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Edited by Vincent T. Covello, Joshua Menkes,
and Jeryl Mumpower

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Preface

Public attention has focused in recent years on an array of technological risks to health, safety, and the environment. At the same time, responsibilities for technological risk assessment, evaluation, and management have grown in both the public and private sectors because of a perceived need to anticipate, prevent, or reduce the risks inherent in modern society. In attempting to meet these responsibilities, legislative, judicial, regulatory, and private sector institutions have had to deal with the extraordinarily complex problems of assessing and balancing risks, costs, and benefits.

The need to help society cope with technological risks has given rise to a new intellectual endeavor: the social and behavioral study of issues in risk evaluation and risk management. The scope and complexity of these analyses require a high degree of cooperative effort on the part of specialists from many fields. Analyzing social and behavioral issues requires the efforts of political scientists, sociologists, decision analysts, management scientists, economists, psychologists, philosophers, and policy analysts, among others.

Papers by authors from each of these disciplines are included in this volume. The papers share a focus on one or more of the following questions that are generic to the social and behavioral study of risk:

1. How do we determine how safe is safe enough?
2. How good are the knowledge base and methods for estimating the risks associated with different technologies?
3. How are estimates of risk incorporated into decision making?
4. How do decision makers treat uncertainties associated with different risks and hazards?
5. How do features of the institutional context affect decision-making bodies concerned with risk and uncertainty?
6. What factors influence individual perceptions of risk?
7. How are perceptions of risk and benefit incorporated into public policies?
8. How does society cope with risks that are unacceptable to some segments of the population?
9. How are normative considerations such as equity and social justice balanced in decision making about risk?
10. What are the criteria for comparing and evaluating different risk management policies?

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Contents

I. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF RISK	1
1. <i>The Psychometric Study of Risk Perception</i>	3
<i>Paul Slovic, Baruch Fischhoff, and Sarah Lichtenstein</i>	
2. <i>Public Perceptions of Technological Risks: A Methodological Study</i>	25
<i>Donald R. DeLuca, Jan A. J. Stolwijk, and Wendy Horowitz</i>	
3. <i>Public Disputes about Risky Technologies: Stakeholders and Arenas</i>	69
<i>Ward Edwards and Detlof von Winterfeldt</i>	
4. <i>Contemporary Worldviews and Perception of the Technological System</i>	93
<i>David M. Buss, Kenneth H. Craik, and Karl M. Dake</i>	
5. <i>Risk, Relativism, and Rationality</i>	131
<i>Marx W. Wartofsky</i>	
II. RISK EVALUATION METHODS	155
6. <i>Methods for Comparing the Risks of Technologies</i>	157
<i>Edward W. Lawless, Martin V. Jones, and Richard M. Jones</i>	
7. <i>Comparative Analysis of Formal Decision-Making Approaches</i>	183
<i>Miley W. Merkhofer</i>	
8. <i>Measuring Risk Attitudes in Risk Analysis</i>	221
<i>James S. Dyer and Rakesh K. Sarin</i>	

9. <i>The Analysis of Risks of Fatalities</i>	233
<i>Ralph L. Keeney</i>	
10. <i>Methods for Analyzing and Comparing Technological Hazards</i>	249
<i>C. Hohenemser, R. Goble, J. X. Kasperson, R. E. Kasperson, R. W. Kates, P. Collins, A. Goldman, P. Slovic, B. Fischhoff, S. Lichtenstein, and M. Layman</i>	
11. <i>Risk–Cost–Benefit Methodology and Equal Protection</i>	275
<i>Kristin Shrader-Frechette</i>	
12. <i>Improving Risk Analysis</i>	297
<i>R. Talbot Page and John A. Ferejohn</i>	
13. <i>Risk Evaluation: A Review of the Literature</i>	319
<i>Lloyd L. Philipson</i>	
III. <i>RISK MANAGEMENT</i>	335
14. <i>Alternatives to Government Regulation for the Management of Technological Risks</i>	337
<i>Michael S. Baram and J. Raymond Miyares</i>	
15. <i>Alternative Risk Management Policies for State and Local Governments</i>	359
<i>David Okrent</i>	
16. <i>Institutional Mechanisms for Converting Sporadic Agency Decisions into Systematic Risk Management Strategies: OSHA, the Supreme Court, and the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia</i>	381
<i>Arthur Oleinick, Lynn D. Disney, and Karen S. East</i>	
17. <i>The Political and Institutional Setting for Risk Analysis</i>	413
<i>Michael E. Kraft</i>	
18. <i>The Management of Risk</i>	435
<i>Rae Zimmerman</i>	
19. <i>Approaches to Risk Management: A Critique</i>	461
<i>Lester B. Lave</i>	
20. <i>Consent and the Justification of Risk Analysis</i>	489
<i>Douglas MacLean</i>	

<i>Contents</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>IV. OVERVIEW OF RISK EVALUATION MANAGEMENT</i>	501
<i>21. Science and Analysis: Roles in Risk and Decision Making</i>	503
<i>John D. Graham, Howard Raiffa, and James W. Vaupel</i>	
<i>22. Risk Analysis and Risk Management: A Historical Perspective</i>	519
<i>Vincent T. Covello and Jeryl Mumpower</i>	
<i>Index</i>	541