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Special Report #2

Local Disaster Preparedness

A survey in collaboration with



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Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey, conducted in collaboration with Citizens for NYC, about local disaster preparedness. The survey focused on threat perceptions and feelings of safety, household preparedness for a disaster, and trust in local institutions to respond effectively to a disaster.

Methodological note: The survey was conducted May 20-30, 2004, and included online responses from 659 panelists, 115 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City.

Findings

The findings below are reported separately for the nation as a whole and for New York City and are weighted to better reflect the general population (see methodological note above). This section begins with general perceptions of safety and concerns about a disaster. It then focuses on steps people may or may not have taken to prepare for a disaster. It concludes with a focus on New York City residents' awareness of Ready New York, the city government disaster preparedness guide.

Sense of safety and concerns about a disaster

As **Figure 1** shows, New York City respondents to the survey are much more likely to feel "very unsafe" from the threat of a disaster happening in their community. **Figure 2** shows that New York City respondents were more concerned about terrorist attacks and blackouts, while respondents nationwide were more concerned about the threat of a natural disaster

Being prepared for an emergency

The survey asked respondents about four key steps recommend by New York City's Office of Emergency management for household to prepare for an emergency: have a plan, have a reference card, have a go bag, and have an emergency supply kit at home. As **Figure 3** shows, New York City respondents appear less prepared than their counterparts nationwide on three of the four steps (they are about equally likely to have an emergency supply kit at home). This finding is surprising to the extent that these steps are the focus of New York City's own campaign to help its citizens prepare for an emergency.

Figure 4 suggests one possible explanation: only 13 percent of the New Yorkers surveyed report having read or having a copy of the “Ready New York” guide that describes the four preparedness steps (a plan, a reference card, a go bag, and a supply kit).

Local contacts and communication

When asked how often they talked about preparing for an emergency and with whom, respondents reported family first, followed by friends and neighbors (see **Figure 5**). Next in frequency are block or volunteer groups and also religious groups. Least frequent was local government, although it is worth noting that New Yorkers appear to have talked with a local government representative more frequently than those living elsewhere.

Respondents also were asked directly about having been contacted by a local agency or group. As **Figure 6** shows, only about 10 percent nationally – and an even small percentage in New York City – reported having been contacted directly with information about how to prepare for an emergency. Interestingly, a higher percentage reported being contacted about opportunities to volunteer to help in an emergency. Finally, about a fifth of respondents nationally and fully a quarter of New Yorkers say they have talked with a neighbor with special needs about what help they might need in an emergency.

Confidence in various institutions

Figure 7 shows the level of confidence respondents have in the ability of various institutions to respond to an emergency in their area. Local government and neighborhood or volunteer groups receive the strongest votes of confidence, followed by state government and then federal government. It would seem, therefore, that respondents have the most confidence in the institutions closest to home. New Yorkers appear to have somewhat lower levels of confidence across the board, except perhaps for their confidence in local government.

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About eTownPanel. eTownPanel is a university-based, nonprofit project that aims to expand the potential of the Internet as a tool for measuring the quality of life in communities across the US and for providing citizen-driven feedback on the performance of local governments. eTownPanel also serves as a cost-effective research tool for local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that seek to understand what citizens think about important local issues. The project currently focuses on New York City but will soon include additional cities and towns from across the US.

For more information visit www.ETownPanel.com or email info@ETownPanel.com

FIGURE 1. How safe do you feel from the threat of a disaster -- such as a terrorist attack or natural disaster -- happening in the city or town where you live?

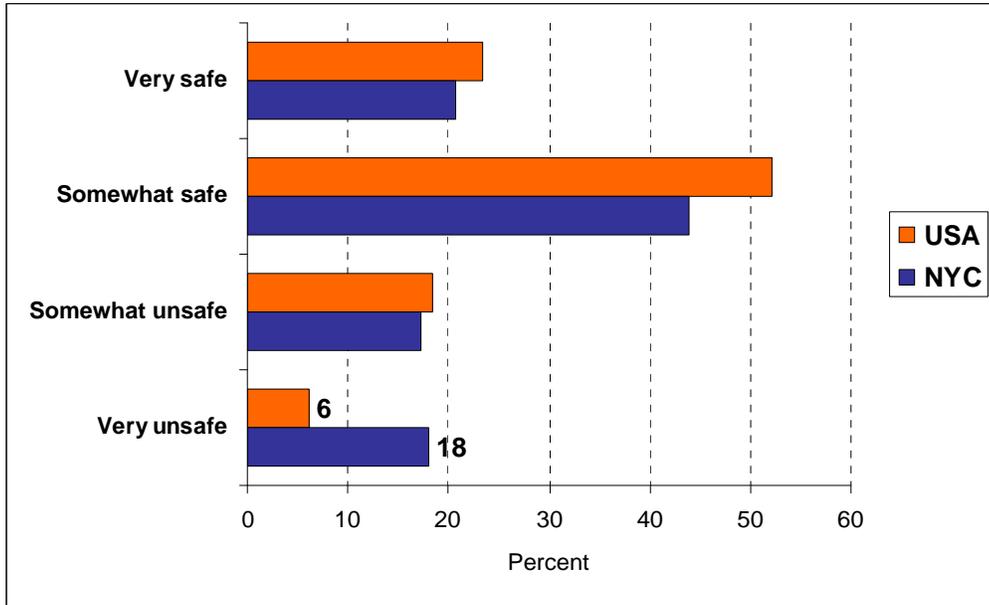


FIGURE 2. How concerned are you about the possibility of the following disasters occurring in your city or town?

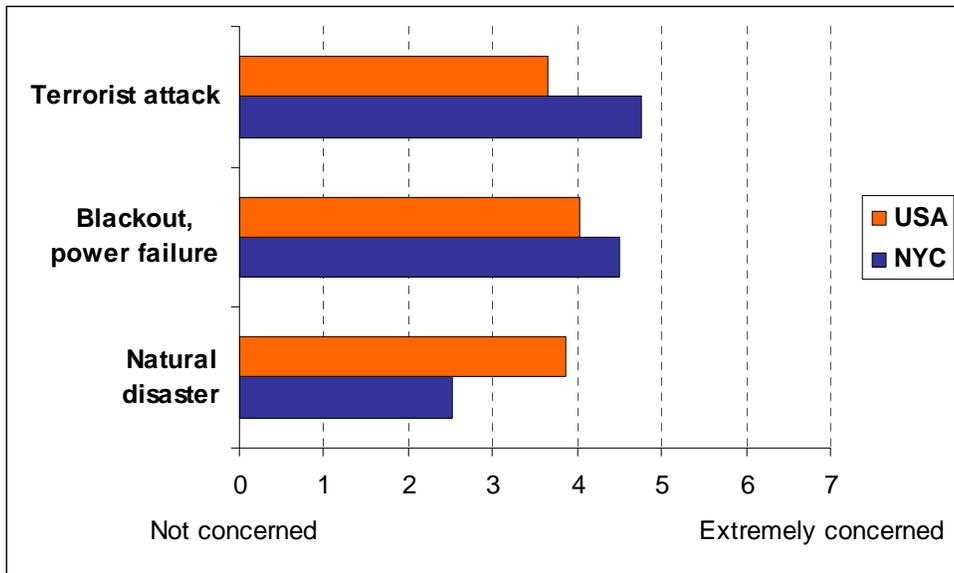


FIGURE 3. Percent of respondent who have taken key preparedness steps recommended by New York City's Office of Emergency Management

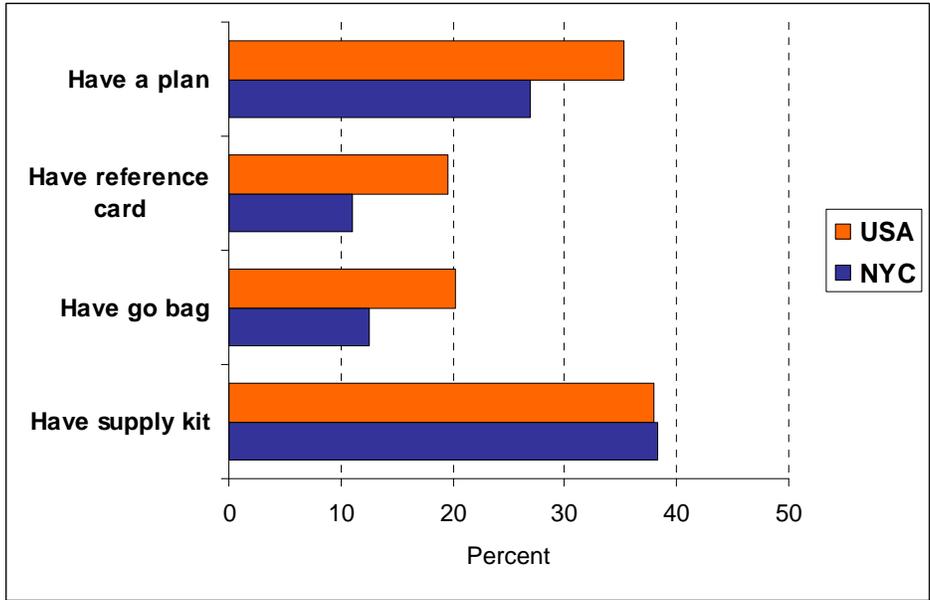


FIGURE 4. New York City respondents who have read or have a copy of "Ready New York," the City's emergency preparedness guide

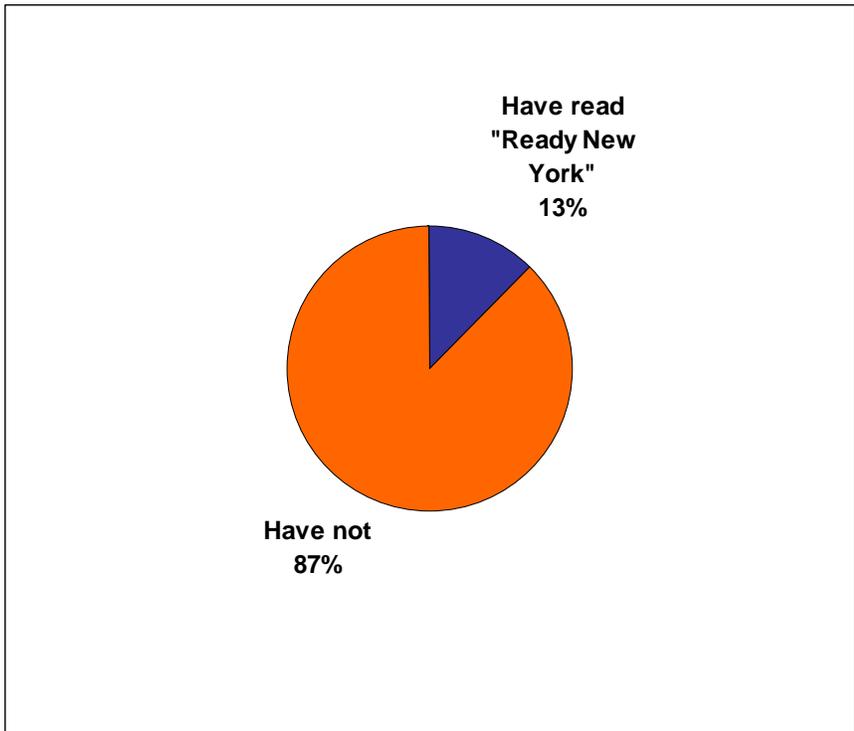


FIGURE 5. About how often have you talked with the following people or organizations about preparing for an emergency? (in rank order)

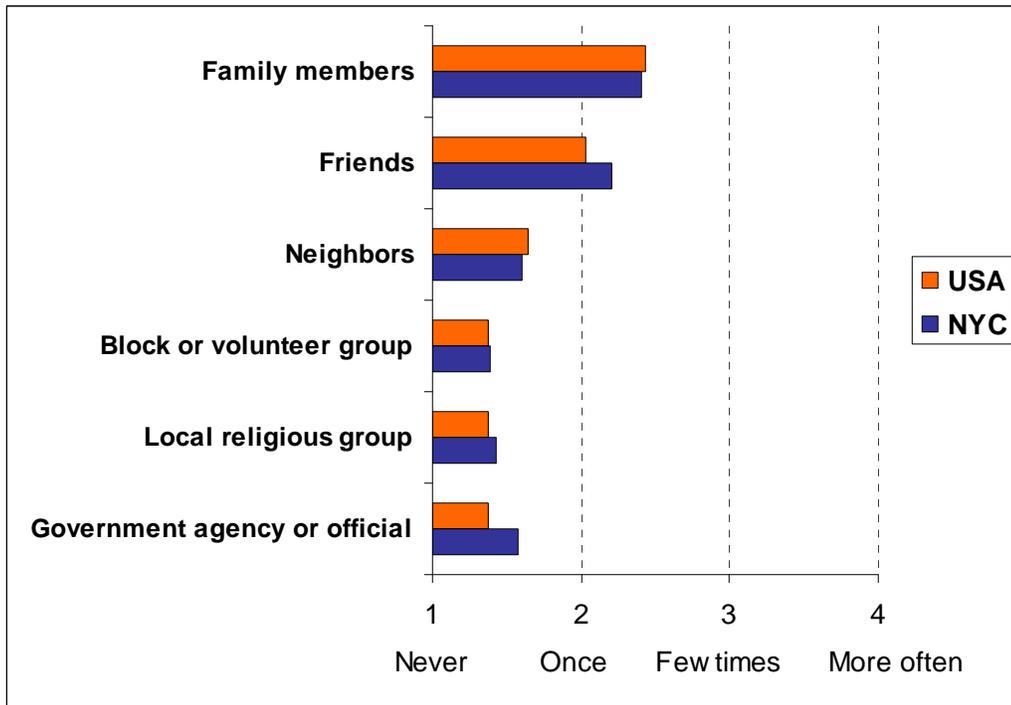


FIGURE 6. Percent who were contacted by a local agency or group regarding information and volunteering. Also percent who talked with a needy neighbor.

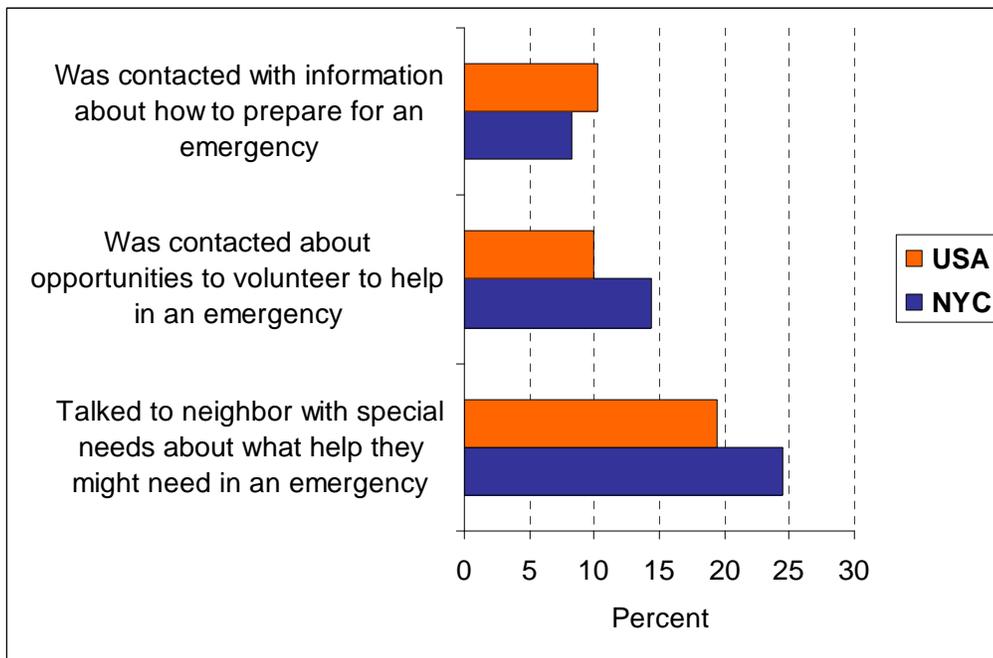


FIGURE 7. Confidence in various institutions to respond to a local emergency (in rank order)

