Profiling Canadian Risk and Hazard Trailblazers: Louise Bussieres

Laurentian University

Public Forum
Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas
Montreal, Canada.
8 March 2017
A Conversation between Louise Bussieres

and Shona de Jong
Background

Job title / Role/Organization: Chief, Climate Services/Prediction Services Directorate - Central Region / Meteorological Service of Canada

Academic background: B. A. Sc., Geological Engineer; M. Sc., Geology; Diploma in Atmospheric Sciences; Applied Meteorology (forecaster program)

Association Affiliations: Ordre des Ingénieurs du Québec (OIQ)

Years in Hazards and Risk: Over twenty years of experience as an operational forecaster, issuing weather forecasts and warnings. Five years in Climate services, responsible for supporting Operations and Partners such as Public Safety. Provide the climate context to some weather events (risk communication approach).
What do Canadian women need to do to become leaders in the 21st century Hazard and Risk (Disaster Management - DM)?

First and foremost, women need to be competent in their field. Second, they should be aware of challenges and opportunities. Overall, they should be good communicators. This advice is for both men and women – as we are in the 21st century.
What’s the biggest misunderstanding about what it’s like to be a woman in Disaster Management (DM) right now?

I would say the tendency to confine women in more traditional roles, for example, as first responders, in the field of nursing, or paramedics. Although the importance of first responders is certainly paramount, women can accomplish other things as well, such as hazard risk management and high-level decision-making during times of crisis.
In your field within hazard and risk management, have you worked with one gender more than the other?
Yes, at the beginning of my career - as a geologist and as a meteorologist - women were especially under-represented. At this time, women’s underrepresentation was evident in many other scientific fields.

If so, do you notice any changes happening to this pattern? Absolutely, women are more and more interested in Sciences in general. Because of their science qualifications and experience women take higher positions in the chain of command.

If there is an imbalance, what could be done to change it? It is becoming more balanced. Young women, though, still need to have positive role models in higher management. They need to feel they can succeed in traditionally more male dominated fields.
How do you think your gender has affected your working life?

Earlier in my career not many opportunities were offered. As a female student, it was harder to get experience. For example, women were often overlooked to do field work. Also, back then, I thought that sometimes I was lacking the experience to apply on some positions. In contrast, men seemed to think they were competent, no matter what...
Has your gender ever been an obstacle or benefit to perform a task within the realm of DM in which you work?

Now, being a female scientist is a benefit, as communication is becoming more and more important. I had to work hard to hone this skill - perhaps more than most men ever had to.
What advice would you give a man/woman entering this field about work and handling the expectations of others?

Ask yourself: do you like doing this type of work? Also, do not be afraid to make errors, as long as they become a learning experience.

Would this advice be the same for men and women? Yes

Why? I think every human being, man or woman, needs to find satisfaction in their work, and need to improve during their career, allowing them to apply to positions where they think they can make a difference.
L. Bussieres

What’s the most significant work-related first responder experience you’ve had? During the 1998 Ice Storm, I was shift supervisor at the Quebec Weather Office for many of those problematic days. Expectations of the Quebec Weather Office included being prepared to answer the media at all times, and to support the Montreal Weather Office.

In Quebec City, we were getting non-stop snow and winds. It was hazardous for us to get to work and meet all the demands for information. As well, the Quebec Public Safety’s headquarters are in Quebec City, so we had to provide extra-detailed forecasts to Quebec Public Safety.

At the same time, Montreal Weather Office faced potential power outages and their staff had problems getting to the office. We kept the authorities aware at all times of what was about to come. It felt like our expertise was relevant, and that we were making a difference.
What’s the next hazard and risk frontier?
Risk communication, before the hazard ever happens. Traditionally, the dominant approach in the weather world has been to forecast hazards, rather than impacts. We are moving more and more towards quantifying and qualifying potential impacts of a hazard event. Thus, we are working towards forecasting a range of potential impacts (event related risks) before an event happens.

What part of this frontier are you most excited about?
This initiative is being accomplished through an iterative and learning process between meteorologists and partners, such as Public Safety and Health authorities, to name a few. If this initiative is successful, we will be more in the business of risk management (proactive), rather than crisis management (reactive).
Further Reading

This is collaboration between ECCC, UQAM, INSPQ and Health Canada (reference in French and in English). I was responsible for some sections of this guide, as well as to coordinating ECCC input. This publication is a great example of collaboration between MSC (Meteorological Service of Canada), with academia (UQAM) and Health authorities (INSPQ, HC).


www.crhnet.ca

- Current + Past Symposia
- Library
- Resources
- Ongoing research
- National Platform for DRR

Social Media networks much more...