Facts matter only if *You* can *Communicate* them

(Public Communication isn’t Peer Review)

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Objectives

- Identify necessity and challenges of communicating technical information to non-technical audience
- Discuss communication principles and attributes of effective presenters
- Define “community”
What are the challenges?

- Competing, more visible issues
- Generally low technical literacy
  - Doesn’t allow you to ignore them…
- Complex content
  - Natural-resource exploitation
  - Land-use decisions
  - Infrastructure
  - Climate change, other hazards
What are the needs?

- Technical knowledge
  - Are you a fox or a hedgehog?

- Credibility
  - Subjective assessment
    - Audience
    - Presenter’s organization
      - Real/perceived conflict of interest?
    - The presenter (You!)

- Evidence-based methods
What are the needs?

- Communication skills
  - Determine message
  - Communicate message

- What is the message?
  - Consistency and focus (CEA/Harris): SOCO (Howard)

- Distinguish between message and what one actually says ("Don’t worry.")

- Frame the message (CRED, 2011)
Controversy?

- Scientific vs. social/political
- Context in one domain may have no bearing on the other
  - Not a scientific debate
  - “Balance”
  - “Proof”
- Add context while avoiding advocacy
  - Is advocacy wrong?
Who is the community?

Possible defining criteria

- Geographic location
- Cultural/ethnic/religious
  - Language
- Economic status
  - Home ownership
  - Public, private, non-profit sectors
- Physical characteristics
  - Pre-existing medical conditions
Who is the community?

- Is there an actual community?
  - Common interest(s)
  - Common (self-)identification
  - Beware assumptions
  - Social cohesion
  - Identifiable leaders (official vs. actual)

- FEMA Whole Community project

- US DHHS: cultural competence
How best to engage?

- Community “DNA”
  - Definitions
  - Constraints
  - Concerns
  - Vulnerabilities
  - Leaders and trusted sources
What’s important?

- Subjective
  - Recognize audience perspective
- You don’t get to determine this
- “Hazard vs. Outrage” (Sandman)
  - “Don’t worry…”
- “In the absence of understanding, perception is reality.”
Concern vs. hazard (Sandman)
Being a credible source

Outcome = Audience + Message + Medium

- Start from the left…
- Respect your audience
  - Don’t “dumb it down”
- Know your topic (and your limitations)
- Be consistent, but admit uncertainty
- Medium ≠ Message
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