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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A GLOBAL APPEAL

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President, California Chapter

American Academy of Emergency Medicine

Over the past year, we have witnessed a seemingly unrelenting stream of devastation from natural disasters which have taken an unimaginable toll in human lives, dislocation of families and property loss. The global economy may well be impacted for years to come. Certainly, there are many for whom the psychological toll will never be fully repaired. Emergency response teams, locally, nationally, and internationally, are now stretched critically thin.

In December, 2004, a killer Tsunami hit the coast of Thailand. This tsunami was the deadliest recorded in history, killing an estimated 275,000 people. The tsunami was generated by a magnitude 9.15 undersea earthquake, making it the second largest earthquake in recorded history. The earthquake lasted nearly ten minutes and caused the entire planet to vibrate several centimeters. The total energy released by the earthquake has been estimated at 4.3 exajoules (4.3×10^{18}) joules – the equivalence of 100 gigatons of TNT. The entire Earth's surface is estimated to have moved vertically by 1 cm. This tsunami affected 27 countries.

On August 29th, 2005, a category 5 Hurricane (Katrina) made landfall off the coast of Louisiana. Several hours later, massive flooding from that hurricane along with levee failures in New Orleans created a humanitarian crisis. Approximately 1,100 people died and millions were displaced. It is estimated that 5 million people are still without power in the affected areas of the Gulf States. Hurricane Katrina was the most expensive natural disaster in the United States with some damage estimates reaching \$200 billion.

In the early hours of September 24, 2005, another Category 5 Hurricane (Rita) threatened Florida and Texas. Prior to the storm's landfall, the resultant storm surge reopened some of the levee breaches and again flooded parts of New Orleans. Post landfall, extensive damage occurred in the coastal areas of southern Louisiana and Texas.

On October 4, 2005, Hurricane Stan decimated entire villages in Mexico and Guatemala. Five hundred people died and hundreds were buried alive when a mudslide hit the town of Panabaj, about 100 miles west of Guatemala City.

On October 8, 2005, a killer earthquake, magnitude 7.6, hit the Himalayan regions of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many of the injured and dead were from the disputed area of Kashmir. Remarkably, alienated populations of India and Pakistan are now working together to rescue the injured and to bury the dead.

All of us are deeply saddened by the loss of life and injury to people in the wake of these disasters, and our hearts go out to those who have been touched. Few of us know the best way to help, and most of us feel helpless just watching the television reports.

Apart from making contributions to organizations or volunteering our efforts in ways that can make a real difference, it is incumbent on each and every one of us to realize that disaster strikes with little regard for national boundaries, with little or no warning and with the potential to cause grave jeopardy in our very own home towns. We must take advantage of the lessons others have learned at great cost to ensure our local communities, our public service emergency response networks, our contingency plans and our hospitals are ready with up-to-date protocols, hardened back-up communications systems, notification lists, air transportation options (to move responders into position) and adequate stores of current-dated food, water, and emergency medical equipment and supplies. Plans should be tested through realistic drills and audits, and lines of accountability, command and control should be formalized and known in advance.

In addition, each of us should assure we have made plans to protect our families, so that we have the ability to address our professional obligations without a cloud of fear hanging relentlessly over our heads, diverting our attention from those who also will be counting on us.

If history is any indication, we will become less concerned about these issues as each day passes and distances us from the tragedies which are now so real and present. Please join with me in a commitment to ensure that does not happen.