

EENS 204/605	Natural Disasters
Prof. Stephen A. Nelson	Tulane University
The Disaster Summary	

This page last updated on 28-Aug-2008

As noted in the syllabus, the Disaster Summary is worth 15% of your grade and is to be turned in on the last day of class. The disaster Summary should only consider **natural** disasters, that is those that occur without the aid of humans. Such things as oil and toxic materials spills, airplane crashes (unless caused by something like a hurricane or volcanic eruption), and human induced explosions should not be considered.

The Disaster Summary will consist of information, as outlined below, on the 12 worst disasters that have occurred during the time period of the course (August 28 to December 4, 2008). The worst disasters will be those with the greatest number of casualties and/or economic damage. It is possible that each student's summary of the worst 12 disasters will differ as in some cases not enough information is available to determine the actual economic damage. In order to come up with the worst 12, each student will have to keep track of all disasters throughout the time period of the course, then in the days before the summary is due, determine which of the disasters are among the worst 12. Helpful hints on how to keep track of the world's disasters using the internet will be provided in the first homework assignment. Still, you should keep in mind that disasters with only one or two casualties and/or one or two damaged structures are not likely to be among the worst 12, and thus can probably be safely ignored when you come across such events. I have found that using news subscription services such as those available on google.com and/or yahoo.com which send you email based on key words, is the best way to keep updated on a daily basis of disasters throughout the world. I use key words like - disaster, cyclone, hurricane, tornado, sinkhole, landslide, mudslide, eruption, wildfire, earthquake, etc. Although these generate lots of email, you can quickly read the summaries to determine which ones have the potential for being among the 12 worst. You can then go to the links for these potentially worst disasters, print the web pages, and keep them for ultimately determining the worst disasters.

Note that not all information on a disaster usually comes out with the first news release. In other words, let's imagine that there is flood that begins somewhere on September 17th . On the first day 250 homes are flooded resulting in 40 million dollars in property damage, with no lives lost. But the flooding continues for another two weeks. Each day the news media reports new events, such as number of new homes flooded, number of lives lost, loss estimates in various towns, etc. You should try to keep track of all of this information for your summary. What you will turn in at the end of the course in your Disaster Summary is a summary of the entire disaster, rather than the notes you keep to compile this summary.

Note also that events like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that occur in sparsely populated areas, even though they may be large events, if they don't cause casualties or property damage, are not likely to be among the 12 worst disasters. A disaster like a drought is also difficult to keep track of because they have no beginning date, a fuzzy ending date, and damage estimates only come out sporadically. Because of this, the instructors summary of the 12 worst disasters

does not usually include droughts.

Any disaster that is ongoing at the beginning of the semester is to be considered part of the assignment.. For any disaster that begins during the semester, but is not completely finished by the end of the semester, you should report as much information that is available up to the deadline to turn in the log.

The final disaster summary **must be typewritten** and should include the following information

- **Location of the Disaster** (be careful here - countries like Indonesia, Russia, and China are large countries, so just reporting the country name is not a sufficient location).
- **Type of Disaster** (i.e hurricane, earthquake, eruption, landslide, etc.)
- **Beginning and ending dates and times of the disaster**
- **A description of the disaster and a short statement as to the cause of the disaster**
- **The total economic loss due to property damage, lost business, downtime, cleanup, and recovery etc., if available** (in dollars). If a monetary figure is not available, provide information on such things as the number of structures destroyed, the number of people affected, the number of acres destroyed, number of livestock destroyed, etc.
- **The total number of human casualties** (injuries and deaths)
- **Sources of information** (Newspaper and magazine articles, television and radio reports, and internet URLs)
- **Mitigation** - A well thought out statement of what, if anything could have been done by humans to have prevented or reduced the economic damage and number of casualties for each disaster. This mitigation statement will be a significant part of your grade on this assignment.

Although you may work with others on this log, **the final work must be yours, in your own words**. Thus, exact duplicates or logs that are copied word for word from another person will be considered a violation of the honor code.

The Disaster Summary must be in **chronological order** (earliest to latest) as near as is possible. Part of the grade will be based on the ease with which the instructor can read and grade the summary - **appearance will count**. Do not turn in binders or covers. Stapled sheets of paper are all that is required. Binders and covers make it more difficult for the instructor to stack the summaries without them sliding off the table. Use a 12 point type face. If the instructor has to dig out a magnifying glass to read the disaster summary, he will not be inclined to award points for ease of reading and grading.

[Obtain a PDF version of this page](#)

[Return to EENS 204 Homepage](#)