

Can we save us from ourselves?

You've probably heard that ex-presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush have been costarring in some public-service announcements lately. In accordance with the first rule of politics (stay on message), the PSAs have a common theme. However, in a potential violation of the second rule (remain positive), the theme, catastrophe, seems to scream negativity.

In January 2005, the isodynamic duo raced to the airwaves in support of tsunami victims. That August the two traded suits for polo shirts to beseech us in the wake of Katrina. Last November, the former leaders of the free world kicked off an "emergency preparedness" campaign by gently imploring their fellow Americans to hunker down.

"Visit ready.gov," Bush coos, "to learn how you can take simple steps to prepare for emergencies."

"A little advanced planning," chimes Clinton right on cue, "can keep you and your family safe."

If you participated in the run-up to Y2K, you know the drill: food, water, meds, blankets, batteries, can-opener, and a wide range of sundries. You'll also find instructions for preparing your workplace for catastrophe and a Spanish translation of the site (at www.listo.gov). Last year an elaborate kids' section appeared. It's geared toward fourth- and fifth-graders, or anyone desirous of fun, games, and a few giggles while bracing for the next fire, flood, flu, or dirty bomb.

The site, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, describes 18 kinds of emergencies in alphabetical order, starting with "Biological Threat" and ending with "Winter Storms." The department suggests you keep a three-day "minimum" supply of whatever you'll need, but it refrains from estimating a maximum amount of time for which the exercise of swiping a credit card might be disrupted. Predictably, the site offers no clues as to what you should do when the Ramen runs out.

The reason for this is that nagging second law of politics. It's hard to remain positive in the face societal breakdown, especially when we are talking about a society so ill-equipped to deal directly with nature. For the same reason, conspicuously absent from the list of potential disasters are threats that could have a long-term effect on our nation, like "Fossil-Fuel-Supply Breakdown," "Devastating Cyber Attack," and "Debt Crisis with China."

Although the gravitas that the former heads-of-state bring to the issue of emergency preparedness is welcome to this permaculturalist, I'm discouraged by the lack of media play that their campaign is getting. This column, buried in your local Real Estate Guide, may be the first you've heard of the Bush-Clinton attempt to save civilization from itself. And, chances are, you won't hear about it again and you'll forget about preparing between now and the next big snow storm — or meltdown upwind in Los Alamos.



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On the bright side, Santa Fe plans a mega-surge for its snowplow fleet. And, on the terror front, at least now we can finally be grateful for that common misconception that New Mexico is not part of the USA.

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