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Book Reviews

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Notable Natural Disasters, Second Edition [book review]

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The second edition of this work has notable improvements. An earlier review (CH, Nov'07) identified several errors. Significant hurricanes were not mentioned, including the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935, and four category 5 hurricanes were incorrectly reported making landfall in 2004. These specific oversights have been corrected. Also, the previous reviewer questioned why human events like the 1947 Texas City ship explosion and 1937 Hindenberg disaster were included in a work on natural disasters. The editors of the 2nd edition explain the human element, "others [disasters] are a combination of spontaneous natural occurrences and elements of human activity like carelessness, failure of design or technology, inadequate planning, or lack of response." The problem with expanding the scope to include human events is the presence of a few leaves questions why others were ignored.   Another criticism of the previous edition was the claim few contributors had science backgrounds. About 30 percent of the contributors in this edition are not associated with a university and their backgrounds are unknown.   A random check of six university contributors showed all had science backgrounds. Thus, the previous criticism may be valid, but it is difficult to verify. The final criticism is the high cost ($275). This is a valid concern since events addressed in these volumes likely have ample coverage elsewhere.   As for the layout of the work, it parallels the previous edition. Volume 1 provides an overview of significant natural events (fires, floods, droughts, etc.), while Volumes 2 and 3 provide entries on 163 notable disasters. Most entries are 4-6 pages, with a few stretching to 10+. A short bibliography for further reading accompanies each entry. *Notable Natural Disasters* is most appropriate for public libraries.