

Responding to Earthquakes - What We Have Learned

Researchers have been studying better ways of responding to disasters for two decades. Here are a few lessons taken from a series of unfortunate events.

Source: *Rachel Swaby / Wired Magazine*

1988 December 7 – Armenian Earthquake	Lesson: Employ local. Armenia was part of the Soviet Union, but Moscow prohibited residents from working on rebuilding, causing political tension. Four years later, only 30 percent of necessary structures were finished.
1995 January 17 – Kobe Earthquake	Lesson: Communicate better, more often, and more completely. A lack of timely and accurate information made it difficult for families to get services they needed. For example, shelter locations were not well publicized, which delayed relief.
1999 August 17 – Turkish Earthquake	Lesson: Rebuild stronger. After quakes destroyed unsafe structures, rebuilding started quickly and without regulatory oversight or regard for the individual needs of each city — resulting in yet more vulnerable construction.
2003 December 26 – Iranian Earthquake	Lesson: Restore law and order quickly. Refugees from the countryside flooded the city in search of aid, but there was no system to support them. Several days of looting hindered distribution of supplies and threatened the overall recovery effort.
2004 December 26 – Asian Tsunami	Lesson: Basic provisions need to be regionally appropriate. Workers distributed non-halal food and built shelters inside Buddhist temples, so Muslims couldn't eat the food or use the shelters. Also, some donated goods weren't suitable for the climate.
2005 August 29 – Hurricane Katrina	Lesson: Aid has to be delivered quickly but also sensitively, especially when it comes to services like finding loved ones or burying the dead. A fifth of aid recipients in Louisiana said assistance came too late and was delivered in an uncaring manner.
2005 October 8 – Pakistani Earthquake	Lesson: Medical care needs to be culturally appropriate. Few female doctors were deployed, and local religious beliefs restrict physical contact between men and women. This severely limited the care available.
2006 May 27 - Java Earthquake	Lesson: Prepare. Areas where households had received some disaster training were able to deliver aid to others before official help arrived. People in those regions surveyed after the quake indicated that they appreciated such assistance.