Phases of Disaster Recovery

First is the Heroic phase, which typically occurs at the time of impact and in the immediate period after the event. Survivors feel a sense of togetherness – if we can, we are helping our families and neighbors in the immediate aftermath. Emotions can be quite intense during this phase when there is a greater sense of community and working together to save lives and property.

The second Honeymoon phase typically occurs within the first few days and can last for up to a several months and sometimes longer. In this phase there is a strong sense of having shared experiences, lived through it, and, of particular significance, is the expectation that those responsible for helping in the recovery will provide us with rapid and significant assistance. People are taking action to rescue survivors and protect and recover property, and, possibly, forming local neighborhood and community groups to support each other.

The third phase is the Disillusionment phase. This particular phase can last from about two months and up to several years. During this phase survivors may be feeling a growing disappointment, anger, and even bitterness as the initial promises made to them, are not fulfilled due to significant delays or outright unfulfilled promises of aid.

It is during this phase that people realize that they have to concentrate on rebuilding their own lives. Perhaps a neighbor’s insurance company is treating them better and they have a new home built on the site of the old one – while another had to hire an attorney and is bogged down by a prolonged legal process.
People may also feel further abandoned as, by this time, the major relief agencies such as ARC, the Salvation Army, and FEMA have begun to pull out of the area. This forces the survivors to find alternate resources.

The fourth phase is the **Reconstruction** phase. This can last for several years after the disaster. Survivors now realize that they are mostly on their own. The community is starting to come back. If recovery efforts are still being delayed, there is the real possibility that emotional problems may occur and linger.

In this phase people have almost completely taken over efforts to recover. It is also possible that community groups who plan to stay for the long term are forming. A new activism can occur.

The final phase is the **Recovery** phase. This phase occurs when homes and infrastructure are up and running. Survivors have adapted to the *new normal* of their lives and have resumed as many of their normal routines as possible that they enjoyed prior to the disaster.