
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Nils Rosmuller has a PhD in Transport Safety from Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. He worked for seven years for the Netherlands Institute for Fire Services and Disaster Abatement. Since July 2007, he has been working at the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Research (TNO) as head of the Department for Industrial and External Safety. His main fields of interest are transport safety, tunnel safety and disaster management.

The International Emergency Management Society (TIEMS) was founded in 1993 in Washington, USA, by an international group of emergency managers, scientists and practitioners, and is today registered as an international, independent, not-for-profit Nongovernment Organisation (NGO) (TIEMS i.n.p.a.). TIEMS is dedicated to developing and bringing the benefits of modern Emergency Management (EM) methods, tools and practices to society for a safer world.

TIEMS is an international network of planners, researchers from engineering and the social sciences, industry managers, practitioners and other interested parties within emergency and disaster management.

Within this network, TIEMS stimulates the exchange of information on the use of innovative methods and technologies within emergency and disaster management to improve our ability to avoid, mitigate, respond to and recover from natural and technological disasters.

To do so, TIEMS organises an international conference once a year. In 2008, this conference was held in Prague, Czech Republic. Scientists, emergency managers and practitioners from all over the world presented their work and exchanged good practices. The best papers were selected for this special issue of the *International Journal of Emergency Management*.

Note the relatively large number of contributions dealing with natural disasters, such as earthquakes, and the relatively small number concerning man-made disasters, for example, accidents involving hazardous materials. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that most of the recent disasters in the world have been natural disasters:

- The June 2008 earthquake in China in the province of Sichuan caused more than 80 000 deaths. China's armed forces played an important role in the disaster abatement: over 50 000 soldiers were directed to the disaster area to assist in the emergency response.

- Typhoon Nargis, which was classified as very severe, hit Myanmar on 3 May 2008, causing more than 120 000 deaths. Here too, the armed forces played an important role in the emergency response, and probably (because we do not know yet) in disaster abatement activities as well. However, in a more negative way (and this is for sure) they blocked help from outside.

Such disasters show that humankind is not able to control the uncontrollable, and therefore, we have to prepare as well as possible. However, should we prepare for the worst? Or in other words: for what disasters should we be prepared? This is a recurrent question in debates among emergency responders and those who have to pay the price. All kinds of ICTs and GIS systems have been developed, but do they work in real-life disaster abatement? Even now, the lack of information and the problems of communications are often mentioned when disaster abatement is evaluated, which raises the question of how we can improve our emergency response activities. One thing is sure, and this is what TIEMS stands for: the interchange between theory and practice. This interchange promotes learning from each other, from different countries and from different disciplines.

The papers selected for this issue present a variety of subjects related to EM. The scores of the members of the TIEMS paper-review committee formed the basis for selection, from which the editors of this special issue finally kept 12 papers.

Two papers (van der Haar and Lakerveld) deal with team functioning. It is not the emergency responder who determines the success of the responsive action, but the cooperation, coordination and communication in a team of emergency responders. Adequate information sharing through information technology is a key factor. However, information technology can also help in avoiding accidents, for example in the maritime sector, which is shown by Gudelj. Accidents and suppression are characterised by interdependencies, and Sarriegi presents a framework for dealing with these interdependencies.

There are two papers (Hecker and Tiefenbacher) that deal with international emergency response. More and more, disasters are cross-border or their impact is international, which requires cooperation between several countries.

However, and also at a more local level, emergency management needs to account for contextual matters, such as the cultural aspect of Alaskan elderly natives (Hagen) or the demand for private fire brigades for a marshalling yard operator in the Netherlands (Rosmuller).

The key issue here is to assess what the realistic accident scenarios are. And subsequently, how can we develop more realistic emergency plans? Brown gives some clues on how to achieve that. The (mental) health of emergency responders is often forgotten, which is highlighted by Smith.

Learning from accidents often stops when the action ends. However, mentally, the emergency responders may still suffer from their work. Borell proposes some new methods to learn from repression activities and applies them to a storm in a remote Swedish area. Rapaport also stresses the borders of today's emergency response activities. He shows the value of Israeli companies that provide shelter for their employees in times of emergencies. Private companies therefore take care of a public responsibility. Public authorities do not always have the capacity or specialised equipment to deal with disasters; hence more cooperation between public authority, private companies and the civilians themselves is necessary.