

# Emergency

The news is not good. The sense of imminent catastrophe is overwhelming, and it can be almost impossible to sort through the media's different versions of the crises we face. We are reminded of the Chicken Little story, but in the end the old folk tale provides little comfort. The two versions of the story start at the same place. *The sky is falling!* Chicken Little hollers after an apple falls on his head. He rallies his friends in terror at the prospect of the world's demise, and the comrades set off to warn others of imminent disaster. Too late they discover that their fears are shadowed by more immediate dangers that lie closer to home.

*PUBLIC 36* would run to hundreds of pages if we were to include all the catastrophic events of the last several years. Images of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the Southeast Asian tsunami, and receding glaciers are vivid in the public imagination. Meanwhile, thousands of people die each day of AIDS and other diseases, war continues to kill in the world's many hot spots, nuclear weapons capabilities are being pursued by corrupt powers, and civil unrest and growing poverty are on the rise in the so-called developing world, not to mention in the world's wealthiest nations. It would be impossible to touch on all these issues. Rather, we have solicited ideas and gathered works that not only cover a range of topics related to the idea of emergency, but also take a variety of forms, including scholarly texts, testimonials, journalistic research, and artists projects.

Emergencies make up the news of the day, enemies are identified and targeted, increased security measures mark our public spaces, and we are becoming adept at shuttering down. As images of upheaval and devastation become increasingly commonplace, how many remain engaged by the world's emergencies, or by the threats of imminent disaster? But it would be a mistake to assume that all is lost. Community groups take local action, and we find humour in the ironies deeply rooted in a system that capitalizes on its own resistance movements as everything green becomes a consumable and bureaucracies undermine the process of agency.

Extreme weather conditions continue, water shortages are pending and bridges are falling down, but the ability to protest is still with us. If we run in fear with Chicken Little we could well end up as the original version of the story has it, eaten by the fox that pretends to offer protection. The Disney version's happy ending is more comforting, but the older folk tale warns us to be careful of what we believe, and to be aware of the real risks we all face in an unstable world.