

Comprehensive Emergency Preparedness for the Hotel Industry

The Myths of Human Response in Disaster

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A key element of emergency management is attempting to plan (or at least minimize) an “unplanned event.” To create a comprehensive emergency response plan, some understanding of human reaction during a crisis event is helpful. Too often we rely on skewed media coverage to presents “facts” about human reaction. As a result several myths of human response in a disaster have emerged.

➤ **Myth – People in Danger, Panic**

- Panic is very rare in disasters
- The circumstances under which panic is most likely to occur are when:
 - People do not have adequate information
 - There is an immediate perceived threat
 - The sense of being trapped or having “escape” means blocked
 - Lack of leadership and direction

➤ **In the Face of Personal Danger, People Only Think of Themselves**

- The majority of people in disasters behave with responsibility and concern for their neighbors.

➤ **Too Much Information is Likely to Scare People into Behaving Erratically**

- The majority of people will react reasonably to information – seeking to verify its accuracy with familiar people, and “requesting” guidance and leadership.
- Individuals relate much better to specific details (that can be amended at a later date) than vague or endless possibilities – which can cause panic.

➤ **People Do Not React with Severe Emotional Disturbance when there is No Effect from the Disaster on Them.**

- There is an exceptionally wide scope of what does constitute a “normal reaction” to a very abnormal situation.
- Recognizing the validity of these reactions reduces stress during the emergent situation and aids with recovery.