



**UNLV Executive Master of Science in Crisis  
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Several years after Katrina and almost a decade after 9-11, can we honestly say that either New Orleans or New York have ‘returned to normal’?

Nonetheless people tend to hold on to that elusive yet persuasive belief because “normal” is what they really want. However, professionals and practitioners in crisis and emergency management know better, they understand that ‘normal is gone forever, never to return. Instead, we accept the fact that something akin to normal will eventually be established, that major elements of our pre-disaster environment will be restored. We also understand that this entails much more than conventional disaster recovery operations and we grasp that it will require much more than extraordinary diligence in mitigation activities. Something which allows us to boldly declare that, ‘we’re knocked out but coming back stronger than ever’ seems to be in the back of everyone’s mind. So how do we get there? This is where resilience comes in—inhabiting a place in our imagination and our emergency management lexicon which proclaims a status that

- absorbs the worst onslaught of damages
- withstands the most extremely devastating forces
- quickly rebounds from complete and utter destruction
- defies easy or simplistic annihilation
- evidences a bruised but completely restored community

**Resilience as a Goal in Crisis and  
Emergency Management  
by  
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We cannot get there through limited, non-strategic thinking and we cannot begin to assemble the realistic and challenging elements which make this vision a concrete possibility without jumping outside our conventional comfort zone and imagining the necessary degree of effort, resources and imagination to achieve that exalted state.

This is far beyond recovery as we crudely understand it which entails things like debris removal, rendering safe operations, resumption of power and water services, the establishment of temporary shelters and expedient public health facilities. This is big-time thinking on a grand scale—Manhattan Project and Apollo Moon landing stuff. We are not there yet and we risk not getting there because of our inability to wrap our minds around the scope and scale of what needs to be done. Resilience has many dimensions. First, there is the personal and psychological dimension which tells us that we have survived and will prosper. Then there is the familial and social group dimension which tells us that comfortable social systems are valid once again.

Then there is the organizational and systems infrastructure aspect which reflects robust restoration of essential infrastructural systems. Then there is the commercial and economic dimension which says normal business and commercial activity is humming along. Finally, there is recognition that public safety and government are operating on the sound and reliable footing necessary to protect and safeguard the community.

These dimensions cannot be simply turned back on after a disaster like flicking a light switch because doing so requires the ability to plan, develop, test and deploy a set of systems, resources, assumptions and other key variables in order to produce evidence that a damaged community can be restored and become operational within 7 days after a major disaster.

Impossible? Delusional? No, it is only as difficult and daunting as trying to build an atom bomb when you've never done it before and then finish the job in 31 months of total secrecy. It's like putting a 3-man team on the moon and safely returning them after 7 years of research and testing with no prior experience.

We have done things like this before---and we are capable of doing them again.

A few words should also be said about the value of building a truly resilient society and support system in order to secure national safety. Enemies wishing to vanquish us and devastate our lives and nation in ways intended to cripple our society and trigger chaos will be surprised and sorely disappointed when they discover we can rebound stronger than ever. When they discover that we cannot be eliminated or knocked down, we become as close to being indestructible as anything mankind has ever produced or achieved. The same insights also apply to devastating natural disasters and while the time to restoration may be a bit longer, resilience can also be extended to cover both man-made and natural catastrophes.

Engineers, scientists, multidisciplinary experts, graduate students and ordinary citizens can become a part of this long term enterprise. When a neighborhood or a society is committed to achieving a state of resilience, it works on the essential fabric of community and finds ways to overcome risks, vulnerabilities and shortfalls in favor of a robust and inspiring survival which is much more than a community simply emerging from the rubble. Resilience can easily transform communities committed to it as a badge of honor because it makes a statement that all have come together and are committed to a restored community impervious to destruction which will come back from the ashes like a proverbial *Phoenix* so as to fully function again. This is a massive challenge to today's generation of future leaders because it at times seems impossible to accomplish. May we always remember that there is a tradition of doing the impossible on our side.

May we harness the vision and work towards achieving the more resilient society we and future generations deserve.

**More information on the ECEM program can be found online at:**

**<http://urbanaffairs.unlv.edu/pubadmin/>**

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