

# COMMON FEATURES OF MAJOR DISASTERS

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Any event that results in the loss of human life is disastrous, but most accidents, such as aeroplane and train crashes, are limited in the number of people involved. Conversely, natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, leave in their wake massive destruction over large areas that can transcend national boundaries. All the apparatus of a society that responds to such disasters (the civil administration, emergency services, fire brigades and hospitals) may itself be involved and unable to respond (Figure 33.1). Large numbers of people may require immediate shelter, clean water and food, in addition to any medical needs. A breakdown of communication is inevitable and can be accompanied by widespread panic and disruption of civil order. Access to the disaster area may be limited because of the destruction of bridges, affecting road and rail links.

Massive casualties Damage to infrastructure A large number of people requiring shelter Panic and uncertainty among the population Limited access to the area Breakdown of communication The role and limitations of field hospitals in disaster • The features of conditions peculiar to disaster situations • and their treatment Figure 33.1 Damage to emergency medical services.

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