

Most Americans Think Devastating Natural Disasters Are Increasing

Less than half believe in global warming

NEW YORK, N.Y. – July 7, 2011 – Reading or watching the news, one might be struck by the seemingly constant barrage of reports of disasters, both natural in origin and not. In fact, some colleges and universities have begun offering coursework in emergency and disaster management, as these impactful and unplanned events continue to shape our world. When Americans were asked if they think that there have been more devastating natural disasters, including hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes recently, three quarters of U.S. adults say there have been more (76%) with three in ten saying there have been much more (31%); only 2% say there have been less and 23% say there have been neither more nor less.

These are some of the results of ***The Harris Poll*** of 2,163 adults surveyed online between June 13 and 20, 2011 by **Harris Interactive**.

Despite a large majority reporting an increase in devastating disasters, only 56% say they are prepared for one of these disasters or a long-term power outage by having the necessary supplies, food and water for three days. Conversely two in five Americans say they are not prepared in this way (41%), although older Americans overall are better prepared than those younger: two thirds of Matures, aged 66 years and older, say they are prepared for a disaster or long-term power outage (67%), compared to 59% of Baby Boomers, aged 47-65, 54% of Gen X, aged 35-46 and fewer than half of Echo Boomers, aged 18-34 (45%).

Types of Disasters and Government Readiness

Americans are concerned about different disasters, particularly depending on where they live. While half of Americans say they think a tornado (52%) or a snow and/or ice storm (48%) will impact them, the numbers vary greatly by region. Some regional concerns are:

- Easterners think that a snow and/or ice storm will be most likely to directly impact them (77%) and while Midwesterners are concerned about this as well (79%), an even greater number say they believe tornados will impact them (89%);
- Southerners are also concerned about tornados (66%) yet half say they are concerned about hurricanes (54%) or droughts (50%);
- Those in the West believe earthquakes will impact them (66%), which is a concern shared by very few in all other regions (between 7% and 16%);
- Although only 11% of Americans think a nuclear power plant disaster or meltdown will affect them directly, it is the only issue listed that most people say the federal government is worst equipped to handle (59%). One third say the government is worst equipped to handle terrorism (34%), which is down from the 48% who said this in 2006; and,
- In 2006, shortly after Hurricane Katrina, half of Americans (50%) said that the federal government was worst equipped to handle hurricanes. Five years later just 16% believe this.

Information about emergencies

Half of Americans say they are most likely to get information about emergencies on television (51%) while fewer than one in five say they get information from the radio (18%). Just over one in ten get information about emergencies from online news sites (13%) and significantly fewer get information from other people (4%), Facebook (3%), text messages (2%), newspapers (2%), Twitter (1%) or something else (1%). Different generations access information about emergencies differently: the older one is the more likely they are to get their information on TV, while the younger one is the more likely they are to get information from an online source (a news site, Facebook or Twitter).

Global Warming

Asked this month, the Harris Poll finds the lowest number who believe in global warming since the question was first asked in 1997 (44% now do, down from 51% in 2009 and 71% in 2007). These numbers do not suggest, however, that a majority now *do not* believe in global warming—just over one-quarter say they do not believe in it (28%) and the same number say they are not sure. Fittingly, among those who say there have been more natural disasters recently, there is no consensus whether this is a result of global warming or not (38% say it is, 28% say it's not and 34% are not sure).

So What?

The world around us is changing—disasters seem to strike more frequently than before and individually each one seems more impactful in nature. What Americans today seem unsure of, however, is how to prepare for these unexpected events, and what is causing them. Luckily with today's confluence of research, experience and modern day technology for communication, while we may not be able to stop natural-born disasters, we may be able to work together to significantly limit their tragic results.

TABLE 1
PREPAREDNESS FOR LONG TERM POWER OUTAGE

“Now, thinking about you and your household, how prepared are you for a long-term power outage or a disaster such as a hurricane, earthquake, flood, wildland fire or terrorist attack by having the necessary supplies, including extra food and water for three days?”

Base: All Adults

	Total		Generation			
	April 2007	June 2011	Echo Boomers (18-34)	Gen X (35-46)	Baby Boomers (47-65)	Matures (66+)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
PREPARED (NET)	58	56	45	54	59	67
Very prepared	14	12	11	12	11	15
Somewhat prepared	44	44	33	41	48	52
NOT PREPARED (NET)	40	41	49	43	40	32
Not too prepared	27	26	32	25	24	22
Not at all prepared	13	16	16	18	16	11
Not sure	2	3	7	3	1	*

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
GET INFORMATION ABOUT EMERGENCIES
 “Where are you most likely to get information about emergencies?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Generation			
		Echo Boomers (18-34)	Gen X (35-46)	Baby Boomers (47-65)	Matures (66+)
		%	%	%	%
Television	51	41	46	54	64
Radio	18	10	21	23	16
Online news sites	13	20	15	10	7
Other people	4	7	5	3	2
Facebook postings or newsfeed	3	6	4	1	1
Text messages	2	2	2	2	2
Newspapers	2	1	1	2	3
Twitter postings	1	3	*	*	-
Other	1	1	3	1	2
Not sure	5	9	3	4	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3
DISASTERS WITH MOST DIRECT IMPACT

“Which three of the following do you believe are most likely to directly impact you?”

Base: All adults

	Total 2006	Total 2011	Region			
			East	Midwest	South	West
			%	%	%	%
Tornados	46	52	31	89	66	10
Snow and/or ice storms	45	48	77	79	25	26
Drought	39	34	18	19	50	37
Hurricanes	27	30	40	2	54	7
Floods	35	28	29	36	23	25
Terrorism	39	25	36	26	14	30
Earthquakes	20	22	7	16	8	66
Wildfires	24	21	6	3	24	49
Nuclear power plant disaster or meltdown	NA	11	22	11	7	8
Mudslides	4	2	1	*	*	7

Note: Multiple-response question; NA indicates it was not asked in that year.

**TABLE 4
GOVERNMENT WORST EQUIPPED TO HANDLE**

"Which two of these issues do you believe the federal government is currently worst equipped to handle?"

Base: All adults

	Total 2006	Total 2011	Region			
			East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Nuclear power plant disaster or meltdown	NA	59	62	65	58	51
Terrorism	48	34	34	37	34	30
Earthquakes	26	25	23	26	24	28
Hurricanes	50	16	12	20	16	17
Drought	18	13	10	10	15	17
Tornados	11	11	13	10	10	13
Wildfires	9	11	10	7	13	12
Floods	24	11	9	11	11	13
Snow and/or ice storms	7	5	7	5	3	6
Mudslides	8	4	5	3	5	3

Note: Multiple-response question; NA indicates it was not asked in that year.

**TABLE 5
MORE OR LESS DISASTERS RECENTLY**

"Do you think that there have been more devastating natural disasters, including hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes recently, than there were previously?"

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
More (NET)	76
Much more	31
Somewhat more	44
Neither more nor less	23
Less (NET)	2
Somewhat less	2
Much less	*

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 6
BELIEF IN GLOBAL WARMING**

"Do you believe the theory that increased carbon dioxide and other gases released into the atmosphere will, if unchecked lead to global warming and an increase in average temperatures, or not?"

Base: All Adults

	1997	2000	2001	2002	2007	2009	2011
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Believe	67	72	75	74	71	51	44
Do not believe	21	20	19	19	23	29	28
Not sure	12	9	6	7	6	21	28

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 7
ARE DISASTERS THE RESULT OF GLOBAL WARMING

"Do you think that the increase in devastating natural disasters is a result of global warming/climate change, or not?"
Base: Adults who think there have been more devastating natural disasters recently

	Total
	%
Result of global warming/climate change	38
Not a result of global warming/climate change	28
Not at all sure	34

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between June 13 to 20, 2011 among 2,163 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

The results of this Harris Poll may not be used in advertising, marketing or promotion without the prior written permission of Harris Interactive.

J40315
Q755, 760, 765, 770, 775, 780, 785

The Harris Poll® #81, July 7, 2011
By Samantha Braverman, Sr. Project Researcher, Harris Interactive

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is one of the world’s leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including healthcare, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in over 215 countries and territories

through our North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help us – and our clients – stay ahead of what’s next. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.