A defining element of catastrophes is the magnitude of their harmful consequences. To help society to prevent or mitigate damage from catastrophes, immense effort and technological sophistication are often employed to assess and communicate the size and scope of potential or actual losses. This effort assumes that people can understand the resulting numbers and act on them appropriately. However, recent research casts doubt on this fundamental assumption. Large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling). We respond strongly to aid a single individual in need, but often ignore mass tragedies such as genocide or fail to take appropriate measures to reduce potential losses from natural disasters. This occurs, in part, because as numbers get larger we become insensitive; numbers fail to trigger the emotion or feeling necessary to motivate action. Possible psychological, legal, and institutional remedies for this insensitivity will be presented.

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~Colloquium~
Friday, June 4, 2010
3:00 p.m. in BEC 155, COCC Campus
Presented by Dr. Paul Slovic
Professor of Psychology,
University of Oregon