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## Preparing for Natural Disasters Trust for America's Health

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
Public Opinion Strategies

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*The following analysis is based on a national research project funded by the Trust for America's Health and conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies. The project included 8 focus groups conducted in May 2008 among various audiences in four locations, as well as a national survey of 1,026 registered voters conducted June 1 – 8, 2008. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.*

Hurricanes in the Southeast. Flooding and tornadoes in the Midwest. Wildfires on the West Coast. Cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis around the world. It is no wonder that the public views natural disasters as inevitable—they seem to be happening every day. Yet less than three years removed from Hurricane Katrina, there remains a level of uncertainty and concern about how prepared the U.S. is to deal with these types of catastrophic events. And the lessons of Hurricane Katrina remain—the American public looks to the government to provide the necessary resources and information on what to do and where to go in the event of a natural disaster, as well as to ensure that plans for response exist and are implemented efficiently.

### Key Findings

- **Natural disasters are nearly universally seen as inevitable.** A full 97 percent believes that a major natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake is likely to occur in the United States within the next five to 10 years. Eighty-one percent feel that such an event is very likely to happen.
- **There is a level of uncertainty about how prepared the government is to handle a major natural disaster.** While people do not necessarily view the government as completely unprepared to handle a major natural disaster, neither do they express a very high level of confidence in the government's ability to respond effectively. Though nearly two-thirds say the government and public health system are prepared to handle a major natural disaster, only 15 percent believe these entities are *very* prepared to handle these types of events. Focus group research indicates that while there is praise for the response to recent wildfires, concerns about the response to Hurricane Katrina clearly still remain.

- **America's lack of preparedness for dealing with natural disasters causes concern.** Despite the sense that the government has responded more effectively to natural disasters that have occurred since Hurricane Katrina, the fact that many U.S. cities and communities still do not have the supplies and plans necessary to deal with these emergencies causes people a great deal of concern. Eighty-two percent say that this fact makes them concerned about the safety of the country, with 53 percent responding that it makes them very concerned,
- **Disaster preparedness is seen as an important role for government.** Sixty-one percent say that "preparing for major natural disasters" is a very important issue for government to focus on ("very important" means they rated it between 8 and 10 on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means the issue is extremely important for government to focus on). A full one-third of the country (33 percent) gave this issue a rating of 10.