

## **Candice Abinanti**

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**Candice Abinanti** is an International Relations Specialist for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Candice works in the International Affairs Division, part of the Office of External Affairs at FEMA's headquarters in Washington, D.C. where she manages projects and coordinates collaborative activities with international and interagency partners.

Before joining the International Affairs Division, Candice worked for the FEMA Region I Mitigation Division in Boston. There she supported several national hazard mitigation grant programs and worked closely with State emergency management partners in New England. Candice has deployed to disasters throughout the United States as a hazard mitigation and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist. In these capacities she supported the TOPOFF 3 national level exercise, the 2004 Republican and Democratic National Conventions, FEMA's response to the California wildfires in November 2003, and Hurricane Katrina recovery in Mississippi in 2005.

Prior to joining FEMA, Candice worked for the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. Earlier, she worked in the private sector for an educational travel company.

In 2006, Candice earned a Master of Arts degree in Sustainable Development from the School for International Training while living in Sri Lanka following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Candice holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and a Certificate of Study in International Relations from the University of Massachusetts.

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### **Mega-City/Mega-Disaster Reduction**

I grew up in the northeastern part of the U.S., where “small talk” with strangers and acquaintances typically includes much reference to the weather. The northeast is characterized by four distinct seasons and a long, cold, and damp winter. To me, this constant chatter about the weather reflects the understanding of a group of people aware that they are both part of and dependent upon their natural environment, not removed from it, as I often sense in our Mega-Cities.

With their robust infrastructure and buildings, Mega-Cities are human-made environments which I’ve observed have a tendency to distance their inhabitants from the natural environment and insulate them from its day-to-day variations and hazards through controlled indoor environments and engineered routes to move people and trade into, around, and out of the city expeditiously. Faced with a Mega-Disaster, a challenge I see for existing and emerging Mega-Cities is strengthening their inhabitants’ awareness and understanding of the changing natural environment their city remains a part of, and leveraging that increased knowledge to socially prepare and physically re-envision more hazard resilient and adaptable cities.

In visualizing what tomorrow’s more hazard resilient and adaptable Mega-Cities could look like, I think of cities of yesterday, the social systems, buildings, and infrastructure they are comprised of as relatively rigid, absorbing stress and force. I visualize cities of tomorrow with buildings and infrastructure more capable of flexing against environmental stresses and deflecting force, and systems more readily capable of adapting to change with minimal energy expenditure. Some examples of the science and technology that may comprise these cities of tomorrow already exist today for us to borrow and build upon.

- Floating homes and communities in the Netherlands that rise with flood waters.<sup>1</sup>
- Building and site design incorporating both traditional and modern ideas for increasing hazard resilience and energy efficiency and minimizing environmental impact. For example: thick walls high in thermal mass painted white, as in southern Europe, to reflect and absorb heat, and “green roofs” and roof gardens to reduce storm water runoff and cool the air.<sup>2</sup>

There is a saying that the tree that survives the hurricane is the one that’s learned to bend. I believe that Mega-Cities cognizant of the environment they are a part of, and equipped with social systems and infrastructure inherently capable of flexing to the stresses of that environment, will be the ones that withstand the Mega-Disasters of tomorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> Evans-Pritchard, Ambrose. (2004, September 8). Dutch find a cure for rising damp - a town full of floating houses. *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved April 5, 2010 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/netherlands/1471274/Dutch-find-a-cure-for-rising-damp-a-town-full-of-floating-houses.html>

<sup>2</sup> Lonsdale, Sarah. (2009, August 19). Eco home sweet home of the future? *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved April 5, 2010 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/6042750/Eco-home-sweet-home-of-the-future.html>