

Ready for Anything (That's Their Job)

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Published: September 9, 2007

ASKED to describe his job, Michael D. Selves, director of Emergency Management and Homeland Security in Johnson County, Kan., recalls what he once told county commissioners who also posed the question.



D. Kevin Elliott for The New York Times

Tammy N. Karlgaard is a regional emergency management planner for a commission in Chesapeake, Va.

“My job,” he said, “is to tell you things you don’t want to hear, asking you to spend money you don’t have for something you don’t believe will ever happen.”

It is a grimly humorous description of a job that involves preparing for everything from floods to terrorist attacks to a flu pandemic. The people who hold these jobs, often known as emergency managers, work on many levels with public agencies, volunteer organizations and businesses to plan for disasters and mitigate their impact.

“In times of disaster, they take control and help expedite plans,” said Dawn M. Shiley, communication manager for the International Association of Emergency Managers, a professional group.

Emergency planning, in various forms, has been around for decades. But in recent years it has emerged as a much more formal career path. Colleges and universities are offering bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees, and professional certifications are available.

In 1994, four universities were offering programs in emergency management, three with undergraduate degrees, said B. Wayne Blanchard, manager of a higher-education project for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Now, there are at least 144 college programs in the United States, and at least another 100 are in the works.

1) Answer the following questions about the text:

a) Who is Michael D. Selves?

b) What did he once tell county commissioners?

c) What does his job involve?

d) How are the people who hold these jobs known?

e) Who do they work with?

f) What do they do in case of disaster?

g) Why has this profession emerged as a more formal career path in recent years?

h) How many universities were offering programs in emergency management in 1994?

i) How many college programs are there now?

j) Describe a person who has a job like this? (How must he/she be and what characteristics must he/she have?)