# Better Safe Than Sorry

The role of the government during and after disasters is to provide protection and emergency response to its civilians in need. It is a role that governments, however, would prefer not to have to carry out. But being prepared is vital, especially in areas and countries vulnerable to floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis. The response to disasters requires on-the-shelf plans and extensive up-to-date geoinformation that is available at all times. When disaster strikes it is almost always too late.

During and after the recent earthquake and the subsequent tsunami that struck Japan on 11th March 2011, a disaster causing sorrow beyond words for hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens, an unprecedented death toll and many more to lose their homes, the Japanese government stunned the outside world by announcing that they would be able to man the emergency response themselves. To a certain extent it must have been pride, but also the knowledge that disaster management is in good hands in a country with a government and other public bodies so used to dealing with the daily threat of earthquakes and its consequences. The Emergency Mapping Team in Japan is one good example of disaster response that made that Japan was confident that it would be able to cope with the consequences of the disaster in the first days and weeks after the occurrence. Please read the whole story on the Emergency Mapping Team in this issue of *GIM International* (page 29).

Japan is a positive example and hurricane Katrina, that hit New Orleans in 2005, a negative one of how federal and state governments that do not know how to respond adequately should ensure that policy makers consult professionals specialising in geoinformation and disaster management alike; often this is one and the same person, to help in making plans. Plans that will, hopefully, gather dust on shelves but could suddenly become a matter of life and death whenever such unexpected, or not so unexpected, disasters occur. Disaster management is a strategic process in times of non-occurrence of the disasters that it is preparing for, it needs to have a co-ordinating and advisory role and should be implemented at all levels of government. The strategy with regard to geoinformation in disaster management or response plans focuses on the geoinformation that should be available at all times, the geoinformation that needs to be updated every week, month or year and last, but not least, in these times of cutbacks, the information that does not need to be updated or stored at all.

Obviously all these strategic decisions will have an impact on the accessibility of the geoinformation gathered by the government. They may even have an impact on the way industry presents the different kinds of geoinformation. Exchanging ideas will provide for the onset of such developments. A strong appeal should therefore be made to governments to include geoinformation as a key factor in disaster management and an equally strong appeal should be made to industry to show governments the power of geoinformation so that they will be able to take their responsibility. Although a terrible cliché and not always possible - there's not much after all that we can do about earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis - it is above all, better to be safe than sorry.