



# Disaster

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A **disaster** is a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental loss and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

In contemporary academia, disasters are seen as the consequence of inappropriately managed risk. These risks are the product of a combination of both hazards and vulnerability. Hazards that strike in areas with low vulnerability will never become disasters, as in the case of uninhabited regions.<sup>[1]</sup>

Developing countries suffer the greatest costs when a disaster hits – more than 95 percent of all deaths caused by hazards occur in developing countries, and losses due to natural hazards are 20 times greater (as a percentage of GDP) in developing countries than in industrialized countries.<sup>[2][3]</sup>



Ruins from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, remembered as one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States.

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## Etymology

The word *disaster* is derived from Middle French *désastre* and that from Old Italian *disastro*, which in turn comes from the Ancient Greek pejorative prefix δυσ-, (*dus-*) "bad"<sup>[4]</sup> and ἀστήρ (*aster*), "star".<sup>[5]</sup> The root of the word *disaster* ("bad star" in Greek) comes from an astrological sense of a calamity blamed on the position of planets.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Classifications

Researchers have been studying disasters for more than a century, and for more than forty years disaster research. The studies reflect a common opinion when they argue that all disasters can be seen as being human-made, their reasoning being that human actions before the strike of the hazard can prevent it developing into a disaster. All disasters are hence the result of human failure to introduce appropriate disaster management measures.<sup>[7]</sup> Hazards are routinely divided into natural or human-made, although complex disasters, where there is no single root cause, are more common in developing countries. A specific disaster may spawn a secondary disaster that increases the impact. A classic example is an earthquake that causes a tsunami, resulting in coastal flooding.

### Natural hazard

A natural hazard is a natural process or phenomenon that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.

Various phenomena like earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, tsunamis, and cyclones are all natural hazards that kill thousands of people and destroy billions of dollars of habitat and property each year. However, the rapid growth of the world's population and its increased concentration often in hazardous environments has escalated both the frequency and severity of disasters. With the tropical climate and unstable land forms, coupled with deforestation, unplanned growth proliferation, non-engineered constructions which make the disaster-prone areas more vulnerable, tardy communication, and poor or no budgetary allocation for disaster prevention, developing countries suffer more or less chronically from natural disasters. Asia tops the list of casualties caused by natural hazards.

### Human-instigated

Human-instigated disasters are the consequence of technological hazards. Examples include stampedes, fires, transport accidents, industrial accidents, oil spills and nuclear explosions/radiation. War and deliberate attacks may also be put in this category. As with natural hazards, man-made hazards are events that have not happened—for instance, terrorism. Man-made disasters are examples of specific cases where man-made hazards have become reality in an event.

### See also

- Act of God
- Civil protection
- Crisis
- Disaster area
- Disaster convergence
- Disaster medicine
- Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000
- Disaster opportunism
- Disaster response
- Disaster recovery
- Disaster research



Airplane crashes and terrorist attacks are examples of man-made disasters: they cause pollution, kill people, and damage property. This example is the September 11 attacks in 2001 at the World Trade Center in New York.

- Disaster recovery and business continuity auditing
- Disaster recovery plan
- Emergency
- Emergency management
- Environmental emergency
- Hazard
- Human extinction
- Maritime disasters
- Risk
- Risk governance
- Risks to civilization, humans and planet Earth
- Sociology of disaster
- Survivalism
- The Klaxon.com
- List of accidents and disasters by death toll
- List of disasters
- List of disasters by cost
- List of military disasters
- List of railway disasters

## References

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## External links

- The Disaster Roundtable (<http://www.dels.nas.edu/dr/>) of the National Academy of Sciences
- EM-DAT International Disaster Database



The Wikibook *History* has a page on the topic of:  
***Historical Disasters and Tragedies***

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20080811021537/http://www.em-dat.net/>) of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

- Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (<http://www.gdacs.org>) - The Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System is a joint initiative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the European Commission
- UN-SPIDER (<http://www.un-spider.org/>) - UN-SPIDER, the United Nations Programme for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response], a project of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)

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