Social Values in Stakeholder Communication:
How to communicate about ionizing radiation?

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Connecting two FP7 projects

OperA

Open Project for European Radiation Research Area

EAGLE

Enhancing Education, Training and Communication Processes for Informed Behaviors and Decision-making Related to Ionizing Radiation Risks
Connecting two FP7 projects
(selected) Goals

Recommendation for future research on risk communication/perception and integration of these issues in training and education.

Guidance tools for good practice to support the ideal of a participative, citizen-centred communication.

Improve risk communication/governance
Risk communication

Supports the stakeholders to make informed decisions and to establish two-way communication and joint problem solving.

• It involves communities
• It protects vulnerable groups
• It serves the public interest (health)

Citizen-centred communication
Risk communication

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Citizen-centred communication

Challenging
Project Finding:
Industry, experts’, authorities views

The general public should be ‘educated’ by
‘explaining them the facts’
and by assisting people to ‘better understand’ nuclear technology.

“Let’s educate emotional and radio-phobic people.”
Example

To help prevent unnecessary, radiation-phobia-related deaths, morbidity, patient’s refusal of medical imaging, dissuading the study of low-dose radiation therapies, and injuries associated with nuclear/radiological emergencies through countering phobia-promoting misinformation spread by alarmists via the news and social media.

Fig. 1 Leukemia incidence in the Hiroshima survivors, 1950–1957 (Cutler 2014). Dashed blue line through 100 rem dose addresses footnote for 50 rem dose in UNSCEAR 1958 “that almost all cases
Citizens miss the recognition by an industry, research and authorities of being a competent stakeholder.

They miss an empathy.

Communication is still too much seen as a one-directional transfer of information from a source to a receiver.
Challenge: Low knowledge about ionising radiation

“Natural radioactivity is never dangerous because we are used and adapted to it.”

“Vegetables grown near a nuclear power plant cannot be safely consumed because of radioactivity.”

Source: SCK•CEN Barometer 2013, Turcanu C. & Perko T.
Project Findings: Media Actors’ View

• Communication by authorities is often driven by interest and they are often concealing or holding back the truth.

• It is a challenge to find neutral/reliable sources willing to provide information.

“Scientists need time to formulate answers and authorities take a long time to organize an official message. However, anti-nuclear groups in time of crisis do not face such constraints and are therefore much faster in forming and voicing their message.”

• Journalists are very reluctant to communicate with representatives of public relations. They appeal for experts to be trained for media communication.
Example
Public Relation vs. Media framing

Sellafield site operating at reduced manning levels.

As a result of a conservative and prudent decision to reduce manning levels today.

This follows the detection of elevated levels of radiation at the north end of the site.

Essential workers only are being asked to report.

Levels of radioactivity detected are above natural levels and we would call for any actions to be taken by the emergency services.

The site is at normal status and employees are being asked to return.

We have taken this decision to focus on investigations.

If this had happened during the working day we would have asked for any actions to be taken by the emergency services.

We will continue to issue updates via our website.

Source: PR- operator

Sellafield partly closed after 'above normal' radiation

A perimeter alarm detected "elevated" radioactivity.

The Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant in Cumbria is partially closed after "elevated levels of radioactivity" were detected.

Each building was checked after a perimeter alarm was triggered at the north of the site.

The company later said it was naturally occurring background radiation and not attributable to any issue with any operation on site.

A spokesman stressed there was no risk to the public or workforce.

He added: "There can be no guessing on nuclear sites".

Rory O'Neill, director of stakeholder relations, said: "One of the 20-odd site perimeter monitors that we have is registering above normal levels of radiation.

"It's not a level that would trigger any kind of activity on or off site. It's just an unusual period of time where the natural background radiation is particularly high."

Source: BBC
You have a 97% chance of survival.
You have a 97% chance of survival.

You have a 3% chance of dying.
SPIEGEL: The government of the Fukushima prefecture has invited you to inform people in the affected region about radiation risks. Right at the beginning, you said: "The effects of radiation do not come to people who are happy and laughing, they come to people who are weak-spirited." What did you mean by that?

Yamashita: That was on March 20 during the first meeting. I was really shocked. The people were so serious, nobody laughed at all.

SPIEGEL: These people's villages and home towns are contaminated. Nobody knows about the invisible dangers. What did you expect?

Yamashita: The mood of the people was really depressed. From animal experiments with rats we clearly know that animals who are very susceptible to stress will be more affected by radiation. Stress is not good at all for people who are subjected to radiation. Besides, mental-state stress also supresses the immune system and therefore may promote some cancer and non-cancer diseases. That is why I told people that they also have to relax.
Example:
Information campaigns
Question to the ethics community

How to continue?