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Journal of Hazardous Materials 88 (2001) 145–167

**Journal of  
Hazardous  
Materials**

www.elsevier.com/locate/jhazmat

# Institutional and legislative issues of emergency management policy in Russia

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## Abstract

The emergency management policy as an organic component of the national development policy in contemporary Russia exists only for a slight more than a decade. However, its basic trends and directions could be revealed. In the legislative area covering technological accidents involving hazardous materials these include increasing differentiation of acts in terms of issue coverage, gradual integration of legislation via enforcement of the so-called systemic (umbrella) acts and increasing incorporation of specific acts, and keeping dominance of federal emergency acts. In addition, emergency legislation and policy programs on communities' protection against major hazards drift from alleviation-oriented towards more mitigation-focused. Meanwhile, the bulk of the existing acts are still specific laws and regulations, which consider most emergency response. In institutional realms the key direction of emergency policy development involved organization and progress of the Unified State System for Emergency Prevention and Elimination of the Russian Federation (USEPE) with EMERCOM as a key coordinator and actor in handling technological hazards and accidents. The detailed analysis of USEPE organizational pattern and operation modes including institutional structure, key functions, means and forces and operation routines is provided. It is argued that the system's logic and flexible organizational framework only to some extent contribute to effective mitigation of the major emergencies and/or disasters. In no less extent it depends on the existing socioeconomic conditions, which have been for a long time unfavorable in Russia and thus seriously constrain the USEPE effectiveness. This provides for ambiguous integral evaluation of the emergency management policy in the 1990s and early 2000s. © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Emergency policy; Emergency management; Legislative regulation; Institutional framework; USEPE

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## 1. Introduction

As in the rest of the world, the protection of communities and regions against multiple threats including those involving hazardous materials accidents in the former Soviet Union

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for decades was prerogative of the national civil defense. Also like other countries, emergency management policy evolved from this civil defense context to address the broader spectrum of natural and technological hazards, hazardous materials threats, and ultimately the danger of terrorism. This was an organic component of the national defense system and was responsible for protection of people against military threat, primarily hostile nuclear attack. In the tense years of Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, such an approach had its obvious political grounds. However, even those should have been considered more comprehensively and embedded in broader connotation of national security. As early as in 1956, the Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Cooperation in NATO put it:

Security is today far more than a military matter. The strengthening of political consultations and economic cooperation, the development of resources, progress in education and public understanding all can be important for the protection of the security of a nation or an alliance as the building of a battleship or the equipping of an army [1].

Despite this progressive understanding of both national and international security, this failed to be implemented in practical state policies of all nations including the former Soviet Union for many years. In the 1970s and 1980s the peacetime threats including social conflicts, terrorist attacks, natural and technological disasters increasingly turned into the key problems of national security and public safety that required respective change in policy priorities. Meanwhile, again for almost two decades this change did not happen thus increasing the risk of communities being adversely affected by emergencies and disasters' impact. In addition to this, the former Soviet government officials kept to the existed cover up policy, in particular to natural and technological disasters with 'no victims, no damage' being stereotypic public comment coined each time the information about a major crisis occurrence leaked into media and became known to the public.

At the same time, the scale and severity of such crises were increasing with the pace of accelerating but poorly managed industrialization and urbanization resulted from one-sided economic policy. The most significant was the human and environmental health impact produced, on the one hand, by hazardous industries because of the poor technological and safety management policies. On the other hand, this followed from technological accidents and disasters, especially those involving hazardous substances and with serious environmental implications, which accounted for the bulk of the total number of casualties and economic damage incurred by all kinds of crises in the former Soviet Union in those two decades. In the 1980s alone, this impact affected several million people with more than 150,000 of those injured or killed annually. This number includes more than 65,000 immediately killed because of the industrial accidents and those died prematurely. Economic damage was no less considerable with our assessments showing the total direct and indirect economic losses incurred by the aforementioned combined impact with that of natural disasters inclusive soaring to 12–15% GDP [2].

It was only the great political and economic changes in the former Soviet Union known as *perestroika* and the world worst radiation disaster of Chernobyl in the mid 1980s that marked the beginning of real drifting away from the old 'military' paradigm of national security policy to a more comprehensive one, which seriously considered a previously flip side of a coin, i.e. peacetime conflict and non-conflict crises. Since those times, these issues became an increasingly organic and important component of the national development and

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