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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



Capturing, curating, and communicating lessons of volcanic crises

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Volcanic crises are a time of high stress and urgency for all players – including scientists, officials, and news media alike. We record our work in various ways – field notebooks, computer data files, published papers, official memos and accomplishment reports, stories in the print or broadcast media, and now, increasingly, in social media. But in times of the highest stress and urgency, it takes an exceptional degree of discipline to take good notes! As soon as the crisis subsides, records start to disappear. Notebooks may be lost or tossed, and unpublished data may be lost when storage media change. In principle, data are always saved, but how many of us can still read 3.5” floppies, much less anything older? Memories inevitably grow dim, overwritten by the next crisis. Occasionally, wonderful monographs or collections of stories are produced, but these are rare. How can we help future generations to have today’s and yesterday’s data and experiences at their fingertips? Talk story! Like Hawaiians. Write, video, or otherwise tell the stories you DIDN’T tell in your dry, academic papers! A good storyteller makes lessons obvious and fun! Science rarely marches straight from observations and hypotheses to unequivocal conclusions. Forecasts of volcanic activity aren’t always right. Sometimes, the volcano changes the script; other times, we read it wrong. What didn’t work or help is just as important as the successes. Show humanity and humility -- even humor! Peer-to-peer communications also work well -- police chief to police chief, city engineer to city engineer, etc. Voices of practical, specialized experience. Find the folks who have been through a crisis, and hook them up with their counterparts facing one. Just think of the power of today’s social media and who knows what tomorrow! Use your imagination. Let's set our academic robes aside!