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### Book Review

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## Book Review

### **Erratum**

The citation for this review is 4 *RISK* 263 (1993) in most commercial databases.

**SHELDON KRIMSKY & ALONZO PLOUGH, ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS: COMMUNICATING RISKS AS A SOCIAL PROCESS.** (Auburn House 1988) [333 pp.] Acknowledgements, bibliographies, case chronologies, figures, foreword, glossaries of acronyms, index, notes. LC: 88-14467; ISBN: 0-8659-187-8. [\$18.95 paper. 88 Post Road West, Westport CT 06881.]

This thoroughly researched collection of five environmental events focuses upon the social and cultural aspects of risk communication. Krimsky and Plough broadly define risk communication with a conventional meaning and a symbolic meaning. Conventionally, risk communication is defined as the transmission of technical information from the elites to the general public. Symbolically, risk communication refers to any public or private communication that informs individuals about the existence, nature, form, severity or acceptability of risks.<sup>1</sup> Five chapters address different case studies of environmental risk in historical and regulatory context.

The first case addresses the permissible residues of the pesticide and soil fumigant ethylene dibromide (EDB) in grain products — an environmental risk with national impact. It illustrates risks associated with low-dose and long-term exposure to pesticide residues in foods and compares federal and state risk communication activities.<sup>2</sup>

The second concerns the release of genetically engineered organisms into the environment. Proposals to open field test the “ice minus” bacterium posed hypothetical risks due to the lack of empirical data about the consequence of such a release.<sup>3</sup>

The third case addresses the risk of naturally-forming radon gas in homes, focusing on the many players involved in risk communication, including the media and the government. Comparisons of two states, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, with markedly different levels of radon also illustrate the role of state agencies and citizen groups.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Introduction at 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, at 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* The bacterium was so-named to signify removal of a gene associated with ice nucleation.

<sup>4</sup> At 132.

The fourth centers on the release of arsenic emission from a copper smelter. Due to the uncertainty about the health effects of long-term exposure to low doses of arsenic, this case presents the dilemma between setting low standards which may result in the possibility of plant closure and high standards which evoke public opposition.<sup>5</sup>

The last case examines a Superfund chemical waste site and the accompanying problem of the unknown adverse health effects associated with it.

In their study of these cases, Krinsky and Plough set out to illustrate the different modes of environmental risk communication to the public, their responses to the messages and factors that hinder or effectuate successful communication.<sup>6</sup> They clearly accomplish this and provide a structured framework for guiding environmental risk communication in events with varying complexity.

Throughout, Krinsky and Plough distinguish technical and cultural aspects of risk, emphasizing the latter. While the former can be regarded as largely independent of culture, popular culture provides a critical framework for communicating and managing risk. Neither can occur absent the cultural perspective the authors address. Those whose backgrounds tend to focus on the technical aspects of environmental risk should gain much from examining the studies of the cultural and social aspects of public risk communication explored in ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS.

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<sup>5</sup> Introduction at 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, at 7.

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