



earthquakes and volcanoes. Only 17 percent were insured. Determining losses with a higher degree of accuracy is impossible because the United States has not established a systematic reporting method or a single repository for the data. Further, these numbers do not include indirect costs such as downtime for businesses, lost employment, environmental damage, or emotional effects on victims. Most of these losses result from events too small to qualify for federal assistance, and most are not insured, so victims must bear the costs. ••• Seven of the ten most costly disasters—based on dollar losses—in U.S. history occurred between 1989 and 1994. In fact, since 1989 the nation has frequently entered periods in which losses from catastrophic natural disasters averaged about \$1 billion per week. The dramatic increase in disaster losses is expected to continue. ••• Many of the harshest recent disasters could have been far worse: had Hurricane Andrew been slower and wetter or torn through downtown Miami, for example, it would have wreaked devastation even more profound than the damage it did inflict. And the most catastrophic likely events, including a great earthquake in the Los Angeles area, have not yet occurred. Such a disaster would cause up to 5,000 deaths, 15,000 serious injuries, and \$250 billion in direct economic losses.

