

Managing the Risks from Natural Catastrophes: Are We Making Progress?
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Environment

Abstract

The risks from floods, storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions have been with us for centuries, yet we are far from controlling them. In the present decade alone, for example, nearly half a million people have died as a result of earthquakes. The modelling of these risks is a growing industry, and its outputs are today widely used in insurance, for establishing building codes, and in developing scenarios for emergency planning. But how good are these models? The talk will look at the evidence basis for modelling natural catastrophe risks, with an emphasis on earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. It will discuss the limitations and uncertainties inherent in the modelling process, and ask whether it is possible to reduce these uncertainties.

Speaker bio

Robin Spence is a Structural Engineer and Emeritus Professor of Architectural Engineering in the Department of Architecture at the University of Cambridge. He is also a Fellow of Magdalene College and a Director of Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd. His principal research and consultancy interests over the last 30 years have been disaster risk assessment and disaster mitigation. He has directed numerous research and consultancy contracts and he is the author of several books and more than 150 technical papers in these areas. He is Vice-President of the European Association for Earthquake Engineering.