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Preface

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The United Nations designated the 1990s as the Decade for Natural Hazard Reduction. It is ironic that natural disasters are an increasingly common occurrence in the 1990s, both due to random chance and, as far as the meteorological hazards are concerned, due to climatic changes. Natural phenomena are considered disasters only when they adversely affect lives and property. For example, an earthquake or flood in a sparsely populated part of the United States is seldom declared a disaster. The number and magnitude of disasters seems to be increasing. Humans cannot control or significantly change the forces of nature. However, there are steps that can be taken to lessen or mitigate the effects of natural phenomena and/or better prepare to cope with the damage of the disasters when they happen. Although human behavior is about as difficult to control as nature, there are also steps that can be taken to prevent man-made disasters and to limit the damage caused by them. What can be done?

In many of the recent events, vast sections of the cultural heritage were impaired, largely by the direct impact of the disasters, but also, and by no small measure, by the actions taken by the hazard mitigation and response teams. As the safeguarding of life and property takes precedence, any other consideration plays a minor role in the disaster response phase. In many cases, damaged historic places are deemed to be a safety hazard and are ordered to be demolished by building officials without due consideration being given to (a) their cultural heritage value and (b) the possibility of their being stabilized and restored. Thus, potential for conflict abounds and, historically, conflict has ensued between the various management agencies. This has been the case in the United States, as well as in Australia.

There was a need to bring together the two different sides of the equation - the disaster management authorities on the one hand and the cultural resource managers on the other -

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and to establish a dialogue which would facilitate future protection of heritage items. In 1995 we were half-way through the United Nations Decade for Natural Hazard Reduction. We had to ask questions such as: What has worked well? What has not worked? What can be improved? How can we best share what we have learned before we forget it?

To this end, a symposium was organized by the US National Park Service (Western Regional Office, San Francisco) in collaboration with the Western Chapter of the Association for Preservation Technology. The symposium *Management of disaster mitigation and response programs for historic sites: a dialogue*, held from 27-29 June in San Francisco, saw participants from throughout the United States with a sprinkling of foreigners from Palau, the Marshall Islands and Australia. The symposium focused on the US management systems and US experiences, but many aspects have relevance well beyond North America. The symposium was limited to about sixty people to maximize the exchange of ideas and opinions and to stimulate discussion. Some forty people presented papers or discussion platforms.

The three-day symposium was marked by a general climate of cooperation and a preparedness by all speakers to exert a concerted effort for communication and mutual understanding of the other's point of view. Even though initially no publication had been planned, it was deemed important to make some of the information available to non-participants. The production of the volume was delayed for numerous reasons, not least the dearth of funding available to produce the volume.

The volume presented here is obviously only the first step in a progression of research and practical work. The publication of these papers will hopefully spawn more research and further conferences to exchange ideas, approaches and strategies.

In publishing these proceedings, we are aware of the poignancy of a joke told by Blaine Cliver during one of the sessions:

This is a short little disaster story about the man who had survived the Johnstown (Pennsylvania) Flood (of the late 19th century). It had been a horrifying experience for the man and afterwards, he found that he had to go up to almost everyone he saw and grab them by their arm and say, "I have to tell you what happened to me in the Johnstown Flood." This went on for the rest of his life. Eventually, the man finally died and went to heaven. As he came to the Pearly Gates of Heaven, the man was met by St. Peter who greeted him saying, "Welcome! What can I do for you?" The man responded to St. Peter by saying that he had this great problem in that he has to tell everyone he ever met about his horrible experience in the Johnstown Flood. The man asked St. Peter if it would be possible to gather everyone in heaven together so that the man could tell his story only once and then it would be all over for him. St. Peter said that would be difficult, but that he would look into it. St. Peter then talked to David Look's counterpart who arranged meetings in heaven and everything was set. The next day, when St. Peter saw the man again, St. Peter told him, "Be here at 8:30 tomorrow morning and you can tell your story." The man was overjoyed and thanked St. Peter profusely. As they parted, St. Peter said to the man, "I must warn you that Noah has asked to say a few words after you speak."

Let Noah come forward!

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