

Kelman, I. 2007. "Where are the people?" Cities and Volcanoes Commission Newsletter, September 2007, p. 2.

### Full Text

Volcanology continues to contribute to and learn from research, policy, and practice related to other environmental phenomena, including floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and tsunamis. In fact, due to the fascinating variety of phenomena which volcanoes produce, overlaps are inevitably present. Studies on pyroclastic flows picking up loose objects in a city inform and learn from wind storm studies. Lahar and jökulhlaup damage has direct analogues to flood damage.

In such exchanges, volcanology can also learn from others' mistakes. At one recent conference, I heard an American presenter explain that a good example of recovery in Thailand after the 26 December 2004 tsunami was that the Starbucks was open in his case study site. I suggested that the lack of local livelihoods and the reliance on external income could perhaps be contributing factors to the root causes of vulnerability which caused the tsunami disaster in the first place. His response: "I don't mind a Starbucks in Thailand". But what about the Thais? Especially those who moved to the coast in order to serve tourists and were thus vulnerable to the tsunami.

I have seen colourful PowerPoint presentations extolling the virtues of detailed GIS maps for analysing critical infrastructure vulnerability – without mention of schools and hospitals. One GIS-based loss model for earthquakes and floods did not include deaths and injuries because, according to the presenter, casualties were too difficult to consider, so they were assigned a loss value of zero.

For society, a disaster does not happen without disruption to people, communities, and/or livelihoods – or elements of those, including infrastructure and buildings. We must never forget that the innovative work and challenging practical situations inherent in volcanology contribute directly to making people, communities, and livelihoods safer. In our work, they should never be far from our thoughts.

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