

## TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN SAFETY & HELPING OTHERS TO DO THE SAME

Amanda Ripley in Time magazine warns against the "nanny state" attitude, where we are all supposed to rely on the authorities, instead of on ourselves. With reference to terrorism, for example, she points out "By definition, terrorism succeeds by making us feel powerless. It is more often a psychological threat than an existential one". She quotes President Obama: "...an alert and courageous citizenry are far more resilient than an isolated extremist."

Let's generalise the point. We may never confront a terrorist, but we may well be caught in an age-changeover catastrophe. However bad it may be, let's remember that in an emergency WE ARE NOT POWERLESS.

So what can we do?

1. **Be mentally prepared.** If you rehearse difficult scenarios before you ever have to face them, your brain will respond better when such events do happen. You will be less likely to "freeze up" or "vague out" - which is a typical response in airline crashes and ship sinkings.

Vivian Reyes, a doctor who helped out in the Haiti earthquake disaster, said: "Preparation makes a difference not only in how effective the response is, but ultimately in how many lives are saved. As a lesson learned, each and every one of us should think of how we will help our neighbors during a disaster. The more times you run through scenarios in your mind or in a drill, the better you will react in a real event. Now when you hear 'Be prepared', don't just consider the supplies you might need, but also think of what role you will play in the hours or days after a disaster.

"If we stand ready for disaster, we will fear it less, and we will come together and manage it."

2. **Work together.** Where there is a group of people who have the ability to respond (ie. they are not in denial about what's happening, or panicking or paralysed by fear) they can do wonders. The passengers on flight 93 on 11 September, 2001 realised that their hijacked plane would be used as a missile if they did nothing. They pushed through the denial phase - even though they were going to die - and deliberated as a group before taking concerted action. Their brave actions stopped the aircraft from destroying the White House or the US Capitol.

In 1996, a flood wiped out Parsons, West Virginia, for the second time in 11 years. Three local ladies in their eighties got together and raised \$40,000 by various means, including baking cookies, to convince the authorities to put forward enough money to build a floodwall to protect the town from further flood threats. It worked.

3. **Take a leadership role.** If you have the time and if you realise others are not responding appropriately (eg. freezing up and not trying to get away from danger) then taking a leadership role can help. Some airline staff are trained to shriek at passengers when aircraft evacuation is necessary. This can break the paralysis response and get people moving. (Research has found that making a loud noise is the easiest way to get a paralysed animal to snap out of fear paralysis.)

If you have prepared yourself - even only somewhat - for a disaster, you are in a better position to lead others who have not.