



# SURVIVING THE STORM: THE DISASTER DEFENSE DIGEST

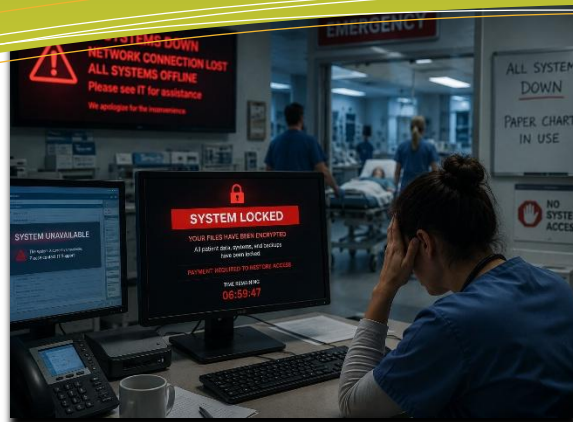
## Monthly Safety Message:

### Cyber Safety Starts with You

Cyberattacks are no longer just a problem for large corporations or government agencies. Every day, individuals, schools, hospitals, and small businesses are targeted through phishing emails, fake websites, malicious links, and stolen passwords. One of the simplest ways to protect yourself is by using strong, unique passwords for every account and enabling multi-factor authentication whenever possible.

Experts also recommend keeping devices and software updated, since many cyberattacks exploit outdated systems with known vulnerabilities. Be cautious of unexpected emails, text messages, or pop-up alerts asking for personal information, even if they appear legitimate. According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), human error remains one of the leading causes of successful cyber intrusions.

Taking a few basic precautions can dramatically reduce your risk. In today's digital world, cybersecurity is not just an IT responsibility. It is an essential part of personal safety and everyday preparedness.



## this issue

When Hackers Strike **P.1**

ERG Book vs. WISER App **P.2**

Preparedness: Paper or Pixels? **P.3**

## When Hackers Strike: The New Face of Disaster

For many people, the word “disaster” brings to mind hurricanes, floods, wildfires, or earthquakes. But some of today’s most damaging disasters arrive quietly, through a computer screen rather than a storm cloud.

Cyberattacks have become one of the fastest-growing threats facing governments, hospitals, utilities, schools, and emergency services across the United States. In many ways, these attacks now function like traditional disasters. They disrupt daily life, damage critical infrastructure, create fear, and can take months to recover from.

Hospitals have also become major targets. Cyberattacks in recent years have disrupted emergency rooms, delayed surgeries, interrupted ambulance routing, and blocked access to medical records. According to the American Hospital Association, cyber incidents can directly impact patient care and create dangerous delays during emergencies.

Unlike natural disasters, cyberattacks are often invisible until the damage is already done. A single phishing email, outdated software program, or weak password can trigger major disruption. Smaller governments and organizations are especially vulnerable because many lack dedicated cybersecurity staff or updated protection systems.

Emergency management agencies are now

treating cyber incidents much like other disasters. Agencies across the country conduct cyber response exercises, backup communication drills, and continuity planning to prepare for digital emergencies. Both FEMA and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) recognize cybersecurity as a critical part of national preparedness.

Modern society depends heavily on digital systems. Electricity, emergency dispatch centers, water systems, transportation, banking, and healthcare all rely on interconnected networks. When those systems fail, the effects can spread quickly through entire communities.

Preparedness remains one of the strongest defenses. Organizations can reduce risk by training employees to recognize suspicious emails, using multi-factor authentication, backing up data regularly, and keeping software updated. Individuals can also help protect themselves by using strong passwords and avoiding unfamiliar links or attachments.

Disasters are changing. Today, some of the most serious threats do not come from nature alone. They come from invisible attacks capable of shutting down the systems communities rely on every day. In the modern world, cybersecurity is no longer just an IT issue. It is a public safety issue.

## Quick Tip:

### Cooling Centers: Planning Before the First Heat Wave

In recent years, the Watch Duty app has become one of the most trusted wildfire information tools available to the public. Designed to provide real-time updates during wildfires and other emergencies, the app delivers fast, reliable information directly from verified sources including firefighters, emergency managers, dispatch communications, and official incident reports. Unlike social media rumors or delayed news updates, Watch Duty focuses on accurate situational awareness during rapidly changing incidents.

One of the biggest advantages of the app is speed. Users can receive evacuation warnings, fire perimeter updates, road closure information, and air quality alerts almost immediately as incidents unfold. The app's interactive maps also help people visualize where fires are moving and whether their homes, workplaces, or travel routes may be affected.

For residents in wildfire-prone areas, Watch Duty has become more than just a news source. It is a preparedness tool that helps families make informed decisions early, before conditions become critical. In emergencies, timely information can save lives, reduce panic, and improve community readiness.



## ERG Book vs. WISER App: Is WISER Actually Wiser?

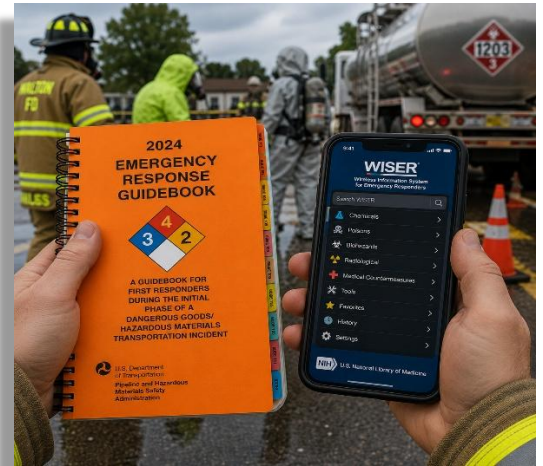
For decades, hazardous materials responders have relied on one small but critical tool during emergencies: the Emergency Response Guidebook, better known as the ERG. The bright orange book can be found in fire engines, ambulances, law enforcement vehicles, industrial sites, and emergency management offices across North America. Designed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the ERG helps first responders quickly identify hazardous materials and determine initial protective actions during transportation incidents.

But in today's digital world, many responders are beginning to ask a new question: is the WISER app actually wiser?

WISER, which stands for Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders, was developed by the National Library of Medicine. Unlike the ERG, WISER is a smartphone and computer-based application that provides digital detailed hazardous materials information, including chemical properties, health effects, protective equipment recommendations, and medical treatment guidance.

At first glance, WISER appears to be the clear winner. The app contains thousands of chemical profiles and allows users to search by UN number, chemical name, symptoms, placards, and even physical characteristics. Responders can access isolation distances, toxicity information, and detailed hazard data within seconds. In many ways, it functions like a digital hazmat library carried in your pocket. The ERG, however, still has major advantages.

One of the biggest strengths of the ERG is simplicity. During a chaotic incident involving fire, leaking chemicals, injured victims, or transportation accidents, responders may not have time to navigate complex screens or search functions. The



ERG was specifically designed for rapid initial actions during the first 30 minutes of an incident. Its color-coded pages and straightforward protective action distances make it easy to use under stress.

Another major advantage is reliability. Cell towers can fail. Batteries die. Apps freeze. Rural areas may have limited connectivity. A physical ERG book does not depend on Wi-Fi, charging cables, or software updates. When technology fails, paper still works.

That said, WISER offers capabilities the ERG simply cannot match. The app provides continuously updated information, mapping features, weather integration, and advanced toxicology data. Medical personnel can use WISER to identify symptoms related to specific chemical exposures, while hazmat teams can access technical details far beyond what the ERG was ever intended to provide. The truth is, this is not really a competition.

The ERG and WISER serve different purposes. The ERG remains one of the best rapid-action field tools ever created for initial response. WISER expands on that foundation by providing deeper technical support once the scene is stabilized. In many incidents, responders may begin with the ERG during the first chaotic moments, then transition to WISER as more information becomes available and specialized resources arrive on scene. Together, the two tools create a stronger and more adaptable response system that combines speed, reliability, and advanced hazard intelligence.

In modern emergency response, the wisest approach may not be choosing one over the other. It may be knowing how and when to use both.

# Preparedness: Paper or Pixels?

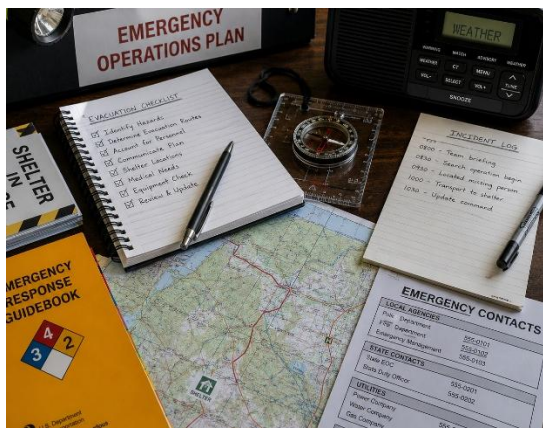
In a world dominated by smartphones, cloud systems, artificial intelligence, and digital communication, analog technology can feel outdated. Yet many emergency management professionals, first responders, and preparedness experts continue to rely on simple analog tools during disasters for one important reason: they are dependable.

Analog technology refers to non-digital systems and devices such as paper maps, printed emergency plans, land navigation tools, hard-copy contact lists, weather radios, handwritten logs, mechanical gauges, and physical reference books. While modern technology has dramatically improved emergency response capabilities, analog systems continue to serve as an important fail-safe layer of preparedness.

One of the biggest advantages of analog tools is simplicity. During high-stress emergencies, people often perform better when information is straightforward and easy to access. A laminated evacuation map, printed checklist, or paper incident command board can often be understood more quickly than navigating multiple digital menus or applications. In emergency situations, reducing complexity can save valuable time.

Analog systems are also less vulnerable to technical failures. Digital systems depend on software, updates, servers, passwords, and network connectivity. Analog tools, by contrast, are not affected by software glitches, cyberattacks, corrupted files, or system crashes. A printed Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG), for example, can still provide hazardous materials guidance regardless of network conditions or device compatibility.

This reliability is one reason many emergency operations centers still maintain physical backups of critical plans and procedures. FEMA's National Incident Management System (NIMS) emphasizes redundancy in emergency communications and operational systems. Redundancy simply means having multiple ways to accomplish the same task if one system fails. Analog technology provides an important layer of that redundancy.



Another major advantage is durability. Paper maps, compasses, dry-erase boards, and printed field guides can often withstand harsh environments where delicate electronics may struggle. Firefighters, search-and-rescue teams, and wildland responders frequently carry waterproof notebooks and printed maps because they remain functional in dirt, smoke, rain, and extreme temperatures.

Analog tools also support better situational awareness in some environments. Studies in cognitive psychology have shown that people often retain and process information differently when reading from paper compared to digital screens. Many responders still prefer printed maps during large incidents because they allow users to quickly visualize terrain, hazards, evacuation routes, and operational divisions all at once without zooming or scrolling.

None of this means digital technology should be avoided. Modern emergency management depends heavily on advanced software, satellite systems, drones, GIS mapping, and real-time communication platforms. However, the strongest preparedness systems recognize that technology works best when layered with reliable backups.

In emergency management, resilience is built through redundancy, adaptability, and practicality. Sometimes the most advanced solution is not replacing older tools, but understanding why those tools have survived for decades. Even in a digital age, analog technology remains one of the most reliable forms of disaster preparedness ever created. The strongest preparedness strategies are often those that combine modern innovation with time-tested tools that continue to perform when clarity, speed, and reliability matter most.

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