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Understanding Risk addresses a central dilemma of risk decisionmaking in a democracy: detailed scientific and technical information is essential for making decisions, but the people who make and live with those decisions are not scientists. The key task of risk characterization is to provide needed and appropriate information to decisionmakers and the public. This important new volume illustrates that making risks understandable to the public involves much more than translating scientific knowledge. The volume also draws conclusions about what society should expect from risk characterization and offers clear guidelines and principles for informing the wide variety of risk decisions that face our increasingly technological society.

Understanding Risk Frames fundamental questions about what risk characterization means. Reviews traditional definitions and explores new conceptual and practical approaches. Explores how risk characterization should inform decisionmakers and the public. Looks at risk characterization in the context of the entire decisionmaking process. Understanding Risk discusses how risk characterization has fallen short in many recent controversial decisions. Throughout the text, examples and case studies--such as planning for the long-term ecological health of the Everglades or deciding on the operation of a waste incinerator--bring key concepts to life. Understanding Risk will be important to anyone involved in risk issues: federal, state, and local policymakers and regulators; risk managers; scientists; industrialists; researchers; and concerned individuals.