



Canadian Risk & Hazards  
Network  
(Knowledge and Practice)

[www.crhnet.ca](http://www.crhnet.ca)

*HazNet*

Réseau canadien d'étude des  
des risques et dangers  
(connaissances et pratiques)

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## WELCOME FROM THE CO- PRESIDENTS

### Welcome to this edition of HazNet.

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu reputedly stated that “the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step”. Like you, I can relate. Many projects were often started with much trepidation about their magnitude, direction, potential outcome, or implementation process. But then, through solid planning, determination, and courage (to face the risks), they were completed ... often, one step at the time.

An example of this approach was recently illustrated by the village of Cumberland, located on British Columbia's Vancouver Island. This small village decided to dedicate the fall/winter issue of its quarterly magazine – Cumberland Now, to emergency management. From the start, Cumberland decided that it would create a publication that would be circulated to municipal officials across BC, and possibly Canada, to assist them to better understand emergency management, and thereby better prepare for disaster.

Cumberland reached out to the academic and practitioner community, and through voluntary effort by numerous authors created a ‘masterpiece’. In fact, their recently published magazine was so successful that over 35,000 hard copies were printed and distributed. Additionally, an electronic version of the magazine (now on the CRHNet website) has been an unimagined success. Numerous agencies and organizations across Canada have already snapped the opportunity to distribute the freely-available magazine to their own stakeholders – students, staff, practitioners and the public. The magazine was also a hit on the international front,

and will soon be distributed by the UN PreventionWeb throughout the globe!

Emergency management practitioners have much to learn from the effort of the village of Cumberland. We *can* ‘move’ or influence the world around us, even by the undertaking of what may seem like small or insignificant steps. “Success” then, is often determined as much by our willingness or courage to take the first step, as it is by the outcome of our actions. If done well, our “success” (e.g., products, systems, procedures, models, organizations, etc.) are likely to be taken by others who would build-upon, integrate, or adapt the outcome of our actions to make further advances in knowledge and practice. Invariably too, our greatest successes are often achieved through teamwork.

CRHNet is proud to have contributed to Cumberland's ‘little project’. We believe that disaster risk reduction and emergency management would benefit greatly from the growth of related knowledge and the enhancement of collaboration among its stakeholders. CRHNet continues to serve to facilitate these goals. Become a part of its growing and active ‘network’, and enhance your professional/academic capacity. We welcome your participation and input.

**Ron Kuban and Ernie MacGillivray,**  
CRHNet Co-Presidents



Insurance (No, I am not selling it!) is one of many worthwhile options, and plays a key factor in our recovery from calamitous events. However, the value of insurance is realized only *after* an accident or an emergency. Whenever possible, we need to *prevent* accidents or disasters from occurring and impacting us. That is *our* responsibility and is generally under our control.

The most effective step we ought to take is broadly termed ‘emergency planning’ whereby we assess the risks we confront and then plan the actions we would take and the resources we would deploy in response to these risks. The process is simple, but often fails because people, organizations and communities fail to commit to ... action.

Benjamin Franklin observed: “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” I could not have said it better. The only thing I may add is that the best time to start is now.

*Dr. Ron Kuban is a long-term community volunteer and activist. He is the President of Pegasus Emergency Management Consortium.*

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## WHY DO BAD IDEAS STICK?

By **Ilan Kelman**

<http://www.ilankelman.org>

Why do so many bad ideas stick in disaster-related research and practice? Meanwhile, common sense notions tend to garner attention and be seen as innovative.

One example of a bad idea sticking is the post-disaster “return to normal” paradigm, even though there is no such thing as “normal society”. In any case, it makes little sense to return to the “normal” that caused the disaster in the first place. After a disaster, we should be trying to do better, not return to the same mistakes that caused the disaster problems.

The “disaster cycle” is another bad but repeated idea. Our job should be to break out of the cycle so

that a disaster does not happen. It should not be to go round the endless cycle, waiting and hoping for a disaster to complete the cycle.

The differentiation between slow-onset and rapid-onset disasters (as opposed to hazards) is frequently touted. Yet disasters result from vulnerability which is created and maintained over the long-term. Consequently, all disasters are slow-onset even when hazards (such as earthquakes and tornadoes) are rapid-onset.

Hazard return periods form the basis for many disaster-related policy decisions, even when recognising that it is a bad assumption that past hazard patterns will match future hazard patterns. Much disaster-related work has an intense focus on hazard return periods, rather than considering more thoroughly the work that implies vulnerability return periods. The latter points out that vulnerability requires decades or centuries to accrue before it is exposed in a disaster. Then, if we “return to normal”, we re-start the vulnerability building process.

Another bad idea that continues to gain currency is that disasters will inevitably increase due to climate change. A quick literature search, or just some basic thinking, will demonstrate the fallaciousness of this statement. Since disasters require vulnerability to occur, it is far from inevitable that hazard alteration or augmentation, such as due to climate change, leads to more disasters.

In fact, it is expected that climate change will reduce the frequency and intensity of many hazards in many locations. As one example, increased precipitation is expected to mean fewer fires in northern boreal forests. Nevertheless, disasters could still increase if vulnerability increases. This does not deny that climate change is a serious problem and must be addressed. It nevertheless accepts that the key challenge with disasters is not hazards but vulnerability. There is no point dealing with climate change to avoid certain changes in

hazards, only to exacerbate vulnerability. Paralleling the bad ideas that are repeated, I provide examples of common sense notions that have become famous and even acknowledged to specific authors. Phrases bandied about to sound intellectual and to develop academic careers are “social-ecological systems” (SES), “coupled human and natural systems” (CHANS), “adaptive management”, and “panarchy.”

The connection between and integration of society and the environment is a truism. Many (not all) indigenous societies have lived like that for millennia. The approach has even been firmly embedded in indigenous studies and anthropological literature for decades. We do not need SES or CHANS to tell us that.

As for “adaptive management”, good management by definition adapts and is flexible. That is not a new, innovative, or intelligent concept; it should be the basis of management. Finally, the word “panarchy” is claimed by certain authors to be have been coined by them. A quick glance at a dictionary reveals that the word dates back to at least the nineteenth century.

Given this pattern of promoting bad ideas while stating the obvious, I would like to see how more effort could be put into learning the history of a field, acknowledging people who first and best generated certain ideas, and moving beyond truisms to understand fundamentals. To illustrate what we need, I have put together two examples of primers:

- <http://www.ilankelman.org/miscellany/DisasterLexicon.rtf>
- <http://www.ilankelman.org/fpp.pdf>

Corrections and additions to me are welcome. Please try to improve my work.

**We have a long way to go, but we have the ability to get there. Will we?**

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### **Position Information**

**Position Rank:** Contractually Limited Appointment

**Discipline/Field:** Disaster and Emergency Management

**Home Faculty:** Liberal Arts & Professional Studies

**Home Department/Area/Division:** Administrative Studies

**Affiliation/Union:** YUFA

**Position Start Date:** July 1, 2012

**Position End Date:** June 30, 2014

The School of Administrative Studies invites applications from qualified candidates for a two-year Sessional Assistant Professor position in Disaster and Emergency Management (DEM). A PhD in DEM or a related field, in hand or near completion is required, as is evidence of excellence, or the promise of excellence, in both teaching and scholarly research.

Preference will be given to those with a professional designation and those who have evidence of successful university teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The successful candidate will be expected to teach at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

The deadline for applications is March 23, 2012. Applicants for all positions should submit a letter of application outlining their professional experience and research interests, an up-to-date curriculum vitae, and a teaching dossier, and arrange for three confidential letters of recommendation to be sent to Professor Peggy Ng, Director, School of Administrative Studies, 223 Atkinson College, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3. Please specify which position applying for.

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