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A Review of Introduction to Emergency Management

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Abstract

This is a review of the 2nd edition of *Introduction to Emergency Management* by George Haddow and Jane Bullock (2006). Overall the book covers the emergency management practices and issues common in the United States today. It has expanded discussion of the events and repercussions of September 11, 2001 but does not discuss Hurricane Katrina's impact in 2005. The authors' experiences are put to good use, especially in discussing the history and future of emergency management, but editorial problems hinder the book's application in an academic setting. The book contains several case studies and other resources that will be of interest to emergency management practitioners.

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George Haddow and Jane Bullock have updated their first edition of *Introduction to Emergency Management* (2003) with discussion of the events of the intervening years. In particular there is some coverage of the 2004 Asian Earthquake and Tsunami as well as more fall out from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The book, though published in 2006, does not capture the effects of the 2005/06 hurricane season, especially the incredible social and economic impacts of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities. This is not meant as an unfair criticism, as the writing and publishing cycle will potentially leave a gap such as this, but the inclusion of these events would have increased the value of the book. Perhaps this edition will serve as a snapshot of the pre-Katrina situation should significant restructuring of the American emergency management system occur as it appears to be heading. Given the authors' previous roles within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), this may be the book's greatest strength.

The intent of the book, according to the authors' introduction, is "to provide the reader with a comprehensive foundation on the background, components and systems involved in the management of disasters and other emergencies"(p. xi). While the book does cover a wide range of topics, it is not written as an introductory textbook to the study of emergency management. In his foreword James Lee Witt describes it as a guide to emergency management, and this may be a more accurate assessment of the content. This is an introduction to emergency management as it is currently practiced, primarily in the United States at the federal level, not an academic textbook on the broader field of study.

The main reason this book would not be appropriate in an academic setting is the exclusion of theoretical perspectives and very limited referencing of the extensive hazard and disaster studies literature. Researchers have greatly increased our understanding of how emergencies and disasters affect communities and how our society manages those effects. While it is not reasonable to expect

any author to incorporate all the research that is currently available in the field, it is hard to see how so many significant contributors could all be missed entirely. Some excellent books could have been referenced to link the reader to the research literature, such as *Facing the Unexpected* by Tierney, Lindell and Perry (2001). Despite the rhetoric common in the field about closing the gap between research and practice and about making emergency management an evidence-based, academically grounded profession, the authors, both of whom are professors in a university disaster management program, do not make the most of this opportunity.

Instead of from the academic literature, this book draws heavily from government sources available through the Internet. Perhaps it could serve to support someone taking FEMA's on-line Independent Study Programs, but it would fall short in a more academic setting. At 336 pages plus appendices, it is too long to serve as an orientation tool for elected officials or upper level managers with emergency management oversight responsibilities. Clear and consistent chapter summaries or other formatting approaches would be useful to highlight the most important information for such an audience.

The other drawback for someone looking to use this book as an educational tool is the inconsistent referencing and presentation styles. The reference section appears to be following one format. However, there are examples of several other referencing styles in use throughout the book. The case studies in Chapter 6, for example, use at least three different styles. The degree to which certain sections are direct quotes is also unclear because of the referencing. The CDC fact sheet on Anthrax is directly reproduced as a page-long quote in a box with the phrase "Source: www.cdc.gov" in the corner (p.50). Later in the book this same referencing style is used to indicate a piece of text that has been paraphrased from the original source. This type of citation makes it difficult for the student-reader to connect information with the original author, for the instructor-reader to promote good referencing practices, and for the research-reader to follow up on the ideas presented.

Overall the book follows a fairly straightforward path to present the main topics. There are ten chapters covering the history of emergency management: hazard and risk assessment, mitigation, response, recovery, preparedness, communications, international issues, terrorism, and finally a view of the future. Several appendices are also included to direct the reader to other resources though many of these, especially the websites, may be time sensitive. The book is indexed to assist readers to find specific topics.

Each chapter is further divided up into subtopics. These are often supported by material in gray text boxes, some of which run for several pages, that usually incorporate information from other sources. Sometimes these boxes are titled and referred to in the text while other times they seem to just float in support of the

surrounding text. The book also includes a variety of pictures, figures, and tables, but unfortunately referencing errors make it difficult to achieve the full value of resources (e.g., in Chapter 2 there are references in the text to tables 2.8 and 2.10 but there are no correspondingly numbered tables and no reference anywhere to a table 2.9). These editorial oversights disrupt the flow of the work and hinder the reader's ability to see the figures and tables as supporting the authors' ideas.

In addition, Chapters 3 through 9 end with case studies. These vary in detail and presentation. Some are simply short examples drawn from the FEMA website or similar sources, while others are long, independently authored pieces complete with separate references. The authors provide these case studies, as with the text boxes mentioned earlier, to give the reader practical examples of the issues being discussed in the chapter. There is no clear effort, however, to take these examples to the level of a case study by providing separate analysis of why one particular set of circumstances represents a best practice or contains lessons for the reader.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history of emergency management in the United States and perhaps the best opportunity for the authors to apply their personal experiences in the upper echelons of FEMA. While the opening comment, that the story of Moses parting the Red Sea is an example of flood control, may have the reader wondering about the authors' perspective, the chapter then settles into a fair presentation of how the field has developed. There is a gap between the discussion of the 1930's flood control projects and the introduction of the Cold War's influence that undervalues the importance of Second World War civil defense measures in establishing the role of civilian involvement. Later in the chapter the authors are able to recount more firsthand experiences in what they refer to as "The Witt Revolution." This includes some interesting reminders of then Senator Al Gore's criticisms of FEMA in the 1980's but the authors do not indicate if Gore's interests later influenced President Clinton's decisions regarding the appointment of James Lee Witt and his elevation to Cabinet. The chapter ends with what has turned out to be a near prophetic comment about the preoccupation with terrorism within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leading to trouble should the country be struck by a significant natural disaster.

The middle chapters are each brief overviews of topics that stand alone in other books, but such is the nature of an introductory text. The chapter on hazards and risk assessment reduces the discussion of some hazards, such as flooding or earthquakes, to a few pages each, while others, like winter storms or nuclear accidents, only warrant a few paragraphs. The degree of coverage does not seem to reflect any particular risk ranking. Furthermore the division of natural vs. technological hazards forces the authors to make difficult decisions, such as using structural dam failures as a natural hazard example and describing lightning induced fires as a technological hazard, which muddy the distinction. This same

problem arises in Chapter 3, when they choose to use terrorism as an example of why they believe mitigation of technological hazards is more difficult than of natural hazards.

Chapter 3 also contains a poignant if unintended lesson. In explaining the problems associated with structural mitigation, the authors point to the failure of the levees in the 1993 Midwest floods as signaling a move away from dependence on such techniques. The authors then use pre-Katrina New Orleans as an example of where “levees can be used effectively” because other methods are impractical (p. 62). Ironically in the very next section, “Impediments to Mitigation,” they discuss the how local officials need to weigh the “economic, social and political costs of not dealing with their risks” (p. 62). Perhaps New Orleans will shift to become an example of this issue in future editions.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 cover the response, recovery and preparedness systems with an emphasis on current government processes and programs. Some new case studies, such as the Columbia Shuttle crash, provide more recent examples of these programs in action. Chapter 7 looks at how communications are involved in the four phases. Unfortunately the discussion of International Disaster Management (Chapter 8) appears unchanged from the 2003 edition despite the lessons coming out of the Indian Ocean tsunami. Chapter 9 contains the most comprehensive updating, almost doubling in length from the first edition, with discussion of the organizational and legislative changes resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The final chapter, The Future of Emergency Management, also gives the authors the opportunity to extrapolate their experiences and insights as FEMA executives. They again express their belief that the 2005 DHS version of FEMA is repeating the mistakes of the past – replicating the imbalance and disjointedness of effort that preceded the formation of FEMA and its early focus on nuclear war. They offer four lessons for the emergency management community: maintain an all-hazards approach; trust the viability of the federal response infrastructure; continue (or perhaps they mean return to) the concepts promoted during the Witt years; and make mitigation the focus of emergency management. This last lesson represents increased importance for mitigation from the three lessons presented in their first edition.

Haddow and Bullock continue in the last chapter to provide recommendations for the future growth of emergency management. Again they draw on the successes of FEMA during their tenure as justifications for these future directions. Of these the most challenging idea, and in turn perhaps the most exciting, is to engage citizens in emergency management planning and decision-making at the most fundamental stages, rather than just as placing expectations on them for preparedness and response. This will not only require a change in the planning process, but also it will require a change in how emergency managers view their

own role in that process – a change which, if realized, is likely to have further reaching consequences for the profession than even the recent disasters. This is alluded to in the section titled “A New Path for Emergency Management,” in which Haddow and Bullock describe the roles government officials will be engaged in to achieve this (pp. 335 - 336). The authors conclude by contrasting the hopes of this “new breed of emergency management professionals” with the “emergency management establishment” that they see as potentially heading in the wrong direction.

The strongest sections of this book are when Haddow and Bullock discuss the organizational structure, politics and management of emergency management. This allows them to pass on their best insights and capitalize on their “real-world” experiences within the system, something academic writers are sometimes criticized for lacking. The weakest sections are when they depend too heavily on government websites for information and fail to connect to the research literature. Overall the book does achieve its goal of providing a “working knowledge of how the functions of emergency management operate” (p. xi) though it will have the greatest value for a reader who already has some grounding in disaster and emergency studies.

REFERENCES

Tierney, Kathleen, Michael Lindell and Ronald Perry, *Facing the Unexpected*, 2001, Joseph Henry Press, Washington D.C.