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Special Survey: Disaster Preparedness in New York

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Nearly Half of NY'ers Say Recent Storms Affected Their Area
Only 28% Were Very Prepared; Nearly 2/3rds No More Ready Today
Concern High For Terrorist Attack, Natural Disaster But 55% Say
U.S. Safer Today than on 9/11

Loudonville, NY. Forty-seven percent of all New York residents say that their area was affected by Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and the flooding that followed according to a new survey released today from the Siena (College) Research Institute (SRI). While only 28 percent of residents say that prior to Irene they were very prepared to withstand a natural disaster and 42 percent were somewhat prepared, today 64 percent admit to being no more prepared than prior to the storms. Concern for both a future terrorist attack and another natural disaster score above 70 percent among New Yorkers but a majority of 55 percent, think that the United States is safer today than ten years ago as we mark the anniversary of September 11th.

Large majorities of both residents of New York City's suburbs and the Eastern counties of Upstate New York say their area was affected. Seventeen percent of all residents describe the storm's impact on their local area as very severe and 38 percent (10% very, 28% somewhat) say the storms and their aftermath had a serious impact on them and their household.

"From Long Island, into the city, up the Hudson and along the Susquehanna, this storm will be remembered for a long time," said Dr. Don Levy, SRI's Director. "In the areas hit by the storms, three quarters said roads were blocked or inaccessible, sixty-one percent had wind damage, downed trees, or roof damage and sixty percent experienced power outages. A majority in those areas say that there was local flooding and public buildings were closed. Nearly four in ten had water in their basements. Over one in ten faced evacuation."

"As the storm approached, New Yorkers were glued to their television sets. Eighty-nine percent followed the news coverage at least somewhat closely and most of those did so by watching TV. And while a quarter of all residents felt the coverage was overhyped and sensational, most felt it was appropriate to the size and scope of the storm," Levy added.

“How well prepared were New Yorkers? Only just over a quarter say they were very prepared while an additional forty-two percent were somewhat prepared. Now, with the storm still fresh in our minds and for many still very evident, two thirds of all residents and nearly as many in the affected areas admit that they are no more prepared today to handle a disaster,” Levy notes.

Prior to the hurricane, 89 percent had flashlights and batteries, 72 percent had an inventory of food and water but fewer than half, 47 percent had a ‘go’ bag containing necessities like medications, clothes and important papers and 45 percent had an emergency plan that all household members understood and were ready to put into effect. Since the storm, of those that did not have one of the ingredients of preparedness, 46 percent of residents have acquired flashlights, 35 percent have purchased emergency necessities, 13 percent have put together a ‘go’ bag and 13 percent have developed an emergency plan.

“According to the experts, everyone needs a plan, a ‘go’ bag and the necessities to hang in there without help for several days. Clearly, while many New Yorkers are prepared and some have taken some steps, most know they weren’t fully prepared before and haven’t dotted all the emergency preparedness ‘I’s’ since the storm,” Levy said.

Today 27 percent of residents remain very concerned that they and their community could face a natural disaster that could result in power outages, flooding or dangerous property damage. While 28 percent are either not very or not at all concerned, 45 percent are at least somewhat concerned. Of greater concern is a terrorist attack. Over a third of New Yorkers, 36 percent, are very concerned while 35 percent are somewhat concerned about a terrorist attack happening that could impact them. Concern is greatest in New York City where 44 percent are very concerned and 36 percent are somewhat concerned.

“Although concern over a terrorist attack remains disquietingly high, over half of all New Yorkers and slightly more Gotham residents must be somewhat reassured by their belief that the U.S. is safer today than it was ten years ago. Still, for those that choose the half empty outlook, a third believe we are no more nor less safe than in 2001 and one in ten actually say we are less safe today than we were on the day the nineteen terrorists attacked our nation,” Levy added.

The Siena College Research Institute, under the direction of Don Levy, Ph.D., conducts political, economic, social and cultural research primarily in New York State. The Disaster Preparedness Survey was conducted September 13 - 15, 2011 by random telephone calls to 622 New York State residents over the age of 18 via both landline and cell phones. Data was weighted by age, gender, and region to enhance representativeness. Results are reported with a margin of error of ± 3.9 points. For more information or comments, please call Dr. Don Levy, Director, Siena College Research Institute, at 518-783-2901 or dlevy@siena.edu. Survey cross-tabulations can be found at www.siena.edu/sri/research