

5 Disasters Coming Soon If We Don't Rebuild U.S. Infrastructure

In the wake of [the Minneapolis bridge collapse](#), the author—a national security expert and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations—[called on Congress](#) to stop turning an “irrational and reckless” blind eye to our crumbling public foundations. Here he reports on more cracks in American hardware that urgently need attention.

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1. Delta Deluge | California

New Orleans has never had a monopoly on outdated, inadequate levees. A magnitude 6.7 earthquake in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Valley could cause 30 levee breaches. Sixteen Delta islands would drown under 300 billion gallons of salt water from San Francisco Bay. It would not only spell disaster for the residents, but also cause problems farther afield, contaminating the fresh water supply for two-thirds of California. Some 10 million people would face severe shortages over the many months the water supply took to recover.

2. Dam Collapse | Kentucky

Seepage through the numerous holes that have been discovered in the foundation of Kentucky's 55-year-old Wolf Creek Dam put it in danger of failing. In a worst-case scenario, the mile-long structure, which holds back the largest manmade reservoir east of the Mississippi, would release a wall of water, inundating towns and cities downstream along the Cumberland River, including Nashville. The warning was sounded last January, after engineers were forced to drop the dam's water level to avoid a potential disaster.

3. Fuel Drought | California

A major earthquake in Los Angeles or a terrorist attack at its harbor could lead to an extended closure of America's largest port complex. If that occurred, Southern California's inventory of refined fuels would be exhausted in two to three weeks, and 18 million people literally run out of gas. A shutdown also would disrupt the flow of 40 percent of the nation's maritime containers, idling factories everywhere and leaving retailers with bare shelves within days. (When a labor dispute in 2002 closed ports on the West Coast for 10 days, economic losses totaled \$4.7 billion).

4. Gotham Superstorm | New York

The storm surge of a Category 3 or 4 hurricane that came ashore in New York City and on Long Island could submerge Kennedy Airport, dump seawater into the city's subways throughout lower Manhattan and flood the Holland and Brooklyn Battery Tunnels. “The first storm's going to be a little bit of a bad day for us,” says Kelly McKinney, the deputy commissioner for planning and preparedness at New York's Office of Emergency Management.

5. Toxic Shock | Pennsylvania

A terrorist truck-bomb attack or major industrial accident at an oil refinery in south Philadelphia could rupture pipelines to several pressurized tanks containing thousands of gallons of anhydrous fluoride. Because the refinery is located close to population centers, lethal concentrations of the gas would threaten the lives of over 100,000 people downwind of the plume.