security professionals. With his Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, he has 15 years of experience in security, loss prevention, risk management, emergency response and adult training. Jason is also an active member and gold sponsor in the *Community Association Institute (CAI) West Florida Chapter*, an association for community HOA boards, property managers and their associated business partners.