

GP REDLine Survey Results: Emergency Preparedness



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Introduction

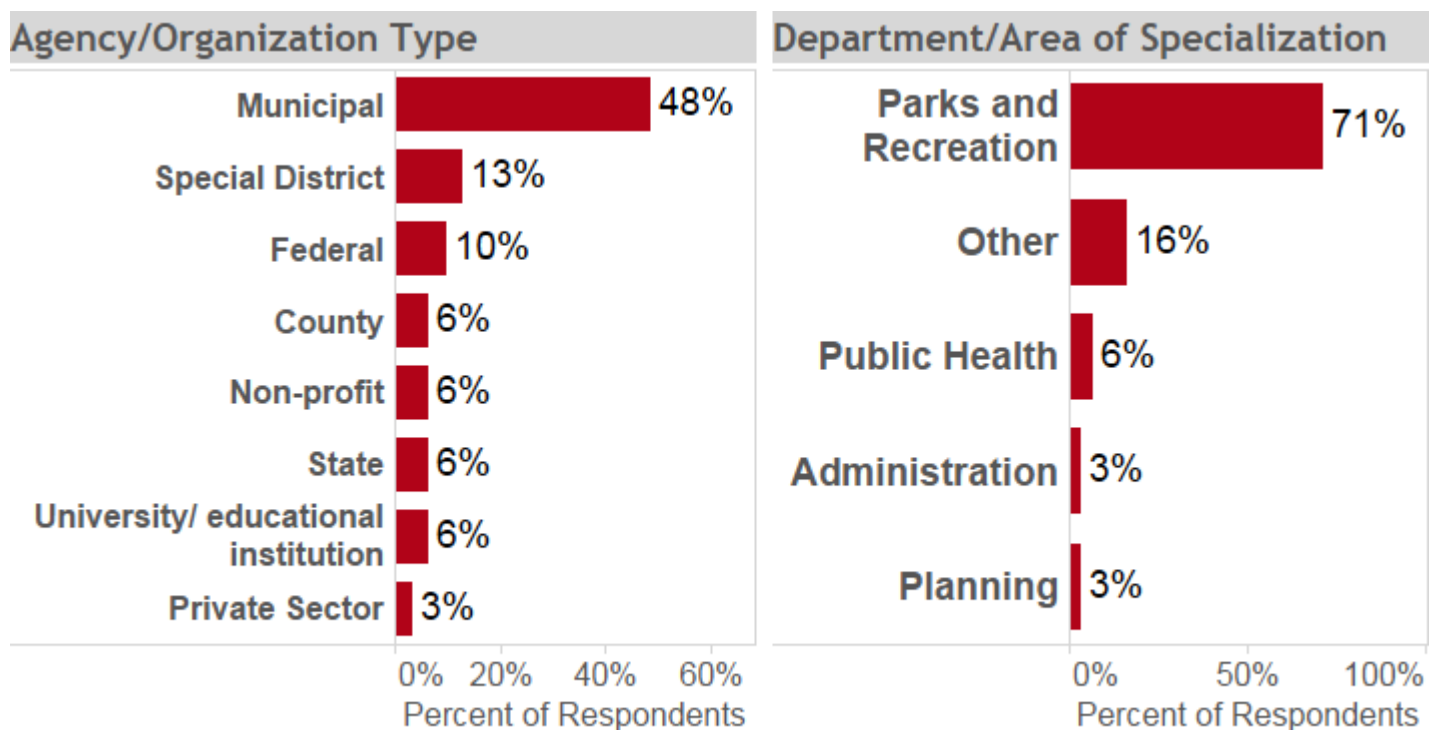
This report summarizes the results from a brief survey conducted by GP RED during summer 2015 as a part of the RED LINE survey initiative. This research was related to the topic of emergency preparedness and explores the general level of preparedness for an emergency or disaster, experiences with emergencies, and tools and protocols currently in place to provide community relief and recovery during disasters. Respondents represented a relatively diverse array of different organization types and departments, ensuring that the answers provided reflect a variety of sectors. The survey was distributed via email to the GP RED master list. A total of 34 responses were received from this survey request.

Organization and Department

Roughly half (48 percent) of respondents are municipal employees, by far the top organization type represented. An additional 13 percent are employed in a special district organization, 10 percent are employed in a federal organization, and 6 percent are employed in county, non-profit, state, and university/educational institution organizations each. Three percent work in the private sector.

Respondents were asked to identify their department or area of specialization within their agency. Most work in a parks and recreation department (71 percent), followed by public health (6 percent), administration, and planning (each 3 percent).

Figure 1. Organization and Department



Source: GP REDLine 2015 Emergency Preparedness Survey, RRC Associates.

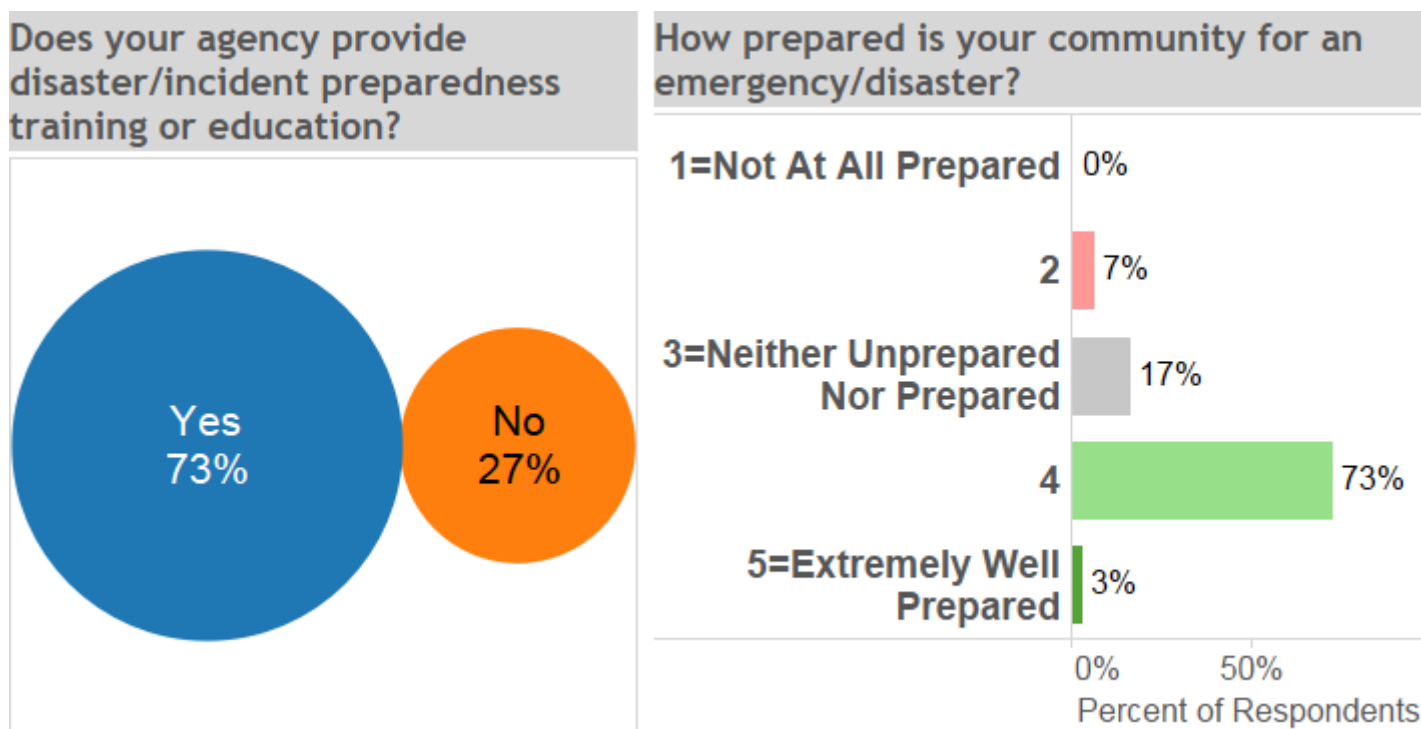
Emergency Preparedness

Almost three in four respondents (73 percent) reported that their organization provides some level of training or education in disaster and emergency preparedness.

Respondents who indicated that their organization provides training cited a variety of training guidelines including Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Incident Management System (NIMS), and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) guidelines. They also mentioned specific areas for emergency preparation like natural disasters/weather, medical emergencies, utility emergencies, bombs and lockdowns, public evacuations and shelter locations, and media communications.

Respondents were asked to rate how prepared they feel their community is for an emergency or a major disaster on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all prepared” and 5 means “extremely well prepared”. Respondents generally feel that their communities are well prepared overall, with 77 providing a “4” or “5” rating (indicating that they feel the community is prepared). No respondents rated their preparation as a “1”. The average community preparedness rating was a 3.7.

Figure 2. Emergency Preparedness

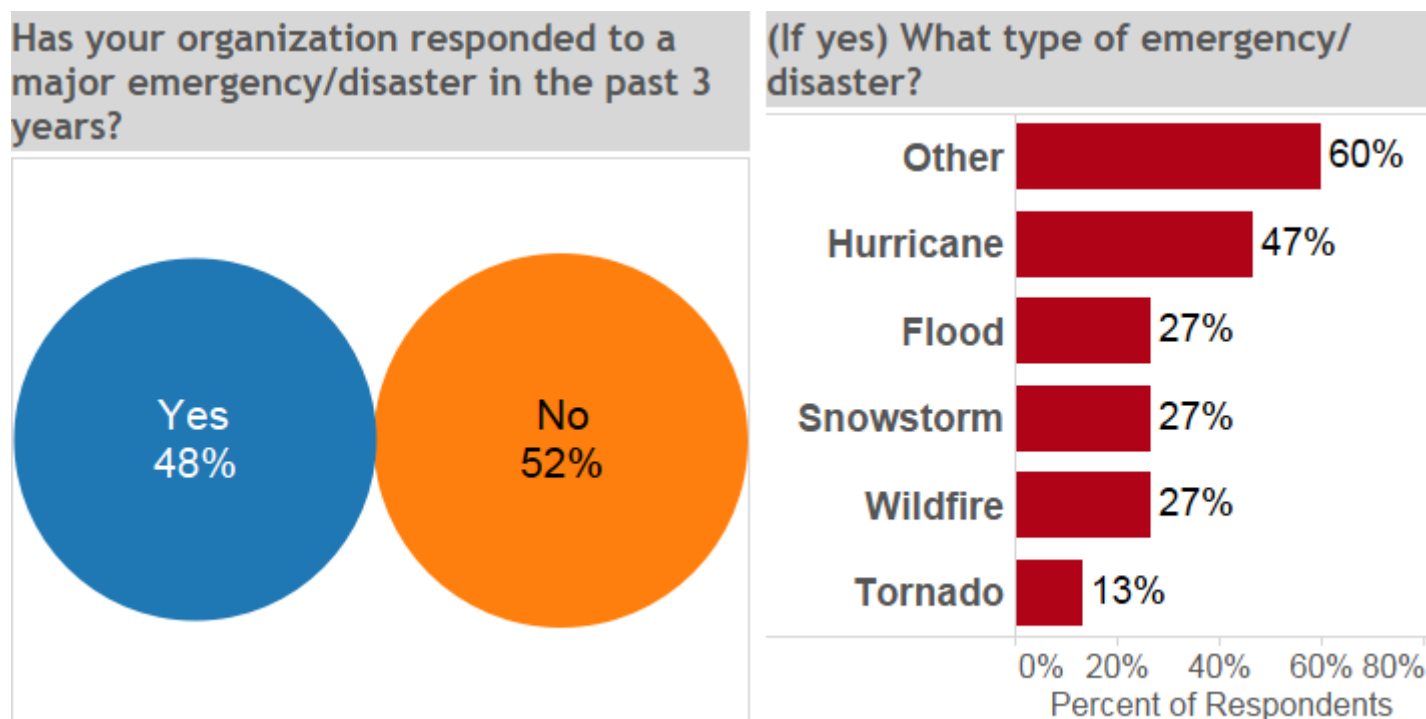


Source: GP REDLine 2015 Emergency Preparedness Survey, RRC Associates.

Emergency Response

Almost half of respondents (48 percent) indicated that their organization has responded to a major emergency or disaster during the past three years. Among those experiencing an emergency or a disaster, a majority indicated some “other” type of disaster not listed (60 percent). Emergencies encountered included hurricanes (47 percent of respondents who responded to an emergency), floods, snowstorms, wildfires (each 27 percent), and tornados (13 percent).

Figure 3. Emergency Response



Source: GP REDLine 2015 Emergency Preparedness Survey, RRC Associates.

Two open-ended questions asked respondents to further describe their organization’s participation in the emergency or disaster response. Selected verbatim open-ended comments from each of these questions are provided below.

What role did your agency play in facilitating a response?

- “Communication on safety and sheltering in place”
- “Fundraising”
- “Planning, mapping, dispatch, law enforcement, equipment, personnel”
- “Superstorm Sandy hit our area hard. As previously mentioned, our arena was a shelter for displaced residents. A few of our parks were also staging areas for visiting utility crews.”

Following the disaster, did your organization change emergency protocol practices? How?

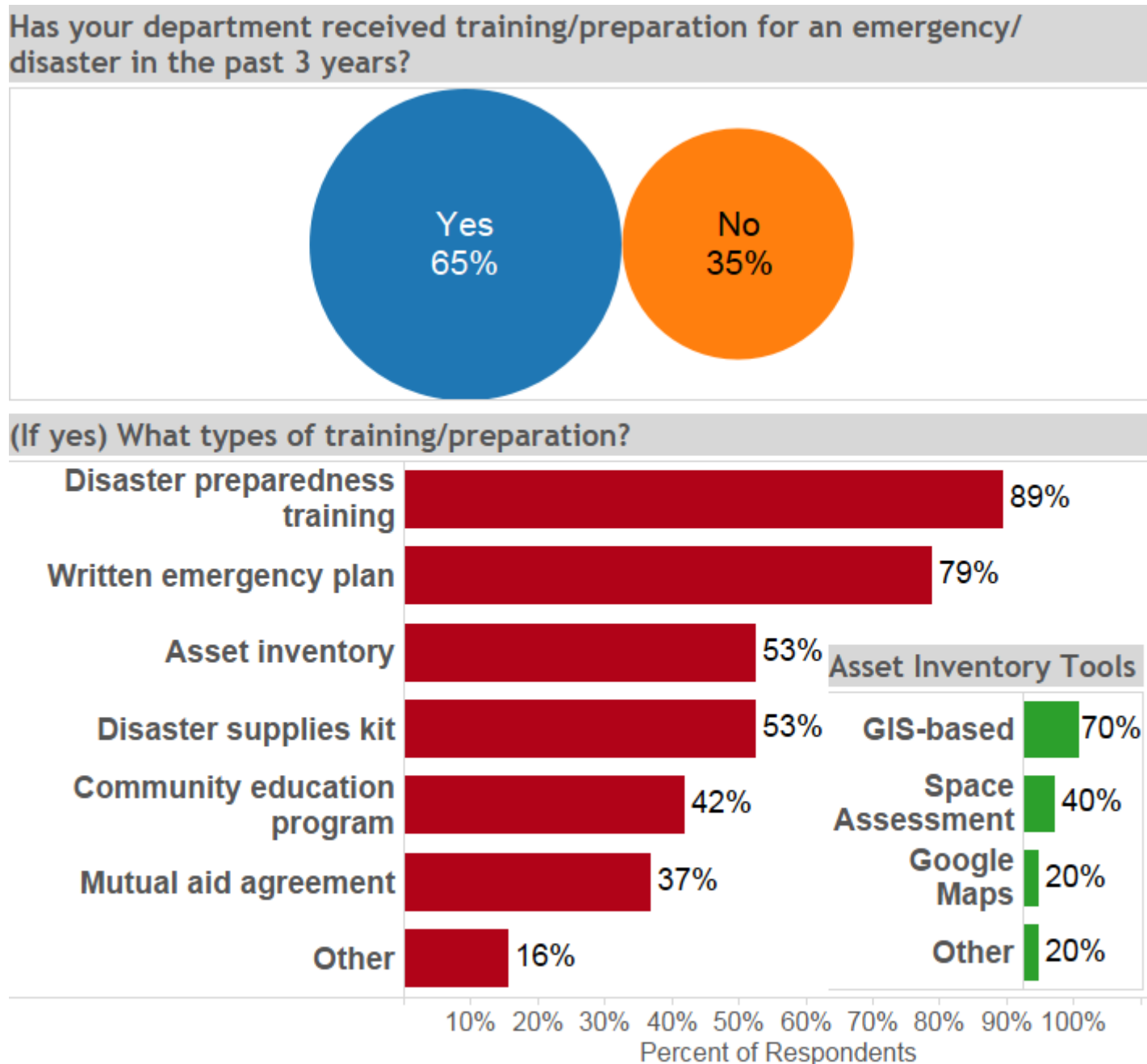
- “No. But our awareness of the issues was heightened.”
- “No, kept same effective routine”
- “Provided more detailed shelter management to all supervisors.”
- “Yes. We improved our preparedness documents and procedures. We better defined evacuation routes and sheltering locations.”

Recent Preparation

Sixty-five percent of respondents noted that their department has received training and preparation for an emergency or disaster in the past three years.

Among respondents who have received training, the top types undertaken include disaster preparedness training (89 percent) and a written emergency plan (79 percent). Following distantly are asset inventory, a disaster supplies kit (each 53 percent), a community education program (42 percent), and a mutual aid agreement (37 percent). Those indicating that their department has received asset inventory training were further questioned on which asset inventory tools are in place. The top tools are GIS-based tools (70 percent), space assessments (40 percent), and Google Maps (20 percent).

Figure 4. Recent Preparation



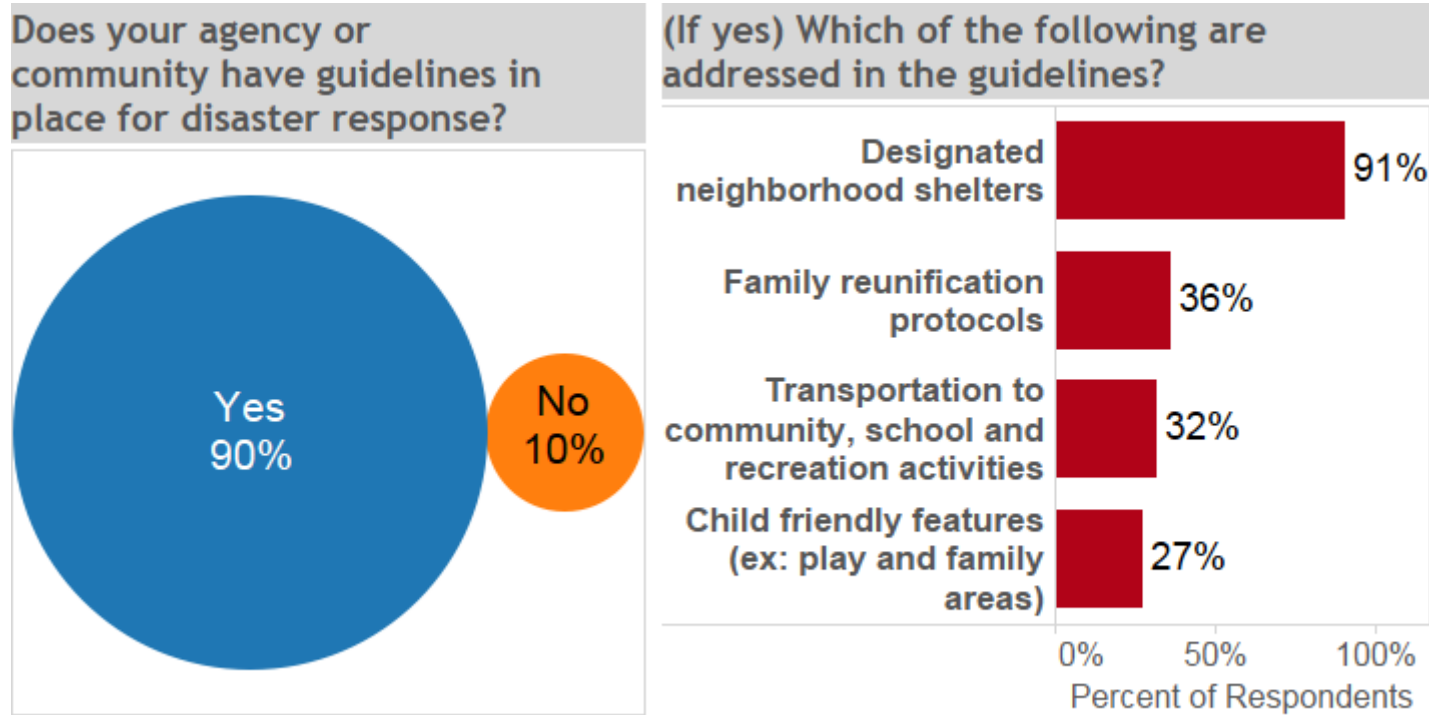
Source: GP REDLine 2015 Emergency Preparedness Survey, RRC Associates.

Respondents were asked to comment on what types of education, skills, or resources could improve the emergency or disaster response capabilities of their organization, both for the organization as a whole as well as for themselves as an individual. For the organization overall, respondents most frequently identified additional training and drills as the area that most needs improvement. Similarly, respondents felt that the most beneficial improvements on an individual basis would come from refresher courses, more training, and running more drills.

Response Guidelines

Almost all respondents (90 percent) said their agency or community has guidelines in place for responding to disasters. Of those with guidelines, the most common topic addressed by far is designated neighborhood shelters (91 percent). Other topics include family reunification protocols (36 percent), transportation to community/school/recreation activities (32 percent), and child friendly features (27 percent).

Figure 5. Response Guidelines



Source: GP REDLine 2015 Emergency Preparedness Survey, RRC Associates.

Community Recovery

A final section of the survey asked respondents to comment on a few aspects of community recovery, including their organization's role, current protocols, and future improvements to their organization's capabilities. Brief summaries of responses received for each question are presented below.

Following an emergency, what role is your organization or agency expected to play in facilitating community recovery?

Clean up and providing spaces for shelter are the two most frequently mentioned aspects of community recovery services, followed by communications and a variety of mutual aid assistance activities.

What emergency recovery protocols do you have in place?

Asset inventory is the most mentioned type of services that are based on recovery protocols. Employee assistance to reduce business disruption, mental health counseling and mutual aid were also mentioned by multiple entities. Several respondents also said that they have “none” in place, or that they “don’t know.”

What would help improve your emergency recovery capabilities? What types of education, skills, and resources are needed?

Various aspects of training were most frequently mentioned, with “coordination” training and skill building specifically called out. Additionally, written protocols (“who does what, when, where and how”) and sample documents were mentioned as examples of the types of needed improvements to enhance emergency recovery activities.

Conclusions

The REDLine Survey on Emergency Preparedness indicates that practitioners in parks and recreation, public health, planning and a variety of other community service roles have been called upon to deal with a wide variety of emergencies. About half the survey respondents indicated that their organization had dealt with a major emergency/disaster in the past three years. The data show that while communities are providing for disaster training and education, there is room for continued improvement. Only 3 percent of respondents indicated that their community is “extremely well prepared.” The survey results suggest that various protocols for dealing with situations, and continued training are valued and needed. Further, the sharing of “best practices” and successful techniques for addressing disaster conditions will continue to be an important opportunity for community practitioners.