

Western Engineering

Professor Slobodan Simonovic releases new textbook on disaster management

By **Mphatso Mlotha**

"Alleluia!" is the opening word found in the forward section of Slobodan P. Simonovic's new textbook, *Systems Approach to Management of Disasters: Methods and Applications*. The forward, written by Professor Emeritus Dr. Burton, emphasizes the long awaited arrival of a book, published in a way to revise and revolutionize approaches to management of disasters.

The main goal of this text is to introduce the systems approach to disasters management community as an alternative approach that can provide support for interdisciplinary activities involved in the management of disasters. The systems approach draws on the fields of operations research and economics to create skills in solving complex management problems.

Simonovic, a Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and an Engineering Research Chair of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction at The University of Western Ontario, states that the textbook offers a new view of disaster management that he names integrated disaster management.

"Integrated disaster management is described as an iterative process of decision making regarding prevention of, response to, and recovery from disasters," explains Simonovic. "Integrated disaster management is important because it provides a chance for those affected by disasters to balance their diverse needs for protecting lives."

The book strongly advocates the systems-view or a holistic approach of integrated disaster management. It involves complex interactions within and between the natural environments, human population and build environment. Simonovic adds that, "a systems view of disasters focuses on interactions among elements of a system and on the effects of these interactions." Systems theory recognizes multiple and interrelated causal factors, emphasizes the dynamic character of processes involved and is particularly interested in a system change with time-be it a flood, hurricane, or a disaster affected community.

Included in the book is a CD with three computer programs Vensim PLE, LINPRO, and COMPRO. Vensim PLE (Personal Learning Edition) is state-of-the-art simulation software used for the implementation of system dynamics simulation. The other two programs are: LINPRO, a Linear Programming optimization tool; and COMPRO, for the implementation of the multi-objective analysis method of Compromise Programming.

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