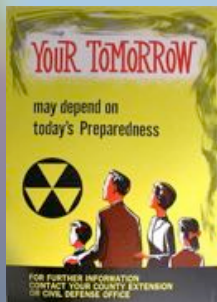


# Gun Thy Neighbor: Individualism and Disaster Preparedness

By Kay Real, ENVS 400

Does modern day disaster preparedness reflect the same individualistic tendencies that were present during Cold War preparedness?

*While the narratives of disaster preparedness literature today have incorporated aspects of community involvement, they still reflect individualistic values that were present during the cold war, suggesting that there is a disconnect between the perceptions and realities of societal behavior during times of disaster. This disconnect may hinder effective preparedness and response.*



## Background:

### A Culture of Individualism

The United States has a culture of individualism, or a tendency for one to withdraw from society at large and side with his family and friends. This culture intensified during the 1800's as a result of industrialization and increasing isolation of the single-family home. Self-sufficiency and owning one's own home became the paragon of The American Dream

**A Cold War Lens:** The family and the single-family home began to function as means of security. The home acted as a haven from the world charged with fears of nuclear fallout. Federal Civil Defense urged individuals and families to prepare themselves for fallout.

**The Fallout Shelter:** An iconic piece of atomic architecture. The most contained version of the single family home and a paragon of individualized disaster preparedness.

**Shelter Morality:** A commonly held fear of absence of community values in times of disaster. Will I help my neighbor if it might jeopardize my own survival? This fear was amplified by "gun thy neighbor" attitudes reflected in literature and the media.

### Disaster Preparedness Today: Cascadia

The Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake is predicted to strike the west coast of the US any minute, causing widespread destruction and a tsunami that will reverberate through the Pacific. Many online resources have been devoted to advising the public to prepare for the Cascadia earthquake, or earthquakes and disasters in general

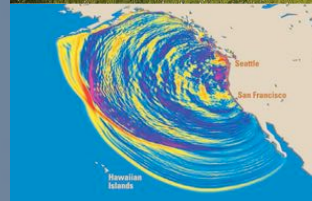
## Methodology:

Content analysis of 10 disaster preparedness websites to determine narratives, whether individually focused or community-oriented.

A systematic analysis of the content of each website

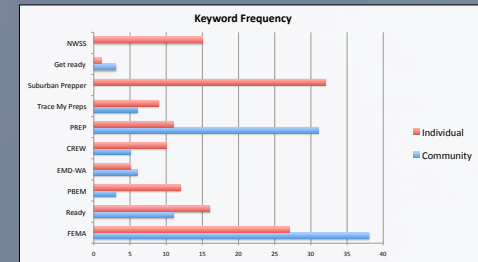
Keyword analysis: A count of words that displayed a specific narrative, either individualistic, or social.

Online literature: Federal agencies, local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, blogs, and commercial websites



## Results:

- 7 out of 10 websites revealed an individualistic narrative, 2 were community oriented, and 1 was indeterminable
- Of the seven that were individually focused, 3 advocated collaboration with the community
- Overall, the individualistic tendencies that were present during the Cold War and American culture in general, have been perpetuated through time
- However, community involvement is touched upon as an important addition to individual preparedness



Graph 1: results of keyword analysis

## At Odds Disaster Research Findings

In the Cold War, people feared society would return to a state of chaos after a disaster. Research in the disaster field shows that this is not true, and community is an important part of disaster recovery. These empirical findings are largely not reflected by media, pop-culture, or disaster preparedness literature.

## Conclusion

- Individualistic preparedness responses to disaster threats have been persisted since the Cold War, despite current findings that strong community ties are often necessary for survival, and disaster can work to bring people together.
- This is likely caused by the reinforcement of the image of social breakdown in the media and the fear from people in power that panic will ensue. As a result, people are told to prepare on the individual level as to avoid community conflict.
- This has a variety of problems including misinformed preparations and delayed disaster response.
- However, this may be starting to change.
- A solution to reconcile individual tendencies of disaster preparedness literature, I propose the Link Approach, which promotes resilience through individual, family, and community connections.

Key Resources:  
 One nation underground: the fallout shelter in American culture, Kenneth D Rose  
 Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States, Kenneth T. Jackson  
 Homeward bound : American families in the Cold War era, Elaine Tyler May  
 Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina, Tierney et al.