

Q: Which state is furthest East?



○ FL



○ AK



○ ME



○ VA

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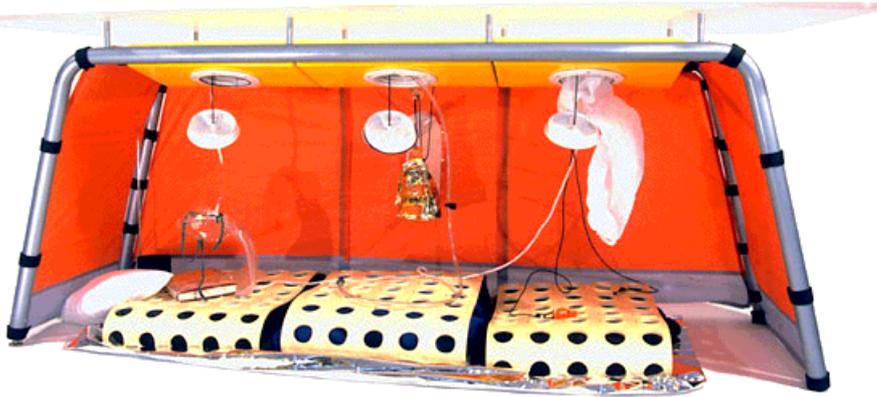
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Can Design Prepare for Disaster?



Beige Design

Beige Design's Undercover Table, converted into shelter.

Published: September 8, 2005

COULD more have been done?" asked Jan Egeland, a United Nations emergency relief co-ordinator, speaking last Friday of the lack of preparedness for the descent of Hurricane Katrina. "I would say every society in the world is not preparing adequately for catastrophic events."

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As the country looks back at the devastation of the last two weeks and forward to another anxiety-provoking anniversary on Sunday - and as the terror attacks in London remain fresh in people's minds - preparedness has become the topic for blogs and backyards.

Beginning Oct. 16, the Museum of Modern Art will examine issues of safety, including emergency preparedness, with its first major design show in its new home. "Safe: Design Takes On Risk," will display products, prototypes and proposals by designers from around the world.

"Safe," conceived in 2001 by Paola Antonelli, a curator at the museum, was delayed because of the Sept. 11 attacks. Now in addition to marking, with an uneasy relevance, the fourth anniversary of those events, the exhibition will address what design can do - or might already be doing or failing to do - to make the world safer. If designers traditionally construct solutions to the problems of everyday life, how have they raised a wall against danger?



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Rob Rogers, Gregg Pasquarelli, Sulan Kolatan, Stefan Sagmeister, Michael Rakowitz, Masamichi Udagawa, Tobias Wong, Paola Antonelli.

In a panel discussion on Aug. 31, William L. Hamilton, a reporter for House & Home, and Tom de Kay, the deputy editor of the section, spoke with Ms. Antonelli and seven designers, five of whom are included in "Safe," about terrorism, subway safety, national identity cards, cataclysmic storms, survivalism and other subjects that are no longer design-school conjecture, but the very real terrain of designers and their work.

Q: A newspaper article noted that a man in New Orleans had to hack a hole in his roof to get up onto it, to wait for help. How do we find ourselves in a situation where houses in a flood zone don't even give you access to your own roof?

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Rob Rogers, partner, Rogers Marvel Architects: When we started dealing with security architecture, we met with this very interesting guy from FEMA who comes in and does analysis after hurricanes, after earthquakes. And he talks about an awareness window of about three years, where, after a catastrophic event, new buildings will respond to whatever the last disaster was, whether it was a hurricane or an earthquake or a terrorist event. And then it just begins to kind of drift because it's nobody's favorite topic. And it begins to slip away.

So it's very episodic and really based on what happened last time, not necessarily what is the most likely event to take place.

Masamichi Udagawa, partner, Antenna Design: In the 50's, I think Japan, Tokyo included, got hit by a few really big typhoons and the city got flooded. I remember seeing a picture from back then, a little boat hanging from the bottom of the roof, preparing for yet another typhoon hitting Tokyo. But nowadays nobody thinks about a typhoon in Tokyo. They all think about earthquakes; just like you mentioned, people respond to what happened last time.

Stefan Sagmeister, principal, Sagmeister Inc., graphic designers: Preparedness is a cultural issue. All of Europe kind of makes fun of Switzerland because they have these fallout shelters and their little chambers in the bridges to explode the bridges in case of an invasion.

Q: After 9/11 there was a lot of talk about the responsibility of designers to push these types of awareness forward. Is it a responsibility of designers to be thinking about these issues if, say, city governments aren't adequately thinking about them?

Michael Rakowitz, artist: I think that sometimes it takes a kind of visibility to make things part of a step forward in the way that design starts to take into consideration safety. In Victor Papanek's "Design for the Real World," there's a great anecdote about car safety in the 1970's, which was totally ignored by Detroit-based companies for a while. In order to raise visibility of the fact that bumper design was not going to cause an increase of, like, \$500 per car if they went ahead and did a better bumper, he sandwiched together beer cans and two shelves and drove it into the Senate building to show that you can make this bumper out of makeshift materials. And that raised a kind of public discussion about design.

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"Safe: Design Takes On Risk" will open at the Museum of Modern Art on Oct. 16 and runs through Jan. 2. For information: (212) 708-9400 or moma.org.

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