

Kingdom: This paper addresses the question of what items are brought to the national political agenda. How and why are some issues given the spotlight while other ones of equal or greater importance are not? For example, although car crashes kill many more people than air accidents, there is much more attention on the latter unless the number of deaths by car crash crosses an established threshold. Politicians may bring certain issues into the spotlight because of personal experiences. “Focusing events” also serve to create public and political attention, although sometimes there must be repetition of the event in order to show it was not a fluke. **Birkland, In the wake of the Exxon Valdez:** The Exxon Valdez oil spill serves as a good example of the power of a focusing event that led to a policy change. Large events are more powerful at focusing political and national attention on an issue than those that require the compilation of statistical data and scientific evidence. We must use these types of events to mobilize work around prevention of similar disasters. Groups that have less power—namely, environmental groups—are able to gain attention from such events, and can use them to temporarily gain more power. Arguments are sometimes made that because events like an oil spill are not hazardous to human health, they are not disasters. Environmentalists and animal advocates refute this argument. Environmental groups were not popular in Alaska because Alaskans are dependent on the oil industry for state and personal income. Effective to the environmental cause, however, was the fact that the spill disrupted the fishing industry in Alaska, another major source of income. Baseline data should be collected in the areas where oil is most likely to be spilled. **Birkland, Focusing events, mobilization and agenda setting:** This paper looks at how interest groups use focusing events to mobilize. This mobilization allows the groups to advocate for policy change and to create popular dissatisfaction with the current policy (although this may be encouraged or discouraged by business/industry representatives, according to their interests). Groups that are in power are put in a situation where they must downplay an event or defend current policies. The author analyzed congressional testimony related to oil spills, nuclear accidents, earthquakes and hurricanes, coding each speaker before Congress on such qualities as tone and affiliation. He found that nuclear power testimony is less centered on one focusing event than in earthquake and oil spill events, and details the differences between mobilization efforts for each type of hazard. **Birkland and Nath, Business and political dimensions in disaster management:** this article looks at “public affairs crises,” including E. coli outbreaks at Jack in the Box, the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the crash of ValuJet flight 592. “Causal storytelling,” immediate actions taken, the ability to admit wrongdoing when necessary, the corporation’s history (of possible misdeeds) all affect the public view of a company post-crisis. Companies must carefully plan their strategy after a crisis to find the best way to regain public and government support and trust. **Reaction:** the recent tsunami is a good example of a focusing event that has created attention around early warning systems. The lack of a good early warning system in the affected areas was much publicized, and in fact since the event much progress has been made. There was also a fair amount of criticism and questions directed to other geological services that picked up the information and had no system in place to act on it. Other policies that have come up in the news due to it are the way that aid organizations are funded, other preparedness measures along coastlines and whether affected people should be allowed to resettle on vulnerable beaches.