

A Brookings report, [The Year that Shook the Rich: A Review of Natural Disasters in 2011](#), points out that 2011 was the worst year in history in terms of costly natural disasters:

2011 was the most expensive year in terms of disaster losses in history, mostly because of a spate of disasters affecting developed countries. Globally, the economic cost of disasters in 2011 was \$380 billion, of which \$210 billion were the result of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. This was 72 percent higher than the losses in 2005, the second costliest year in history of disaster-related losses.

The report also draws an interesting connection with demographic trends. In most developed countries, the population is rapidly graying due to declining birthrates and longer life expectancies. This means that a greater percentage are elderly. The elderly are particularly vulnerable to disasters. This fact has been clear for years. In the 1995 Chicago heat wave, almost three-quarters of the victims were over sixty-five. In Hurricane Katrina, over forty percent of the dead were over seventy. Thus, it is hard to take issue with the view that, in developed countries especially, disaster management needs to attend to the special needs of the older population.

Brookings has made disasters an ongoing research focus. These [papers](#) should be an important resource for anyone with an interest in disaster issues.