



Black Swans, Grey Rhinos, and Dragon Kings: the Next Great Challenges for Emergency Management

Presented by: **Christopher Godley, CEM, Director of Emergency Management, Stanford University**

Presentation Abstract: As individuals, each of us have our own perspective in how we see and think about the world - this is called a paradigm or worldview. As emergency managers, the way we view future risk shapes our actions and may ultimately determine just how successful we are - we must become more adept at perceiving if we are to truly remain effective at protecting.

In this session, we will assess the potential for viewing future risk through a different paradigm. The term “black swan” was made popular by Nassim Taleb and describes a significant event that surprises everyone because our outlook on what was possible is too narrow - an example being 9/11. A “grey rhino” event is a highly probable and understood (but ignored) threat - for example, a major earthquake in the Pacific Northwest. The term “dragon king” refers to an event that is extremely large or has an outsized impact and is statistically an outlier – Three Mile Island serves as an example here.

Why do disasters usually take us by surprise? Can we learn to anticipate even “impossible” events? How will we manage the unmanageable? Come help find the answers for questions we are all just starting to ask.

Learning Objectives:

1. Attendees will understand and be able to explain the paradigm and the characteristics of potential disasters defined as highly improbable/difficult to predict, obvious but ignored, or “impossible”.
2. Attendees will understand the potential likelihood, scope of impact, and challenges of extreme disasters considered likely to occur before 2040.
3. Attendees will also be provided with key references and source materials for the three key paradigms and for each disaster scenario presented.

Speaker Bio: Christopher Godley was appointed as the Director of Emergency Management for Stanford University in 2023 where he leads the oversight and execution of the University’s comprehensive emergency management programs including preparedness, business continuity planning, response operations, and recovery.

Previously, Chris led the creation of the new Department of Emergency Management in Sonoma County following their devastating 2017 firestorms.

Chris has served in various leadership positions in response to more than three dozen local, state, and federal disasters. Chris is a graduate of UCLA and obtained his master’s degree from California State University, Long Beach in Emergency Services Administration with a focus area of climate change preparedness.