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PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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We began over a year and half ago to try and develop a special issue that would focus on the Emergency Information Systems that directly support individuals and organizations to effectively deal with all the phases of Emergency Preparedness: Planning, Training, Response, Recovery, and Assessment. Both editors have experience in working in Emergency Preparedness environments and felt that while there was much research and development activities dealing with hardware in computers, communications, and sensors, there did not appear to be a community of research in the design and requirements to facilitate what people and organizations have to deal with. The assumption that seemed to be operative was that current technologies such as databases, messaging systems, and synchronous meeting systems could somehow be pasted together to handle whatever was needed.

In an attempt to develop a community in this area, we decided to organize two meetings in 2004. The first meeting was an international workshop on *Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management (ISCRAM2004)* held in Brussels, the capital of Europe. Much to our surprise, more than 80 researchers, practitioners and policy makers from about 20 countries registered for the meeting, far surpassing the more modest number of 20 attendees we originally had in mind. The second event was a track at what was probably the largest IS conference in the United States in 2004, the *Americas*

Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS2004) in New York City. Once more, the number of submitted papers exceeded our expectations, and we were able to put together three excellent sessions. From both experiences, we had to conclude that an active research community was 'out there', but it was a highly fragmented one and most members of the community were in general unaware of each others' work.

At both meetings, we actively targeted presenting authors to solicit papers for this special issue. A special Call for Papers was widely distributed as well, leading to a fairly wide exposure of this special issue of *JITTA* to the Emergency Response community. Consequently, we received more outstanding papers than we felt we could use for this issue. We therefore decided to move four papers, with the authors' permission, to a special issue of the *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (JHSEM)*, while seven papers remain in this issue.

Together with the *JHSEM* issue, we view this special *JITTA* issue on Emergency Preparedness and Response Information Systems as a very important milestone in the growth and maturing of our community. We have not only been able to put this research topic on the map for the readership of both journals, but we can now also convincingly show researchers in Emergency Preparedness and Response that their work can indeed be published in high quality journals. We do hope that this encourages many prospective authors

in Emergency Response to submit their work to journals such as *JITTA* and contribute to the growth of this field.

Our efforts within the Emergency Response community continue in the coming years. Since mid 2004, we have a community website at <http://www.sckcen.be/iscram>, which at the time of writing has 200 registered members. Our flagship meeting in 2005 will be the *ISCRAM2005* conference, again taking place in Brussels from April 18-20th, but in 2006 we hope to see it move to the US. We also plan to continue to encourage more sessions on this topic at appropriate conferences and to work on more special issues as a result of conferences and workshops. The current community needs more opportunity to interact and begin to develop a relevant accepted body of knowledge. It also needs to interact with what is a collection of disciplines that should form the basis of a true interdisciplinary community for a more effective design of information systems. In this respect, we are happy to announce our call for contributions to a truly interdisciplinary Emergency Response track at *AMCIS 2005* (Omaha, August 11-15, 2005), which is co-sponsored by no less than three AIS Special Interest Groups: Medical Systems, Decision Support Systems and Human Computer Interaction. The focus on and need for interdisciplinarity is also clearly evident from the nature of some of the papers included in this special issue and the diversity of topics they represent.

Overview of papers

The paper on Emergency Preparedness Assurance by a multi-disciplinary team at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and Rutgers University (Turoff et al 2004) clearly calls for the integration of professionals from Information Systems Design, Software Engineering, Auditing, and Emergency Preparedness Professionals. It emphasizes the critical roles of auditing in creating improved

societal pervasive Emergency Response Systems. It furthermore suggests an approach to bringing this about.

We have two separate papers on the impact of SARS in Singapore (Devadoss and Pan 2004) and China (Xue and Liang 2004) with respect to the inadequate Information Systems that exist at the time of the outbreaks and the resulting efforts to set up effective systems. There are lessons to be learned from these two excellent case studies and much to observe about current lacks of interoperability between data systems in such diverse areas as medical systems and law enforcement systems.

Klashner's (2004) paper on the "golden barrier" provides an extension of the concept of the impact of delayed response to emergencies beyond the medical field to emergencies in general. In so doing, the paper provides a framework for the analysis of emergency response plans.

We encouraged two historical papers on the Y2K experience because there are important lessons to be learned from this prior attempt to ensure the survivability of Information Systems under adverse conditions. The paper by Jennix (2004) deals with the utility industry and it is quite clear what was done then to prevent problems was necessary and effective but does not seem to be characteristic of today's situation. Chepaitis' (2004) paper looks more generally at the lessons of Y2K and sort of points out that the "cry of wolf" that went up then and the lack of any real materialization of a real wolf, may have led us to a greater societal state of complacency today about what we need to do today with respect to protecting our information System infrastructure.

Finally, and clearly associated with the latter observation, is the paper by Bagchi and Tang (2004) showing the magnitude of attacks on the Web is growing at a disturbing rate correlated to the growing size of the Web.

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