



...notes from Sara Fineman  
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## Emergency Preparedness - The Costa Concordia Cruise Tragedy

How curious things sometimes are!

I have been doing, teaching, reading, and discussing emergency preparedness/response for over 25 years. Some folks call me paranoid when I ask what the back-up to the back-up is... obviously, they haven't seen panic. And then yesterday I was struck with the same feeling I have had before. When will we learn that preparing for an emergency is crucial, because that emergency we believe will never happen because of all the technology we have in place, may just happen? It may only happen once every 10 years, but when the time comes, folks need to be ready!

So why did I start thinking about the parallels of a capsized cruise liner and industrial emergency preparedness?

Yesterday, I heard a news reporter interview a survivor of the Costa Concordia cruise ship, and I couldn't help but draw some parallels between this cruise ship's emergency preparedness program and emergency preparedness I see in industry and communities. The interviewee stated that they were at dinner when the liner ran aground, and they heard a loud noise. For the next hour they were told that there were engine problems. This interviewee knew that with this huge 4,200 passenger cruise ship listing from side to side, dishes flying everywhere, wine and water on the floor that the issue at hand had to be more than engine problems. As she stated, "we had not had our muster station drill, but I knew I had to get out of my dinner gown and high heels." Good for her! Don't get me wrong, I am not condemning anyone on the cruise ship; I believe we all do the best we can with what we have at the time it happens. But, we must learn from the past, in order to improve future outcomes.

What are we hearing now? The life boats on the half-submerged side were not accessible; people were aggressively all trying to get the boats that were accessible (creating other hazards); crew members had no control (or very little from the first accounts); passengers did not get correct information that may have saved lives; and the person who should have been in charge, the captain or master, was already gone.

You can see the parallels. Emergency preparedness is a process – one that must be drilled over and over. If you want folks to act and react, then hands-on drills must be part of it. Carving out the time to accomplish good practice drills for what may happen only once in 10 years becomes more important when it is your loved ones caught up in the emergency. The things that you think will never happen – will! At some point, they will!

Safety Training & Environmental Protection, LLC  
Murray KY  
270-753-6529 [www.stepky.com](http://www.stepky.com)