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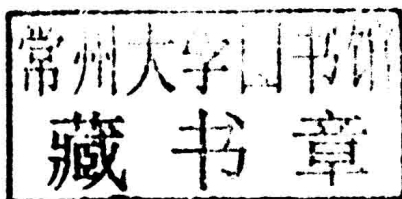
Human Factors Challenges in Emergency Management

Enhancing Individual
and Team Performance
in Fire and Emergency

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Enhancing Individual and Team Performance in
Fire and Emergency Services

Edited By
CHRISTINE OWEN
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ASHGATE

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HUMAN FACTORS CHALLENGES IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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Dr Jan Douglas

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Dr Joel Suss

Joel has conducted research on performance in dynamic and complex environments, including wildfire fighting and law enforcement. He has employed a variety of cognitive task analysis techniques to examine expertise in these domains. Joel has recently completed his PhD using a prediction and option-generation paradigm to understand and improve decision making in law enforcement.

Professor Alexander J. Wearing

Alexander has taught and undertaken research in complex psychological processes. His recent work has involved collaboration with Lisa Frye as her PhD supervisor at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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Chapter 1

Human Factors in Emergency Management

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Introduction

People who manage emergency events face many challenges. This book focuses on the human factors challenges that are experienced by managers who deal with emergency events. Such events arise from hazards in the environment. Hazards can be natural, for example, earthquakes, wildfires, storms and tsunamis; they can be created by human activities, for example, oil spills and chemical explosions; or they can be intentional, for example, terrorism. Emergencies are actual or imminent events that pose a threat to life, property or the environment, and require a significant and coordinated response (EMA 1988). Some emergencies can be small in scale, like road accidents, while others can impact on thousands of people. A disaster has been defined as a crisis arising from significant damage, where agencies and the services they provide are overwhelmed by the damage and where the communities they work with are limited in their capacity to recover (Turner 1976). Although definitions of scale and complexity may be used to differentiate between emergencies and disasters, there are also some important qualitative differences. Quarantelli (2000) noted that compared with emergencies, disasters tend to require responding organisations:

- to work with more groups, many of which will be unfamiliar to those responding
- to have reduced autonomy
- to operate to different performance standards
- and to develop closer working arrangements between the public and private sectors.

Clearly these conditions present many challenges for those involved.

Emergency services are made up of people and technology-based systems for coping with adverse events, and the discipline of *human factors* can offer valuable insights into how these emergency services meet the challenges faced and how they can be continually improved. As a discipline human factors is concerned

with ‘understanding the interactions among humans and other elements of a system...[and] applies theory, principles, data and methods to design, in order to optimize human well-being and overall system performance’ (Karwowski 2012, p. 3).

Most of the research discussed in this book has been undertaken with emergency services agencies responsible for either wildfire, and/or flood and storm management in Australia and New Zealand. Although personnel working within the fire and emergency management domain face a unique set of human factors challenges, the insights provided in this book will be of interest to researchers, scholars and practitioners involved in managing hazards of all kinds, such as technology and terrorism-based emergencies; emergencies in safety-critical industries like nuclear power, oil and energy production; and emergencies in health and transportation. This is because many of the challenges to be discussed in this book also can be found in these domains.

This book contributes to a growing body of knowledge about emergency services work and about the role of human factors involved in building capability in the sector. At the heart of this book are the following questions: how do personnel responding to emergency events manage these events, and what can be learned to enhance their capabilities?

The Growing Importance of Emergency Management

The emergency management sector performs a critical role in attempting to mitigate the harmful effects of a hazard that may develop into an emergency or even a disaster. Its activities therefore aim to protect individuals, communities, businesses, the economy and the environment from harm. In so doing, their purpose is to provide confidence to communities, governments and other stakeholder groups in the face of adversity.

In this respect the emergency services sector helps support the maintenance and development of stable and resilient communities. In many jurisdictions the part-funding of fire and rescue services by insurance companies is recognition of the loss minimisation role these emergency services agencies play in the economy. These agencies play a role in reducing the likely costs of emergency and disaster events, and, importantly, support resilient communities and businesses, so that they are able to recover more quickly from emergency events.

The emergency management sector comprises a variety of agencies, including fire and rescue, ambulance, police, coastguard, search and rescue, civil defence and state emergency services, as well as members of self-responding community groups. Emergencies often require several agencies to coordinate their response activities, e.g., fire, ambulance and police. Complex or large-scale events require multiple emergency services: various federal and state government departments;

local government and their municipalities; Red Cross and other non-government organisations; and logistical support from the military.

A core challenge for the emergency management sector is the fact that the number and intensity of adverse events is increasing and there is a growing vulnerability in our communities. This includes our social and ecological vulnerabilities, as illustrated by some of the major events that have happened globally in the past decade. These are outlined below:

- The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami had an impact on 14 countries where an estimated 275,000 people died. More than 600,000 people lost their livelihoods and 1.7 million were displaced.
- In 2010 a number of overwhelming disasters affected many populations. These included:
 - the earthquake in Haiti that affected an estimated 10 million people, creating one of the most complex urban disasters in decades (World Vision 2010); and
 - the record-breaking floods in Pakistan, which had an impact on almost all of the country. An estimated 20 million people were affected, and 1.89 million homes were damaged or destroyed (Red Cross 2010).
- In 2011 the Japanese earthquake, subsequent tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdown was reported as the toughest and most difficult crisis for Japan since the end of World War II (CNN 2011).
- The hurricanes and tornadoes now occurring across the Atlantic each year continue to cause considerable damage to countries such as Bermuda, Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, the USA and sometimes Canada.

Australia and New Zealand have also had a series of significant emergency events and disasters that have tested and challenged governments and communities. The summer of 2010–2011 saw every State and Territory in Australia – except for the Australian Capital Territory – impacted by emergency events unprecedented in intensity and geographic spread. These occurred within two years of other exceptional events. The evidence gathered during the empirical research carried out for this book, and listed below, supports this claim:

1. **In 2009** Australia experienced its hottest month on record in January. In the state of Victoria, this heatwave was linked to 374 deaths (DHS 2009). In February of the same year, following a decade of drought, Victoria also experienced catastrophic bushfires where 173 people died and thousands of others remain displaced and multiple communities continue to recover.
2. **The 2010–2011 floods in Queensland and Victoria** were reported as Australia's wettest two-year period on record (BOM 2012). In terms of extent, impact and severity, the flooding along Australia's east coast was amongst the most significant in the country's recorded history.