

Principles of Emergency Planning and Management

by David Alexander

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Reviewed by Paul Shrivastava

Students looking for a basic text that explains the fundamentals of emergency planning and management need to look no further. *Principles of Emergency Planning and Management* offers a thorough description of basic concepts they need to understand this complex and important field. It provides the general procedures, methods, protocols and strategies of emergency planning. It covers essential topics, including the use of maps, analytical techniques and modeling of disasters, developing and implementing emergency plans, and emergency management training. It also addresses special topics dealing with planning for medical services, schools, industrial emergencies, terrorism, tourism, archives and libraries, art and architecture, and the media. The treatment includes definitions of concepts and detailed lists of tasks and activities involved in emergency management.

David Alexander's orientation and expertise as a geographer comes through clearly in the treatment of the topics. The focus of the book is on natural disasters, and emergency planning is organised as a space-time activity. The book provides detailed accounts of who should do what, when, where and how. The focus is at the local level, on municipalities and cities, with special attention to engineering and to the architectural and physical context of disasters and hazards.

As the title indicates, the book strives to extract 'principles' that have general applicability across situations, but it augments and deepens that generic orientation by adding checklists of emergency planning tasks and resources. The author has undertaken a very ambitious task: developing a generalised account in a field that involves intensely particular situations. The target audience is emergency planners and managers in government. Managers are notoriously impatient with generalised descriptions: they prefer accounts narrowly applied to their specific situations. So, despite the author's best intentions, the book will be of limited value to managers. Instead it is likely to find a more receptive audience among students looking for an emergency planning primer.

The book was published in 2002—that is, in an era when there is general scepticism about 'planning' in general, and about emergency planning in particular. After 11th September, the public's faith in planning for emergencies has declined significantly, even as the need for planning has probably increased. Terrorism has become a primary source of emergencies. To its credit the book includes a brief section on terrorism emergencies and planning for them. However, I at least was not able to shake of the feeling of futility towards planning for such events. The book would be more convincing if it seriously examined the limitations of emergency planning and identified alternative economic, social and political choices for averting disasters.

David Alexander has made an important contribution to the discussion on emergency planning and management. The book is easy to read and accessible to a wide audience. It would make a fine addition to courses and training programmes in emergency preparedness.

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