

Has exercising helped Mexico in the wake of a real-life disaster?

Mexico is waking up to widespread disruption and damage following a 7.1 magnitude earthquake.

The country is prepared for this type of disaster. All across Mexico, regular drills are practiced to ensure people are prepared for natural disasters, however this time it wasn't a drill. The widespread damage is yet to be fully reported on and it's likely that we won't know the extent for days, weeks and even months, however their initial response appears proactive and positive.

In August 2017, the U.S. Department of Defense undertook an exercise designed to prepare the military and residents for a possible 7.0 magnitude earthquake. They followed their plans to the letter; escalating the disaster from local to county authorities. Once these county authorities could no longer manage the exercise scenario, it was escalated to state authorities and as a final escalation, the federal government was involved. According to Army Col. Barry Graham; "... I think it has been a great exercise and everyone has gotten something out of this training. New Mexico is very prepared because of this exercise."

Residents across the US and Mexico are also exercised regularly, undertaking drills which educate them on how to respond to a variety of scenarios. During these exercises, a 30 second warning is given and they are instructed of where to go and what to do depending on the type of disaster being exercised. This time however, there was no warning. The first the residents felt was the tremor.

As this disaster becomes a reality with uncanny resemblance to their most recent exercise, how are local, state and federal authorities responding? Alfredo del Mazo Maza, the State of Mexico's governor has invoked their disaster response plan; ordering schools to close and public transport to operate free of charge to allow residents to travel safely. Emergency services and volunteers are also in place working around the clock, searching the rubble for survivors. The extent of the damage and the widespread panic may hinder the recovery process, however even in the first 24 hours following the disruption, it appears that their widespread preparedness and exercising schedule will play a vital role in their recovery as a whole.