Session 022: Next Steps in Human Dimensions Research and Practice: Priority Actions for Building Community Resilience to Oil Spills
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Session Overview
This session presented findings from research on the health, social, and economic impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and other hazard events on Gulf Coast residents and provided recommendations for building community resilience.

Session Highlights
- Studies used multiple methods, including focus groups, tabletop exercises, surveys, and modeling to examine socio-demographic, cultural, place-based, and other factors affecting disaster experiences and responses.
- Methods for identifying and addressing needs of vulnerable communities (e.g., Cambodian, Laotian, displaced persons) emphasized.
- Need for culturally responsive recruitment methods and emergency response strategies emphasized to allow key stakeholders to identify gaps in the planning and implementation of disaster response plans.
- Critical coastal environments, such as wetlands and estuaries, not only provide ecosystem services, but also socio-cultural services in the form of physical/emotional health. Environmental protection is directly linked to human well-being and positive health outcomes.
- “Human welfare” identified in the National Contingency Plan and the Incident Management Handbook, but not defined; public welfare assessment technique proposed as a mechanism that could be used within the incident command response structure.
- Housing recovery policy in the US needs to be revisited. After each major disaster, and also with smaller and moderate sized events, housing is disrupted and people are dislocated. People experience disparate trajectories; equitable disaster policy that targets resources to the most socially vulnerable community members – as opposed to excluding them – can greatly advance community recovery and improve community resilience.
- An overarching message was the lack of baseline data and need for prospective, longitudinal studies.
- Prospective, longitudinal studies would provide better data for testing causal mechanisms of disaster impacts, determining the effectiveness of alternative programs/interventions aimed at supporting impacted communities, and determining factors influencing adaptive/maladaptive trajectories.
- Need to expand the adoption of welfare-enhancing preparedness and response practices by USCG leadership and coastal states nationwide.
- Governance, implementation, and funding of cohorts built through the proposed Community Health Observing System need to be determined.
- Resilience and recovery models are challenging to validate. Resilience and recovery happen over long periods of time. Primary data is resource-intensive. If we can get post-disaster household-trajectory data from a sufficient number of households, it would still only represent one disaster and one community’s experience. It is critical to use a combination of verification and validation steps, including the use of stories and data, to check predictive, numerical models.
- Potential beneficiaries of this research include response teams, policy makers, and communities.
- 5 research-informed recommendations suggested ways to: support vulnerable communities; use social science to understand the complex context in which disaster management occurs; adopt a whole of community approach to risk management; connect the past, present, and future contexts in risk mitigation efforts; and build the evidence base for improving community resilience.

- 11 research-informed practices recommended by oil spill USCG leaders/specialists, state representative, and sociologists identified and demonstrated in Virginia to adapt existing preparedness and response “practice” to support and protect community resilience