

Volunteers' Preparedness for Natural Disasters and EVANDE Project

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Abstract : The role of volunteers in disaster management is of decisive importance and the need of their involvement is well recognized, both for prevention measures and for disaster management. During major catastrophes, whereas professional personnel are outsourced, the role of volunteers is crucial. In Greece experience has shown that various groups operating in the civil protection mechanism like local administration staff or volunteers, in many cases do not have the necessary knowledge and information on best practices to act against natural disasters. One of the major problems is the lack of volunteers' education and training. In the above given framework, this paper presents the results of a survey aimed to identify the level of education and preparedness of civil protection volunteers in Greece. Furthermore, the implementation of earthquake protection measures at individual, family and working level, are explored. More specifically, the survey questionnaire investigates issues regarding pre-earthquake protection actions, appropriate attitudes and behaviors during an earthquake and existence of contingency plans in the workplace. The questionnaires were administered to citizens from different regions of the country and who attend the civil protection training program: "Protect Myself and Others". A closed-form questionnaire was developed for the survey, which contained questions regarding the following: a) knowledge of self-protective actions; b) existence of emergency planning at home; c) existence of emergency planning at workplace (hazard mitigation actions, evacuation plan, and performance of drills); and, d) respondents' perception about their level of earthquake preparedness. The results revealed a serious lack of knowledge and preparedness among respondents. Taking into consideration the aforementioned gap and in order to raise awareness and improve preparedness and effective response of volunteers acting in civil protection, the EVANDE project was submitted and approved by the European Commission (EC). The aim of that project is to educate and train civil protection volunteers on the most serious natural disasters, such as forest fires, floods, and earthquakes, and thus, increase their performance.

Keywords : civil protection, earthquake, preparedness, volunteers

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