



By Lynn Fritz

## Viewpoint

# Let's Mobilize Our Disaster Management Expertise

It struck me a few years back. Earthquakes in Turkey and Taiwan. Floods in Curacao. Disaster upon disaster hit nations where Fritz Companies' employees were based and we didn't have a plan to help them and their families. In fact, when I called around to other companies at the time, I couldn't find anyone that had a global plan for managing disasters in countries where they had facilities.

Since then, some progress has been made. A minority of large companies have developed full-scale disaster preparedness plans to address safety, communications, customer service, manufacturing, and distribution. They also anticipate all types of disasters — from strikes and natural disasters to war and financial crises.

I began thinking about the kinds of people who provide relief and rescue for the world's disasters. I wondered what kind of resources they had access to and what kind of training they had.

### Heroes with Zero

The people on the ground who direct disaster relief do heroic work under the worst possible circumstances with little resources. Most of them put their own lives on the line for the good of others.

It concerned me to learn that many of them do this with little or no training and technology. At Fritz Institute we noticed that while many businesses have long supported a local disaster relief charity, when a major disaster hits, most do so with cash contribu-

tions. Few actively contribute their expertise and professional resources.

**Do disaster relief professionals have access to the best practices and technologies when providing relief in the midst of a crisis?** Our research shows that disaster relief professionals have limited access to the best commercial practices and very little in the way of technology. These gaps present opportunities for logistics experts to make an enduring contribution to the millions of people impacted annually by natural and political disasters.

**I believe that people in the logistics and transportation sectors have a lot to contribute to disaster relief management.** Our colleagues in 3PL, transportation, and manufacturing companies have huge reservoirs of practical experience to draw from. There is a lot to be learned from our collective experiences responding to customers, monitoring routes and regulations, developing logistics software, and finding the best tools and techniques to apply to the disaster relief field.

If we pull together to bring our expertise, talent, and resources to these challenges, we can expedite the delivery of essential medical supplies, food, and shelter and save more lives.

**It is important to draw on the expertise of the academic community to learn about best practices in managing disasters,** as well as identify gaps in systems, information, and training. I view the field of disaster preparedness much like careers in the logistics industry 20 years ago, when few academic offerings or research in

logistics could be found. Today, you can get logistics and supply chain education and training from the junior college level through doctoral degrees.

By drawing on the expertise of the academic community, the disaster management field can similarly evolve. Research can identify best practices, and increased education can lead to more knowledgeable professionals.

### Making a Difference

**If you are interested in engaging your company in the work of strengthening the world's disaster relief expertise,** then let's continue this discussion. I am recruiting logistics companies to join me in the newly formed World Economic Forum Disaster Response Network, which I co-chair on behalf of our industry. We are looking for pledges of financial resources, professional expertise, and functional assistance with disasters around the world.

I am gathering ideas and funding, and facilitating programs to grow the business and academic collaborations I have described. This ranges from our engagement to develop logistics software for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent for global implementation to an upcoming release of a case study on the logistics practices applied during the Gujarat, India, earthquake last year.

I welcome your ideas and interest in joining me to mobilize disaster management expertise and augment the resources of the world's disaster relief community. ■