

Retired Lieutenant General Russel Honoré serves as Emergency Preparedness contributor to CNN Worldwide. He focuses exclusively on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities, with multi-sector integration of emergency management.

Before retiring, LTG Honoré commanded Joint Task Force-Katrina. In that capacity, he led the Department of Defense response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and directed the operations of over 22,000 Service members, 200 aircraft, and 20 ships. In accordance with the leadership and priorities established by LTG Honoré, Joint Task Force-Katrina collaborated with Federal, State and local authorities to coordinate and conduct all response, recovery, and mitigation operations.

Lieutenant General Honoré is a native of Lakeland, Louisiana and retired on February 29, 2008, following 37 years of active service with the United States Army. He continues to speak and consult nationally on Building a Culture of Preparedness.

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America needs a culture of preparedness. We are seeing that more state governments are struggling in response to recent disasters. Recent Red Cross data shows that for every dollar spent on preparedness, it saves 6 to 9 dollars during disaster response and recovery. As many have seen, disasters cause drama, drama for state governments especially when plans don't execute or the storm trumps the states capability to deal with the disaster response. "Blame the Federal government and FEMA", that is the get-out-of-jail- free card that the state governments have. We can do better, this America and one solution is to transform state government.

First and foremost, we have to optimize technology. We need to issue disaster assistance cards which can easily be activated and provide financial assistance to those who need it. Secondly, all state employees should be trained to register folks for relief following a disaster, which currently few states are trained to execute when needed. Officials also need to be mindful to pre-position food water and tarps in communities, as well as use local businesses to serve as a large part of the area's disaster response. Each area affected should have assistance locations and they should be well marked. They shouldn't block major roads and supplies should be given to anyone who shows up, no matter what county they are from.

Cities should utilize resources and use local businesses as an integral part of the disaster response. Businesses should be aware of response logistics and local governments should have pre-arranged contracts with local businesses to provide emergency goods and services. One idea would be to have local businesses provide hot meals at fixed prices – approximately 8 dollars each.

Officials should also think of the residents in disaster areas as resources as well. School systems in each state should integrate disaster preparedness and first aid into to its curriculum and every college graduate should be first aid certified. We need to involve the members of our communities, where we can create a civilian response corp in each community. I like to call them "men of consequence" – those who volunteer their time and talent to create resilient

communities. These volunteers would be prepared and trained to clear debris from roads and help shore up levees. They would be taught how to operate distribution points and help evacuate communities.

A very important point that I must make is that local officials must assure that residents in our communities have power. It is imperative that various laws are passed that will require gas stations and drug/grocery stores to have generators. When cities lose electrical power, our quality of life regresses back 80 years - people have no television, no running water or working sewer, no internet or cell phones. Facilities such as hospitals, courthouses and emergency response stations should have mandatory generators on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in order to protect the power source. As we saw during Hurricane Katrina, many City of New Orleans public buildings did have generators – but unfortunately they were in the basement or at ground level which did not serve them in the disaster.

Lastly, officials need to improve evacuation contra flow. We need full use of interstate highways. The federal government owns the flow on the interstate but during hurricane Gustav, unfortunately, we saw city, state and county officials blocking traffic on interstate highways. This policy needs to be reviewed and having surrounding states reroute traffic to protect the flow of tourist traffic to local resorts is unacceptable. As I am sure you will agree, going 40 miles in 12 hours is another disaster in the making.

We need to create a culture of preparedness in America. Our forefathers knew how to take care of themselves, their families, and the communities in which they lived. As citizens, we need to be prepared to do that same - we can not wait on the federal government to do it for us. For more information, go to [www. CNN.com](http://www.CNN.com).