

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

In July of 1986 the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), a 16,000 member public interest and professional association, formally approved creation of a "Section on Emergency Management." Funded from the modest section dues of ASPA members who elect to join the section, Emergency Management got off to more than 260 and continues to grow. The section charter calls for it "to encourage and promote sound formulation, execution, and oversight of policies and programs related to emergency management." To do this, it is to encourage research "which will improve the quality of emergency management thereby reducing risk to the public and their property." It is also supposed to provide research, in collaboration with other organizations... to expand knowledge and improve the practices of emergency management." It is in this spirit that we, members of the ASPA Section on Emergency Management, submit this issue of the *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to the regular editors of this journal and to the Board of the Research Committee on Disasters of the International Sociological Association (ISA) for extending to us the opportunity to write, referee, and edit this issue. It is our sincere hope that the bond that this forms will yield benefits to the members of the ISA Research Committee on Disasters and to the members of the ASPA Section of Emergency Management.

The opening article by Llewellyn Toulmin, Charles Givans, and Deborah Steel, demonstrates that disaster communications are complicated by the phenomenon of intergovernmental distance. Distance here is in an organizational, rather than spatial, sense. They show convincingly that the successive entry of organizations into disaster response tends to increase communications complexity in exponential, not simply arithmetic, terms. They also argue that organizations that seldom interact with each other before the disaster event, frequently evidence the greatest inter-organization communications problems. Beyond this, they also examine the way in which U.S. "picket fence" federalism adds

another dimension to disaster communication. Their work is graphically illuminating and mathematically incisive.

Josephine M. LaPlante and J. Stephen Kroll-Smith bring the problems of chronic technological disaster to our attention. "Technological" refers to human-caused and "chronic" refers to long-running, protracted events. Together they denote often insidious, or suspected but as yet unproven threats to humans. The rubric encompasses newly discovered hazardous waste dumps, underground mine fires, and prolonged, serious local pollution threats to public health. The authors explain ways in which chronic technological disaster differs from "episodic" natural and technological disaster, particularly in the realm of victim response. Their findings seek to link disaster sociology and emergency management in a way that affords better appreciation of chronic technological threat.

In her article about improving medical preparedness for chemical accidents, Linda Young Landesman asks us to consider whether our local emergency management and emergency medical communities are ready to handle a chemical disaster similar to Bhopal's. She examines why health sector preparedness for chemical accidents is essential and she furnishes reasons why medical preparedness for chemical accidents has been unsatisfactory. Her pleas for community risk assessments and mapping, medical resource compendiums, local vulnerability studies, and environmental audits are weaved into her argument for improving the marriage of emergency managers and emergency medical service (EMS) professionals. Her study is topical because it addresses the U.S. Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, alias SARA. That law compels much more local EMS and hospital preparedness for chemical disasters.

Gilbert B. Siegel's study of seismic mitigation in U.S. Pacific basin seaports and harbors is both intriguing and enlightening. He reminds us that seaports are important components of coastal infrastructure that may also be vulnerable to earthquake and tsunami damage, especially so in the U.S. Pacific basin. Based on a survey, an expert opinion analysis, and a previously published case study, Siegel considers both the structural (read engineering) and non-structural (read land-use control) dimensions of port seismic mitigation. His findings lead him to call for more risk analysis, better evaluation of proposed seaport sites, improved

dissemination of port-related earthquake mitigation technology, and federally-mandated port building codes. He believes that the ports of his study remain highly vulnerable to earthquake and tsunami damage.

Professor Louise K. Comfort edited the entire book review section of this issue. Professor Josephine LaPlante ably co-edited this issue with me. LaPlante and Comfort deserve immense credit. Note that the LaPlante/Kroll-Smith article survived the same conventional anonymous refereeing process that the other articles in this issue did. In closing, it is my hope that the Section on Emergency Management will be able to produce more issues of this journal in future years and that the amicable bond of section members and ISA Research Committee on Disaster members started by this editorial opportunity, will continue and strengthen.

*Richard T. Sylves,
Guest Editor*