

# KICKING OFF 2015 HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS SEASON

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New York, NY



Edmond Mathez, Curator of the "Nature's Fury" exhibit, delivers keynote address.



Rohit Aggarwala of Bloomberg Associates answers a question regarding New York City's approach to disaster preparation.

## New York City leaders share disaster preparedness tips at American Museum of Natural History

The Travelers Institute held its fifth annual *Kicking Off Hurricane Preparedness Season* symposium at the American Museum of Natural History on June 1, 2015, marking the official start of the 2015 Atlantic hurricane season.

More than 150 people attended the event, which featured speakers who explored how governments, businesses and families could prepare for and recover from severe weather and other natural disasters. Held in partnership with the American Museum of Natural History, the Partnership for New York City and Team Rubicon, the event included a tour of the museum's "Nature's Fury: The Science of Natural Disasters" exhibit, presented by Travelers.

### Award presentation

During the symposium, the first annual Travelers Excellence in Community Resilience Award was presented to Team Rubicon, a nonprofit organization that leverages the skills and experiences of military veterans to deploy emergency response teams after natural disasters. In accepting the award, **Jake Wood**, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Team Rubicon, said the organization's work is important in helping communities recover from disasters, and in giving former U.S. veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan a "continued purpose in their life" to serve others.

### Disaster preparedness

In opening remarks, **Joan Woodward**, President of the Travelers Institute and Executive Vice President of Public Policy at Travelers, mentioned the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's prediction of a calmer 2015 Atlantic hurricane season compared with previous years. Other organizations, including Colorado State University, released similar forecasts, but, Woodward cautioned, "It's very, very difficult to predict weather patterns. It only takes one major storm to expose us to a great amount of risk."

The keynote address was delivered by **Edmond A. Mathez**, Curator in the Museum's Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences and of the "Nature's Fury" exhibit. Mathez stressed the need to educate the public about natural disasters, explaining that as a society we care "how natural disasters are going to affect us and our families and our communities. In other words, what we really care about are the risks."

When asked about the possibility of a severe earthquake striking the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut region, Mathez responded, "We're always surprised by earthquakes because they can occur where we don't expect them," adding, "I don't think we're at risk here for large earthquakes, but you never know about these interplate earthquakes."

The symposium featured a panel discussion on disaster preparedness, including lessons learned from Superstorm Sandy in 2012. **Rohit Aggarwala**, Principal, Sustainability, Bloomberg Associates, and Professor of Professional Practice and International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, said that, prior to Sandy, New York City considered longer-term risks and how it would adapt.



Jake Wood of Team Rubicon accepts the inaugural Travelers Excellence in Community Resiliency Award with Marlene Ibsen, CEO and President of the Travelers Foundation, and Joan Woodward, Travelers Institute.

Aggarwala, who served as Director of New York City’s office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability from 2006 to 2010, later said that the city took a more immediate approach to disaster preparation, because “It is here and now; and it’s not just about disaster response, it is about fundamentally changing the city to make the city less exposed and to make the impacts of bad events less disastrous.”

**Daniel Zarrilli**, Director, Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency, City of New York, said that after Sandy, New York City launched a multilayered approach to disaster preparedness and recovery, including investments in the coastline, upgrades to building and zoning codes, and improvements in social and economic resiliency measures. Zarrilli said the city has been helping to strengthen local organizations, “which serve as the first line of defense in the event of a catastrophe,” so they are better prepared to serve their neighborhoods.

Upgrading a city’s infrastructure to withstand the impact of natural disasters takes time and money, but **Klaus H. Jacob**, Special Research Scientist, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, said “smart” operational procedures can play a major role in protecting infrastructure in the meantime. “If you have proper knowledge of how your system is vulnerable, and you don’t have the capital funds to fix it, at least you can go about in a very smart way to operationally plan for such an event, at least for hurricanes.”



Daniel Zarrilli of the Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency for the City of New York.

## Disaster response

Based on the firsthand experiences of Team Rubicon, Wood highlighted three key actions to help people respond to natural disasters:

- 1) Develop a response plan: “Your plan should cover a number of bases, but at its core should be simple,” said Wood, who added that everyone in the household should be familiar with the plan. Wood also urged people to know their neighbors’ response plans and to help each other when a crisis strikes.
- 2) Listen to weather-related watches and warnings, and take appropriate action.
- 3) Understand your role post-disaster: Wood encouraged people to join neighborhood response and recovery efforts to help their communities get back on their feet.

## Practical advice

- In live audience polling, more than half of attendees indicated they did not have a home survival kit in the event of severe weather or other natural disaster. Wood urged people to put together a survival kit that includes first-aid supplies and cash.
- More than 80 percent of attendees said they did not have a contents inventory of their household belongings. Woodward advised them to create an inventory list with photos or video, and to store it off-site.
- Additionally, 65 percent of audience members said their company or organization had a business continuity plan, which helps companies maintain operations during interruptions such as power outages.

For more information on disaster preparedness, please visit [www.travelersinstitute.org/disasterpreparedness](http://www.travelersinstitute.org/disasterpreparedness).

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