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Cartographies of Danger: Mapping Hazards in America

Mark Monmonier

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No place is perfectly safe, but some places are more dangerous than others. Whether we live on a floodplain or in "Tornado Alley," near a nuclear facility or in a neighborhood poorly lit at night, we all co-exist uneasily with natural and man-made hazards. As Mark Monmonier shows in this entertaining and immensely informative book, maps can tell us a lot about where we can anticipate certain hazards, but they can also be dangerously misleading.

California, for example, takes earthquakes seriously, with a comprehensive program of seismic mapping, whereas Washington has been comparatively lax about earthquakes in Puget Sound. But as the Northridge earthquake in January 1994 demonstrated all too clearly to Californians, even reliable seismic-hazard maps can deceive anyone who misinterprets "known fault-lines" as the only places vulnerable to earthquakes.

Important as it is to predict and prepare for catastrophic natural hazards, more subtle and persistent phenomena such as pollution and crime also pose serious dangers that we have to cope with on a daily basis. Hazard-zone maps highlight these more insidious hazards and raise awareness about them among planners, local officials, and the public.

With the help of many maps illustrating examples from all corners of the United States, Monmonier demonstrates how hazard mapping reflects not just scientific understanding of hazards but also perceptions of risk and how risk can be reduced. Whether you live on a faultline or a coastline, near a toxic waste dump or an EMF-generating power line, you ignore this book's plain-language advice on geographic hazards and how to avoid them at your own peril.

"No one should buy a home, rent an apartment, or even drink the local water without having read this fascinating cartographic alert on the dangers that lurk in our everyday lives. . . . Who has not asked where it is safe to live? *Cartographies of Danger* provides the answer."—H. J. de Blij, *NBC News*

"Even if you're not interested in maps, you're almost certainly interested in hazards. And this book is one of the best places I've seen to learn about them in a highly entertaining and informative fashion."—John Casti, *New Scientist*

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