



Useless Arithmetic: Why Environmental Scientists Can't Predict the Future

Orrin H. Pilkey, Linda Pilkey-Jarvis

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Useless Arithmetic: Why Environmental Scientists Can't Predict the Future Orrin H. Pilkey, Linda Pilkey-Jarvis

Writing for the general, nonmathematician reader and using examples from throughout the environmental sciences, Orrin Pilkey and Linda Pilkey-Jarvis show how unquestioned faith in mathematical models can blind us to the hard data and sound judgment of experienced scientific fieldwork. They begin with the extinction of the North Atlantic cod on the Grand Banks of Canada, and then they discuss the limitations of many models across a broad array of crucial environmental subjects. Case studies depict how the seductiveness of quantitative models has led to unmanageable nuclear waste disposal practices, poisoned mining sites, unjustifiable faith in predicted sea level rise rates, bad predictions of future shoreline erosion rates, overoptimistic cost estimates of artificial beaches, and a host of other problems. The authors demonstrate how many modelers have been reckless, employing fudge factors to assure "correct" answers and caring little if their models actually worked.

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