

WTMC PhD WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT

Safety Cultures and Responsible Citizens

7-9 April 2010, Soeterbeeck, Ravenstein

Workplace health and safety regulation, 'blame-free' systems for reporting errors in aviation or medicine, preventive lifestyle improvement programs: matters of safety are becoming increasingly important in our technological culture. Risks and safety interventions become manifest on population levels when the flu is rendered pandemic and national governments have to act in a world of uncertainty. On an organizational level, fire regulation in the buildings we inhabit and first aid networks aim at safeguarding us while we are at work, while at the same time shifting the notion of what we consider to be a 'manageable risk'. On a more personal level, safety practices are ever more interwoven with 'lifestyle' matters. Step counters, measuring our daily movements, may be seen as an individual aid for improving personal fitness but with the quantification of 'healthy living' individually comes a debate about 'responsible citizenship' that quickly questions the boundaries of solidarity. With individual *possibilities* of safety improvement comes a *responsibility* to the collective to enhance safety – or to be held accountable for failing to do so, for example by being placed in a higher insurance risk category. Safety devices therefore reconfigure what it means to be a responsible and accountable citizen.

The focus on safety regulation is partly due to the dependence of modern societies on critical infrastructures. If electricity, transport or communication networks fail, such societies come to a hold. For the enhancement of safety and reliability of such networks, standards are often considered important preconditions. However, standardization can also result in new risks when newly imposed standards conflict with existing local practices. Despite this 'risk of new risks', safety improvement activities are often justified by a 'logic of repair': through improved protocols, safety gaps are fixed which leads to less accidents and better (health) outcomes. This 'deficit' model of safety may lead to a reduced sensitivity for the safety practices that at present make technological cultures relatively robust and sometimes leads to safety initiatives that threaten safety rather than enhancing it.

One of the ironies of individual safety improvement initiatives is that the affordances for *unsafe* and *unhealthy* living are unsurpassed in modern societies. Paradoxically, citizens are expected to be rational actors, choosing in their best self-interest in a society of plenty. Where neoliberal consumer-roles are well aligned with the 'epidemic of obesity', notions of discipline and rational choice of the perfect subject urge citizens to achieve thinness amidst this plenty. The implied self-reliance is amplified by pseudo-medical devices such as step counters and iPhone apps like HealthCalc ("a Utility application for fat persons all over the world") and MyHealthCoach. Responsible and safe citizenship may thus come at a high cost, both in terms of 'societal deservingness' and in terms of insurance premiums to be paid.

These issues not only indicate the need to study the ironies of technoscientific safety cultures and responsible citizens, but also to explore how concepts and theories in science and technology studies can reconfigure such debates and propose different modes of governing safety and responsibility. This is precisely the aim of this workshop. Besides lectures by leading scholars in this field, the workshop includes scrutinizing core texts on safety cultures and skills training activities. Confirmed speakers include Roland Bal, Anique Hommels, Klasien Horstman and Michiel Korthals.

The registration form for the workshop is available online at:
http://www.mb.utwente.nl/steps/forms/WTMC_April_workshop_2010.doc/

Please register by 22 February 2010.