

Project Overview

From 1492 to Present

The goal of this project, is to be the most accurate and complete compilation on Large-Loss-of-Life Events in American History (10 or more lives lost). We prefer to view what the reader sees, as a work in progress, that we intend to continually amend as more sources become available.

To date, more than 5,400 events - which have taken ten or more lives and over 400 others taking fewer than ten (such as the space shuttle disasters and some terrorism incidents) – have been compiled. This document is believed to be in the 90+ percentile range of large loss-of-life events. The researcher currently has a “To Do” list consisting of possible events to include in the future, most of which relate to conflict between Whites and Native Americans, as well as epidemics.

The “Chronology” document contains events in numerical order from 1492 to present. These events are written as one-liners in the Chronology document and are then cut-and-pasted into a “Typology” document. This later document is a systematic classification of events so that they can be grouped, reviewed and compared for research.

The Typology document is much longer than the Chronology document because most events are listed twice – such as hurricanes – are listed in chronological order and then by mortality. In addition, some events are cross-listed. For example, a fire in a hotel set by an arsonist would be listed in the Structural Fires typology within the Hotels/Motels sub typology and would be cross listed in the Violence typology under Arson.

Next, the Chronological entries are cut-and paste into a State document which lists all fifty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico alphabetically. Thus, to the extent of our current state of knowledge, we show in chronological order every large-loss-of live event for every state of the Union plus DC and Puerto Rico.

For events with 500 or more fatalities, we move the one-line next into a Mortality document showing in order, from the most fatal down to 500 fatalities, all such events.

We use the information in the Typology and State documents to put together what we refer to as a “Rank-Ordering within Types of Large Loss-of-Live Events by State” document. The types are listed alphabetically. The States are then listed by event totals. Thus, one can look under “Avalanche/Snowslide” and see, in order, the state with the largest number of such events taking ten or more lives, down to the states showing just one such event. This continues for over twenty-five pages to end on “Wood Alcohol Poisoning” as a large-loss-of-life type.

The information in the above-mentioned document is used to create a one-page summary Chart entitled “Large Loss-of-Life Events by Type and the State with the Largest

Number of such Events.” The event types are listed alphabetically. In the column to the right of the event type is the name of the State which has experienced the largest number of 10-or-more-lives-lost events, and then in the next column, the number of such events.

To give more information, we have put together for many of the events listed a Microsoft Word narrative document starting with the one-liner and then providing anything from a one-paragraph description to many dozens of pages on the event, using quoted language from identified sources, and including a listing of all sources used. This documentation totals more than 14,000 pages.

Considering that the Narratives contain information on more than 5,800 events, this averages just a bit more than three pages per event. This is not, on average, a great deal of information, but it is not our mission to write histories of all “disaster” events in American/U.S. history, but to chronicle the existence of all such events and to try to determine as best we can the number of people killed (or failing that, a range of deaths). Most large loss-of-life events have, after-all, for most intents and purposes, been lost to history.

Finally, information from the Chronology is currently being populated into an Excel Spreadsheet to offer another way to access the information.