

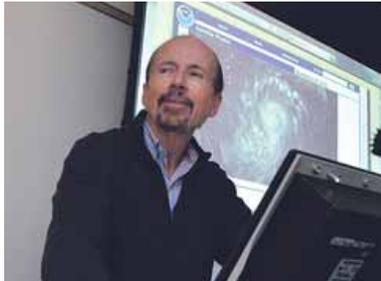


Penn professor simulates next Sandy scenario

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28 November 2012 07:17

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The next time a hurricane barrels towards the mid-Atlantic, will you take a proactive approach or a wait-and-see attitude?

A University of Pennsylvania professor has helped develop a program called "Stormview simulation" that could help people better prepare in the event of another storm like Sandy.

The simulation, which takes about 30 minutes, asks users to assume they live in Florida and takes them through the days leading up to a fictional Hurricane Gabrielle. Users can choose how they would get information about the storm -- television, radio, web reports or neighbors -- and whether they would prepare.

"The idea was to say if we can't study storms in the real world ... why not go ahead and study them in a lab situation," said Wharton School of Business marketing professor Robert Meyer, who worked with professors from the University of Miami and Columbia University to develop the tool.

Meyer said researchers surveyed area residents before superstorm Sandy last month, but with the simulation researchers can get a better understanding of how people would actually behave based on certain information.

Researchers have learned a few lessons already from 400 people who've gone through the simulation, according to Meyer. One of the lessons is that people primarily rely on television news reports.

Meyer said the creators are in the process of trying use the technology to study preparedness for other sorts of hazards, such as wildfires and earthquakes.

Sandy on their minds

If the East Coast were to see another tropical storm like Sandy, Meyer said the reaction from residents would likely depend on how they were affected by the October storm.

"It kind of will depend on what happened to you in Sandy," he said. "What we do know is that people who had been through Irene and nothing happened to them -- they went through the storm, their power went off for a couple hours and that's it -- when the next storm comes you tend to think hurricanes are no big deal."

If another storm didn't arrive until next fall, the reactions would likely be even less.

"People have pretty short memories," he said. "There would still be a signal, but it would tend to be a pretty weak signal."

Observations

Based on the simulation, researchers had some notable observations:

Those with higher income and more education typically used online reports more than those with lower income and less education.

Older people typically rely on television. Younger people tend to use a variety of media. Women typically gathered more information than men.