

# SURVIVAL PAPER

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## Why Disaster Are A Sure Thing

By James C. Jones CHCM/EMT

Of course natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and meteors are sure to happen, but there are reasons why mankind is seldom ready to avoid even the predictable and avoidable disasters and is also seldom prepared to survive the unavoidable disasters. Simply put “ **we are always prepared for the last disaster and seldom prepared for the next one**”. The fact is that safety, security and preparedness run against human nature and economic imperatives. Humans tend to take risks in order to gain immediate gratifications. We take the expressway rather than the side streets to get to work faster. We accept risky jobs for higher pay and unfortunately we often ignore safety procedures in favor of comfort or speed. Families, corporations and governments will ignore or postpone spending time and money on safety, security and preparedness in favor of the immediate economic and political rewards of more popular and enjoyable investments. What often looks like a conspiracy to fail is actually just human nature, shortsightedness and political and economic reality. It's the story of the three little pigs over and over again. Lets look at a well-known case. When the tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef in Alaska spilling 11 million gallons of crude oil, the cover-up was to blame Captain Hazelwood, but here is what happened.

- The land based radar that was responsible for watching the waters that the ship was in had been replaced with less powerful equipment that could not monitor the tanker's location. Budget cuts.
- Exxon had not gotten around to replacing the ship with the newer double-hulled ships. Economy.
- Crew size on the Exxon Valdez had been reduced from 40 people in 1977 to only 20 working 12 to 14 hour shifts. The crew worked overtime the night before and were very fatigued. Bean counters at work.

- Equipment to monitor icebergs was never installed, so the ship was outside its normal shipping lane to avoid possible icebergs. More money saved.
- The Coast Guards staff had been cut by one-third so it could not perform the required safety inspections. Congress!
- Tanker crews relied on the Coast Guard to plot their course all the way to Bligh Reef, but the Coast Guard had discontinued this practice without informing the tanker crew.

Now, they say that the Captain was drinking. I can't blame him. It was not the Captain's fault, or the crew's fault or the Coast Guard's fault. It was the inevitable result of decision and priorities established by the United States Government and the Exxon Corporate culture. These kinds of decisions can be found at the root of 9/11, Chernobyl, Pearl Harbor, the Titanic, Katrina and they will be there when they investigate the next cataclysmic event. On a smaller scale, you will find the same kind of failures behind that house fire or industrial accident you read about every day.

- Would the Captain of the Titanic been applauded for arriving late in New York on the maiden voyage of a new "unsinkable" ship? He probably would have been fired!
- Would the public have paid higher airfares and taken off their shoes for security *before* 9/11? They would have complained until it stopped.
- Did New Orleans want higher levies or bigger casinos *before* Katrina? You know the answer!
- If dad said that the family vacation was canceled so that we could stock up on emergency supplies, would he get away with it? Probably not!
- Will most folks spend real time and money being fully prepared and self-reliant before the inevitable next big or really big disaster? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

Basically, funds, time and support will always flow away from security and preparedness and towards immediately popular and rewarding investments and programs until there is a dramatic failure. Then resources will be focused temporarily on preventing a reoccurrence of similar failures. In addition, special interests almost always misdirect government programs into ineffective or even dangerous programs that are more about making money for someone than protecting anyone. For example: the US Navy at Pearl Harbor was thinking in terms of the big battleship threats of the previous war. As time goes on, even the resources initially dedicated will be whittled away until once again disaster strikes. There were no air marshals on any planes at the time of 9/11 The program had been canceled since there had been no hijacking in a long time.

**Then there is the old military axiom that "you cannot be strong everywhere and weak nowhere". Resources (e.g. manpower, funds, time) directed at one threat must inevitably be taken away from some other threat and create a new weakness.**

The effects of 9/11 were that resources to prevent terrorist attacks were drawn away anticrime and antigang programs. The huge cost of the so-called “War on Terror” has cost the private economy billions and run up the national debt, thus hastening an economic disaster. One need only remember how the Soviet Union’s economy collapsed from the constant costs military preparedness to see where things are going. So it can be said that **(1) peace and security are almost guaranteed to create the proper environment for violence and disaster and (2) we are most ready for the least likely (repeat) disaster scenarios.** For example: After 9/11 FEMA said they were caught off guard because they focused on being ready for a natural disaster. Then after Katrina they claimed that they were mainly ready for a terrorist attack. **Simply put, “we never learn from history and we are doomed to repeat it”.**

### **It’s Going To Get Worse!**

The aforementioned patterns are dangerous enough in a health economy and a relatively stable world. When things get tough (as they are going to get) safety, security and preparedness are the first things to be cut. Metaphorically speaking: a nation or a corporation or a family that is suffering economically is like a human body that is bleeding. When the body loses blood it contracts the blood vessels, reduces blood to the extremities and pumps it faster. This is called compensated shock that keeps things looking normal for a while until collapse and death. In the case of state\*, corporate and family economies the extremities are almost always safety, security and preparedness. So everyone is working harder, with greater debts and less security to sustain a “normal” life, but inevitably there will be a catastrophic and domino effect collapse. **It can be said that the United States in particular and much of the world in general exist in a state of “compensated risk” where most things seem normal and the illusion of prosperity and security exist on a weakening foundation.** The realities are:

- There are simply never enough resources in even a healthy economy to provide more than minimal security and preparations for limited emergencies.
- In a constantly changing matrix of threats, limited resources will most often be for the wrong disaster at the wrong place.
- Population densities, international travel, weapons proliferation and new technology have greatly increased the size and effect of disasters.
- In the “gravest extremes” governments are about government survival and corporations are about corporate survival. So people have to be about people survival.
- Regardless of the nature and scope of a disaster (e.g. storms, epidemics, crime, economic collapse, fire, etc.), it is individual and family preparedness and self-reliance that will be the most reliable and effective means of preserving lives and freedoms.

The effect of dwindling resources on governmental and corporate safety and security will assure the occurrences of bigger and more frequent accidental and intentional man made disasters and reduce preparedness for all kinds of disasters. Families that have waited too long or misplaced their faith in government agencies will unnecessarily suffer loss of life, liberty and property. Once the symptoms of social/economic shock appear, it will be too late to invest time and money in preparedness and self-reliance because there won't be any time or money available. Those who have taken survival preparedness and self-reliance as a personal responsibility and commitment will have a far better (not guaranteed) chance of coming through the challenges ahead and being able to lead their communities in retaining safety and freedom. **Just because we are doomed to repeat the history of unpreparedness on larger and larger scales does not mean we, individually have to be doomed.** That's still up to us. Self-reliance and preparedness beats dependency and complacency every time. It may not me normal thinking, but it *is* superior thinking.

\* By "state" here, I refer to any level of government entities.

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