



Society for Risk Analysis New England Chapter

2014-2015 Event Series

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT **Wednesday, March 11, 2015**

Refreshments: 5:30 pm – 6:00 pm

Presentation: 6:00 pm – 6:30 pm

Discussion: 6:30 – 7:00 pm

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNCOMMONS

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Location

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Kresge Building Room G-3 (on the bottom floor)
677 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115

Please RSVP by Thursday, March 6th to Aylin Sertkaya (aylin.sertkaya@erg.com).

Space is limited and to enter the building you need to be on the list of attendees, so reserve your seat today. For more information on SRA-NE, please go to: www.sra.org/sra-ne



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ABSTRACT

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNCOMMONS

We are now familiar with the classic “tragedy of the commons,” in which a shared open-access resource is overused by individuals, with damaging consequences for all. We have learned ways to mobilize collective action and protect public goods from depletion, thereby alleviating some tragedies of the commons (although difficult commons problems still persist where institutions of collective action are weak, such as at the global scale for fisheries and the climate/atmosphere). When societies deal successfully with tragedies of the commons, they prosper economically and environmentally, they reduce their commons risks, and they come to face longer-term and more remote risks. In turn, a new type of problem looms: the “tragedy of the uncommons,” in which a rare extreme catastrophic risk – perhaps a one-shot existential mega-catastrophe – is neglected or mishandled. (Both types of tragedies may be occurring at the same time in various settings, and both types may be mixed in the same setting.) A growing literature focuses on optimal precaution in the face of extreme tail risks. This paper focuses on the psychology, political economy, and policy challenges of tragedies of the uncommons. There are multiple possible tragedies, including: public neglect arising from factors such as the availability heuristic, (un)identified individuals (victims/villains), mass numbing, and underdeterrence; challenges for risk management such as priority-setting, under/over-reaction, optimal precaution, and risk-risk tradeoffs (here, catastrophe-catastrophe tradeoffs); and the difficulty of adaptive learning about rare catastrophes. Illustrative examples include asteroid collisions, back contamination from outer space, and extreme climate change. The paper suggests a twist in the longstanding debate over public vs. expert perceptions of risk; a justification for both precaution and careful regulatory impact assessment (often seen as adversaries, but actually both forms of policy foresight); and a need for new approaches to mobilizing and designing anticipatory policy measures to address looming tragedies of the uncommons.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Jonathan B. Wiener is the Perkins Professor of Law, and Professor of Environmental Policy and Public Policy, at Duke University. He is also a University Fellow of Resources for the Future (RFF). He served as President of the Society for Risk Analysis (SRA) in 2008, and co-chair of the World Congress on Risk in 2012. He is a member of the scientific committee of the International Risk Governance Council (IRGC). He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, the University of Chicago, Univ. Paris-Dauphine, Univ. Paris-Ouest Nanterre, Sciences Po, and EHESS in Paris. His publications include the books *Risk vs. Risk* (1995), *Reconstructing Climate Policy* (2003), *The Reality of Precaution: Comparing Risk Regulation in the US and Europe* (2011), and *Policy Shock* (forthcoming 2015). He was a chapter lead author of the IPCC, 5th Assessment Report, Working Group III, on “International Cooperation” (2014). Before coming to Duke in 1994, he served at the at the US Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division (DOJ/ENRD); at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP); and at the White House Council of Economic Advisers (CEA); there he helped draft the IPCC 1st Assessment Report (1990), helped negotiate the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) (1990-92), and helped draft Executive Order 12,866 on regulatory review (1993). He was a law clerk to federal judges Stephen G. Breyer (1988-89) and Jack B. Weinstein (1987-88). He received his J.D. (1987) and A.B. (1984, economics) from Harvard University.



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GETTING TO THE EVENT

Directions to Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health can be found by clicking [here](#).

Via MBTA (subway):

Take an "E" train on the MBTA Green Line to the Brigham Circle stop. To visit the MBTA website, click [here](#).

Driving from North or South of Boston:

Take I-93 North/South to Exit 26 (Storrow Drive). Follow Storrow Drive approximately 2.5 miles to Kenmore Square/Fenway exit (on left). The exit ramp forks, stay to your right. Take a right at the first light, which will bring you to into Kenmore Square. At the second light, bear left onto Brookline Avenue (left of Uno Chicago Grill). Follow Brookline Avenue approximately 1 mile to the intersection of Brookline and Longwood Avenues (Beth Israel Hospital will be on your left; watch for blue and white Longwood Medical Area signs). Take a left onto Longwood Avenue. At the third set of lights, turn right onto Huntington Avenue. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health will be on your right.

Driving from West of Boston:

Take I-90 to Exit 18. Follow Storrow Drive Eastbound to the Kenmore Square/Fenway exit. (.8 miles) Follow the directions above.

-or-

Take Route 95 to Route 9 East. Follow Route 9 to Brookline Avenue (7.1 miles). Turn left onto Brookline Avenue after the Brookline Village intersection (.6 miles). Turn right onto Longwood Avenue (.4 miles). At the end of Longwood, turn right onto Huntington Avenue (456 feet). Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health will be on your right.

Parking

Day parking near Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health is limited, and the cost is approximately \$30 per day. We strongly encourage participants to use public transportation whenever possible, but if you do need to drive, you may find availability at these local garages:

- [333 Longwood Avenue Garage](#), located at 333 Longwood Avenue, Boston
- [Longwood Galleria Garage](#), located at 350 Longwood Avenue, Boston
- [375 Longwood Garage](#), located at 375 Longwood Avenue, Boston
- [Stanhope Lot](#), located at 690 Huntington Avenue, Boston