

ABSTRACT

An analytical study was conducted in the Kingston Metropolitan Area in early 2000, to assess the capability of occupants in high-rise office buildings in the area, to respond to fast-breaking (rapid-onset) hazards such as fire, earthquake and explosions.

The study utilized a multi-stage sample of buildings selected randomly from a population of Government Ministries and private sector buildings. The entire population of employees on a randomly selected floor, no lower than the third level of each building was used as a third-stage sample. Five Government Ministries and six Private Sector buildings were studied. Variables studied included education of staff in disaster management, the attitude of employees and managers to disaster management, disaster management practices, ownership of building and sector of employment.

Private sector office buildings were 3-7 floors high and all company owned, while the public sector buildings were 4-12 floors and 80% rented or leased. Most, 60% of public sector buildings and 50% of those in the private sector had no disaster plan. Less than 40% of respondents (36% public sector and 38% of the private sector) reported some disaster management training. The private sector was marginally more prepared for response than the public sector except for the installation and servicing of fire extinguishers.

Both sectors were deficient in disaster-reduction measures; 16% of the occupants of private sector buildings and 40% of the public sector were found to be at high risk of injury or death in the event of fire, earthquake or explosion. Respondents in both sectors named fire as the greatest risk that they face in their respective buildings. All respondents felt that disaster management was beneficial.

Recommendations focus on strategies to reduce risk and improve the capability of occupants for appropriate response.