

International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters  
 March 1994, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 95-115

## Opening a Policy Window: The Costa Rican Hospital Retrofit and Seismic Insurance Programs 1986-1992\*

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*In December 1986, the Costa Rican Social Security System formally initiated a seismic retrofit program for several of its principal hospitals as well as its administrative headquarters. Between 1983 and 1991 it also implemented a number of major changes in the seismic insurance coverage afforded its installations. Based on full access to internal documents and thirty-four in-depth interviews with key actors, the author examines the role of "focusing" disaster events and the financial, technical, professional, and ethical considerations behind these major innovations in earthquake protection policy.*

### Introduction

When, why, and how does a "window of opportunity" open for substantive public policy innovations? Or, as Kingdon (1984) asked in his general treatise, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, "How Does an Idea's Time Come?"

Despite the importance of these questions for disaster research, only a small number of scholars (Drabek et al. 1983, Lambright 1984, Olson 1985, Alesch and Petak 1986) have attempted to probe them in any depth. The unfortunate result is that the field possesses few detailed studies of hazard mitigation decisionmaking. Moreover, I can find none which deals with events and processes outside the United States. I offer this paper to partially rectify this gap.

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\* This paper is based on a more extended Spanish language document (Lavell 1992). Author gratefully acknowledges the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), BHM Corporation, and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Author also gratefully acknowledges the review and revision suggestions of Professor Thomas E. Drabek, University of Denver, and Professor Richard Stuart Olson, Arizona State University.