

Fixing the flaw in emergency planning

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Emergency response plans must include knowledge from the people who need to be protected if these plans are to help communities respond effectively to threats, write Drs. Roz Lasker, Noni MacDonald and Editor-in-Chief Paul Hebert in an editorial in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

"There is no question that [emergency](#) planners have critically important expertise for designing protective strategies," write the authors. "But without listening to the public, they can't be aware of problems their plans may create."

People may not be able to follow emergency instructions or they, or their families, may be endangered by the plans to protect them. For example, they may be told to plan to reunite with family members at a specific location, but what if they have to go through a danger zone to reach it? The tragic consequences of a top-down approach were evident after [Hurricane Katrina](#) when many residents of New Orleans could not evacuate because of barriers that had not been identified and addressed beforehand.

A new community engagement process has now been developed that enables a large and representative group of community residents to contribute their essential knowledge to emergency planning. "The challenge for our various levels of government now is to provide communities with incentives and supports to put such a process into place — before people suffer and die unnecessarily in the next disaster," conclude the authors.

Source: [Canadian Medical Association Journal](#) (news : [web](#))

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