In an effort to create safe and secure commorancies in many disaster prone states in the country, the federal government has undoubtedly increased the potential for increased devastation in the event of the same disasters that they try to mitigate. This has resulted in an observed escalation of recovery and response cost far exceeding the cost of inputs in mitigation efforts that the federal government provides. Burby in “Katrina and the Paradoxes of Government Disaster Policy” asserts that “Federal policy has had its intended effect of facilitating ad sustaining development in hazardous areas” but these efforts in particular in New Orleans contributed a great deal to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Wetlands became habitable after several Federal safe development policies created the path and as a result rendered a lot of these developments in harms way in the event of the occurrence of any major disaster such as Katrina.

Local governments cannot be left out of the loop too. There is evidence to suggest that local government policies or lack thereof has proven equally damaging in disastrous events. Burby makes mention of a New Orleans local government officials who resisted proposals to protect their communities from storms because they refused to pay their share of Federal projects intended for that purpose. Many scholars believe that Moral Hazard can be an explanatory factor in some local government’s lackadaisical attitude towards effective disaster policies. What will be the incentive to pursue prudent policies if property is insured and the Federal government will aid in rebuilding and recovery efforts? Not much, since people are always prepared to undertake risk if they are not liable for the resultant cost.
But the shortfall of Federal safe development policies should not in any way diminish the importance of mitigation policies in the United States. FEMA spent $25.4 Million from 1990 to 1999 in this country (Haddow, Bullock, Coppola, 75) and this decade has already witnessed outstanding damages and monetary cost from Katrina alone. Mitigation provides the means for reducing such damages, and this can be achieved through Federal policies that will reduce the burden of disasters and not to escalate them and to commit local governments to embrace disaster mitigation and planning efforts and not to shun them. Hazard identification and mapping, design and construction applications, proper land use and planning, structural controls should be taken into account in drafting effective disaster policies. Burby makes a good point on amending to the Flood Insurance Act for example, to insure communities and not individuals and businesses with local governments paying the premiums. This change in the program according to him will have the following beneficial results; 1) All flood prone dwellings will be covered instead of a few establishments which bought the insurance coverage. 2) Incentives and benefits for community participation will arouse interest. 3) The cost of coverage for example will spur local governments to embrace policies that will help reduce the risk of lose by carefully scrutinizing development and redevelopment efforts in disaster prone areas and lastly 4) It will help the National Flood Insurance Program properly assign risk and the premiums they attract. This act will align Federal and local government mitigation policies and also increase the involvement of local government bodies in mitigation efforts.

It is also important to recognize the importance of planning in disaster policy making. Land use planning can be a powerful tool for reducing losses from natural disasters. (Burby, Raymond J - “Unleashing the power of planning to create disaster resistant communities”). Land use planning can refocus development efforts to less risk prone areas helping to reduce losses and also allows the federal and local governments to realign misplaced objectives to pursue a more proactive approach that will put greater emphasis on mitigation.

All the readings shed light on the importance of mitigation in the right context and by right context, I mean that policies should be aimed at efforts that will build disaster resistant communities and not otherwise.