

Issues and Education in Disaster Health*Steven J. Rottman, MD, FACEP*

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The public health consequences of disasters may be both direct and indirect. The physical force of the event can cause injury and death to the affected population, and the accompanying disruption of health and lifeline infrastructures can jeopardize disaster health responses. Prior to a disaster occurrence, emergency health planners should assess the underlying health care and environmental services of their community. The assessment should balance everyday resources with demands, and form the basis for projections of how a disaster will negatively impact those systems and the population.

Following a disaster, rapid assessment surveys should be conducted to evaluate those segments of the community that are most significantly affected by structural damage and/or loss of environmental health systems. The results of these assessments can be used to guide emergency responses for ongoing health care, sanitation and security needs of displaced populations.

A coordinated, multi-agency disaster health response demands educational programs that integrate emergency medicine, public health, social welfare, and emergency management. Many of these elements of disaster health fall naturally into the multidisciplinary educational programs of public health.

The development of a prototype, university-based educational curriculum in disaster public health with associated community practitioner outreach programs will be described.

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