Kelman, I. 2005. "Volcanology Ethics". <u>Cities and Volcanoes Commission Newsletter</u>, December 2005, p. 2.

Full Text:

In the last newsletter (September 2005), I suggested that the role of volcanologists is to serve society. The fundamental driver of this sentiment is ethics, "the science of morals" according to the Oxford English Dictionary. How often do volcanologists, theoretical or applied, consider the ethical implications of their work, their results, and publicising their results?

For the latter, academics receive credit for authoring peer reviewed papers along with citations of those papers. Yet volcanologists know well the potential pitfalls of taking robust research publicly available. Accusations abound that property values will fall due to detailed risk analyses—fears which are usually unfounded. People moving away from a risky or rumbling volcano can become more exposed to disease, crime, and stress.

At the operational level, IAVCEI has made progress towards addressing ethics, through documents such as "Professional Conduct of Scientists During Volcanic Crises" (1999, Bulletin of Volcanology, 60: 323-334) and "Safety Recommendations for Volcanologists and the Public" (1994, IAVCEI website). How much work has been completed regarding volcanologists' adherence to these recommendations? Who is monitoring volcanologists' conduct during research or volcanic crises?

But what would be the ethics of independent external observers watching over volcanologists' actions? Could honest analyses and evidence-based decision making be compromised through worry of violating a theoretical ethical principle in a paper document? Would volcanologists feel that they should no longer contribute to ongoing crises, reducing the knowledge base of erupting volcanoes while leaving inexperienced non-scientists to monitor activity?

Answering these questions is not straightforward and competing interests inevitably produce competing solutions. Consistent answers might not be available. At minimum, we have a duty to accept such ethical questions as central to our work while trying to answer them as thoroughly as feasible.

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