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The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) has co-sponsored a survey that explores public attitudes about terrorism and natural disasters a decade after the attacks of September 11, 2011.

Summary Analysis:

A decade after 9/11, a majority of Americans (55%) are willing to give up some personal freedoms and civil liberties to enable homeland security and law enforcement officials to better protect them from terrorist threats. At the same time, a significant number of Americans are suggesting increased profiling of potential terror suspects as a key step to thwart attacks. Despite the euphoria over the death of Osama Bin Laden, 71% of consumers and 69% of professionals believe the threat of a terrorist attack in the U.S. is just as likely following his death. Twice as many professional emergency managers as consumers (28% vs. 13%) believe an attack in the U.S. is even more likely since Bin Laden’s death.

When it comes to why there has been no major terrorist attack since 9/11, 59% of consumers credit the U.S. government for making it more difficult for terrorists to attack. 36% of these respondents believe the U.S. government has stopped recent attempts and didn’t tell the American people. Professional emergency managers and homeland security officials are far more concerned (61%) about radicalized Americans being the source of future attacks than consumers who fear foreign born terrorists who have been living in the U.S. for some time (38%), followed by foreign based terrorists who infiltrate the U.S. (26%).

Americans have modified many personal behaviors as a result of 9/11. The majority (82%) have the threat of a terrorist attack on their minds. 74% of consumers agree that they are more likely to report any suspicious activity to authorities than before 9/11. A majority (68%) are more alert about who is sitting near them when using public transportation and nearly half of those using public transportation think about the possibility of having to help stop a terrorist from carrying out an attack. Over half (61%) have changed where they would vacation internationally out of concern for attacks.
When asked about consumers’ concern for natural disasters, consumers reported that they are very concerned about the following: Lightning strikes (19%); Tornados (17%); Flooding (17%); Hurricanes (15%); Ice storms (15%); Earthquakes (13%); Hail Storms (13%); and Wild fires (11%). Professionals feel that that our nation is somewhat or very prepared to respond to Wildfires (46%), Flooding (42%), Tornados (42%), Lightning (41%), Ice Storms (37%), Hail (36%), Hurricanes (36%), Land/Mud slides (22%), Earthquakes (19%), and Tsunamis (8%).

When assessing the increase in preparedness post 9/11 across federal, state and local governments, only about a fifth of professionals believe government has become “much better prepared” for terrorist attacks or natural disaster in the past 5 years. The percentages are Federal Government (22%), State Government (22%) and Local Government (20%). In contrast, only 10% of professionals believe the private sector is “much better prepared.” There is broad agreement that all levels of government and the private sector are making progress in being “somewhat better prepared” over the past five years as evidenced by these percentages: Federal Government (67%), State Government (63%), Local Government (55%) and Private Sector (51%).

The top ranked actions that consumers have taken to protect themselves and their families from disasters in the past couple of years include the following: 39% of consumers have created a family disaster plan, including an evacuation route and emergency housing location; An equal percentage have upgraded their homeowner’s or renter’s insurance to cover more potential disaster damage; One third (34%) have purchased a disaster supply kit; 23% have purchased a standby generator; 22% have added lightning surge protection to their whole house; and 21% have purchased flood insurance.

Other key findings:

- When it comes to the likely targets of future terrorist attacks, professional emergency managers and homeland security officials have significantly different views than consumers about the nature of the attacks that we may see. (For security considerations, the details of this response are not being released.)
- Other gaps in the views of professional emergency managers and consumers exist around topics of preparedness and personal responsibility. 21% of consumers strongly agree and 42% somewhat agree that it’s the responsibility of the government to subsidize the rebuilding of their home or find them temporary housing if their home is destroyed by a natural disaster and they don’t have sufficient insurance coverage. In contrast, only 7% of professional respondents strongly agree and 34% somewhat agree. 60% of consumers strongly agree that they have sufficient insurance coverage for rebuilding.
- Nearly half of both consumers (47%) and professionals (41%) strongly agree that Americans have an obligation to look out for neighbors who are more vulnerable during disasters.
- 67% of professionals strongly agree that even though it’s been 10 years since 9/11, the threat of a terrorist attack in America is “still on my mind,” compared to only 43% of Americans.
- 55% of consumers are very or somewhat willing to give up some personal freedoms and civil liberties to enable homeland security and law enforcement officials to better protect them from terrorist threats.
- When asked the single most important step law enforcement and counter terrorism officials should take to protect Americans from terrorist attacks in the face of limited resources, a composite of the consumer responses, based on ThoughtScan Analysis®, yielded this statement, “More people to protect the country, increased profiling, better intelligence and stepped up border security.”
- When it comes to the source of future terrorist threats, professional emergency managers and consumers have a similar view about the high risk posed by foreign born terrorist who have been living in the U.S. for some time. However, professionals see far greater threats coming from...
radicalized Americans than do consumers (52% vs. 15%).
- Professionals want more private sector involvement to help with recovery from a disaster. 81% “strongly agree” that the private sector has capabilities that should be levered in partnership with government resources to help recover from disasters. 68% of professionals believe the private sector has an equally important obligation to be prepared to meet the public’s needs following a disaster and 61% believe states and major cities should have dedicated programs that engage the private sector in helping communities recover from a disaster.
- 57% of consumers strongly agree that private businesses should have plans in place to reopen quickly after a disaster and 46% strongly agree that it’s a business’ obligation to have a recovery plan in place to ensure continued employment following a disaster.
- 47% of professionals agree that stronger building codes would make a big difference in reducing damage due to natural disasters. When consumers were asked which actions they had taken in the past couple of years to protect themselves and their families, home fortification actions such as adding window protection, reinforcing garage doors, strengthening their roof or adding a safe room ranked the lowest.
- 43% of professionals strongly agree that if we don’t maintain the significant investment in homeland security at the federal, state and local level that started after 9/11, America will become more vulnerable and less able to respond to natural disasters or terrorist attacks.
- Nearly a quarter of professionals strongly agree that the nation’s increased investment in national security has created unrealistic expectations of the government’s ability to prevent future terrorist attacks (24%) and has created unrealistic expectations of the government’s ability to respond to natural or manmade disaster (21%). Yet in an indication of split views on this topic, nearly the same percentage (19%) of professionals feel that public expectations are well aligned with government’s ability to respond to a natural or manmade disaster.

Full Results of Consumer Survey:

Full results of the consumer survey, including verbatim responses to all open ended questions, are available online at the following address:

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