Editorial

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At the time of writing this editorial a number of events are receiving significant media attention. In the US, a state of emergency was declared in Florida in the wake of Hurricane Charley; early estimates of the costs lie within a range of \$5–11bn. Media reports indicate that such climate-related disasters are on the increase, due in part to global warming. Cyclonic storms occur most frequently around the tropics, where vulnerable populations are most concentrated—over the years many thousands of people on the low-lying coasts of Asia and Central America have died as a result of such storms. In the UK, a government booklet entitled *Preparing for Emergencies* is being circulated to every household. Advice on coping with specific emergencies is restricted to ‘fire prevention and safety’, ‘bombs’ and ‘chemical, biological or radiological incidents’. The implication is clear: the perceived threat is terrorism. Coinciding with this booklet is another one for Muslim households, providing advice on how that community should prepare for a backlash if terrorists target Britain. The events of 11th September 2001 have certainly brought terrorism to the forefront of emergency planning, yet as Hurricane Charley indicates disasters with natural causes are more likely and, with vulnerable communities, potentially more damaging. The three papers in this edition of the journal are each linked to these issues in one way or another. One is concerned with how nation states interact to deal with threats of hazards, man-made and natural; another is concerned with a process for risk and decision analysis; the third is concerned with how to reclaim contaminated land, which raises subsequent issues about whether we should focus our efforts on recovery or prevention.

It is obvious that risk and emergency preparedness, although truly international, is often delayed at national level. This provides the basis for Porfiriev’s thought-provoking paper, which is especially concerned with considering the process by which transnational dimensions of risk are considered and negotiated by various state agencies. Central problems concern the prominence of different stakeholders within different nations; the priorities of nation states, as shaped by history and national culture; and the institutions of the state, which reflect political history and traditions. Porfiriev focuses on risk in the area of the Baltic Sea—virtually an inland lake—which is indeed a rich melting pot of political cultures and national histories, from the Scandinavian social democracies, the newly reunited Germany, the emerging Russia, with its tendencies towards centralism, to the newly independent states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. The risk agenda, argues Porfiriev, is in part determined by the degree of threat, as perceived by stakeholders, and their familiarity with its source. The paper concerns four central propositions, which contend that priorities and ease of communication and negotiation will be determined by the characteristics of the threats under consideration. For example, threats from natural hazards tend to be better understood, which facilitates negotiation.

The second paper deals with risk and decision analysis at a more micro level. It recommends a model for risk analysis in a paper which seeks to critique the use of such frameworks. Aven emphasises the limitations of quantitative approaches to risk analysis, arguing that the starting point for statistical analysis is frequently grounded in assumptions, which are, necessarily, subjective.

The third paper, as often occurs, received very different reviews. The paper by Burger *et al* deals with the significant issue of how to deal with contaminated land, using the US Department of Energy as a detailed case study. The paper identifies the key steps required to reduce the physical size of contaminated land. One reviewer saw the paper as ‘a fine example of accommodative technocentrism ... well meaning but unworldly ... This is playpen environmental titillation.’ A key criticism is that such an approach does nothing to remove contamination at source—a point which the authors seek to deal with in their introduction. Other reviewers were more supportive; hence the decision to publish the paper. We would welcome your views on this.

Finally, we always welcome suggestions for special issues, special sections or dialogue sections. We are also always open to any comments about the journal in general. We appreciate the many kind comments that have been made about the progress of the journal in recent years, but we also try to learn from the constructive criticism some of you have offered.