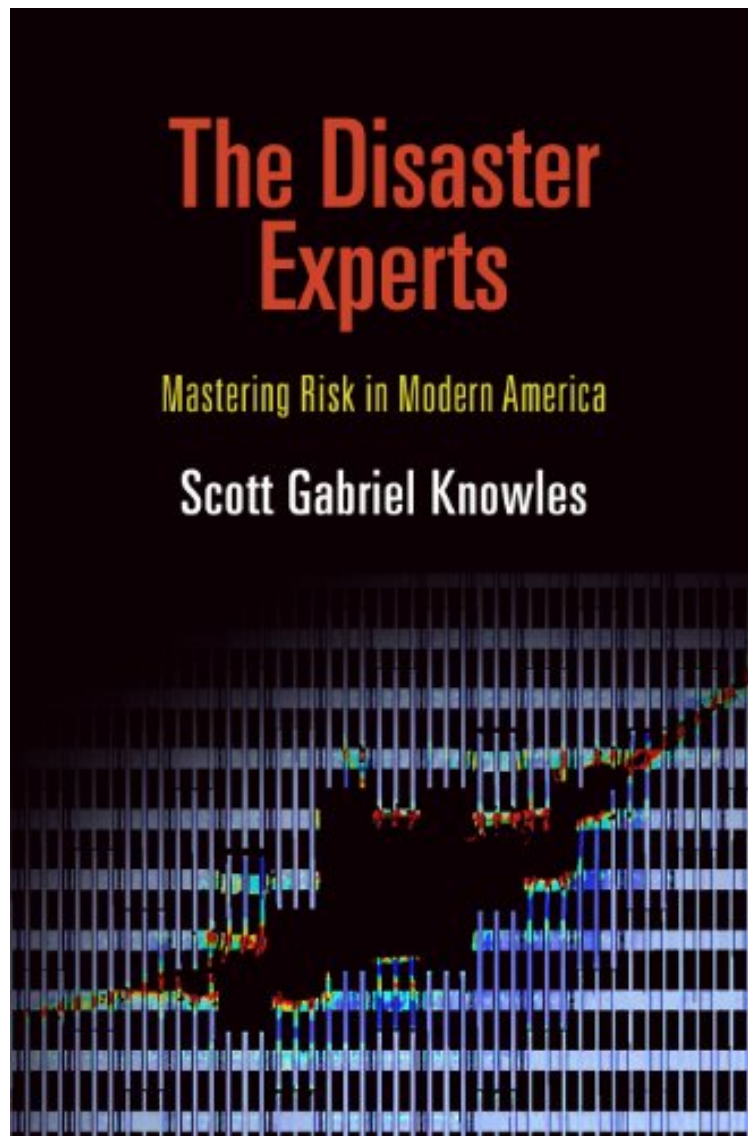


[Ebook pdf] The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America (The City in the Twenty-First Century)

## The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America (The City in the Twenty-First Century)

*Scott Gabriel Knowles*

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**Scott Gabriel Knowles : The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America (The City in the Twenty-First Century)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America (The City in the Twenty-First Century):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The Most Intelligent and Accessible Book on the Topic! By Mark R. Jorgensen This is essentially a history book that recounts the evolution of disaster consensus in modern America, "a frequently contentious and impermanent agreement among experts as to what to protect against disaster, and how to protect against it," and the diverse and itself evolving community of experts. There is a growing literature in the academic journals that this book builds upon - I have read it from time to time and much of it is pedantic academic claptrap - so this book was a pleasant discovery for me. Professor Knowles possesses that clarity of perceptive thought and skill with the English language to have written an interesting, engaging and even compelling book. The subject of fire in the modern urban "built" environment receives a disproportionate amount of attention, but it serves to illustrate the author's several points. Such a book could perhaps as easily been done with reference to floods, storm surges, or the other natural (and unnatural) hazards in our environment. Early on the author warns the readers that he will "challenge conventional wisdom about the relationship between modern knowledge systems and solving complex problems" and that was true in my case. The disaster of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, is discussed at points throughout the book and appropriately so - perhaps more than any other single event in recent history do those crashes, fires and subsequent collapses illustrate how what we as a society deems acceptable risk is a balance of many contesting factors and safety is not paramount among them nor should it be. This is not a book for the general public though educated lay readers and individuals in a variety of professional and academic fields I am sure will already intuitively recognize the ideas discussed here and find it worthwhile to buy and read. Should you want to think further and deeper on this topic then I recommend this book. And I predict that this book will become required reading in many graduate seminars in history, planning, urban studies and sociology.

In the wake of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, many are asking what, if anything, can be done to prevent large-scale disasters. How is it that we know more about the hazards of modern American life than ever before, yet the nation faces ever-increasing losses from such events? History shows that disasters are not simply random acts. Where is the logic in creating an elaborate set of fire codes for buildings, and then allowing structures like the Twin Tower to go up as design experiments? Why prepare for terrorist attacks above all else when floods, fires, and earthquakes pose far more consistent threats to American life and prosperity? *The Disaster Experts* takes on these questions, offering historical context for understanding who the experts are that influence these decisions, how they became powerful, and why they are only slightly closer today than a decade ago to protecting the public from disasters. Tracing the intertwined development of disaster expertise, public policy, and urbanization over the past century, historian Scott Gabriel Knowles tells the fascinating story of how this diverse collection of professionals - insurance inspectors, engineers, scientists, journalists, public officials, civil defense planners, and emergency managers - emerged as the authorities on risk and disaster and, in the process, shaped modern America.

"In *The Disaster Experts*, Scott Knowles makes a key contribution to our understanding of how American disaster policy has evolved over time. This book is a way to appreciate at a deeper level why and how Americans are prepared in some ways, and profoundly unprepared in others, for the disasters to come in the twenty-first century." James Lee Witt, Chief Executive Officer, Witt Associates, and FEMA Director, 1993-2001 "Shows how a cadre of professionals - engineers, scientists, journalists, insurance inspectors, public officials, civil defense planners and emergency managers - have ill-prepared us for disasters from 9/11 to Katrina." *Washington Post* "This marvelous book offers a gripping analysis of American disaster expertise over the last 150 years. . . . A powerful, eminently readable book that belongs on undergraduate and graduate syllabi in the history of science and technology and, indeed, in the library of every educated citizen." *Isis* Knowles adroitly chronicles in fine historical detail the emergence of the experts (and their intellectual disciplines) who worked to understand and mitigate the constantly changing human and technological landscapes of urban risk. "Choice" About the Author Scott Gabriel Knowles is Associate Professor of History and Politics at Drexel College and Associate Dean and Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry at Pennoni Honors College. He is also editor of *Imagining Philadelphia: Edmund Bacon and the Future of the City*, also available from the University of Pennsylvania Press.