

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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– Jules Renard

June 2021, Issue 32



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

RISK COMMUNICATION 101

There are many aspects to consider when it comes to preparing communities for climate change. One that none of us should consider shortchanging is the need to update our risk communication skills.

I am understandably biased, as I think communication plays an important role in just about every endeavor. But this skill set is particularly important here. There are many of us, myself included, who would prefer to stick our heads in the proverbial beach sand instead of contemplating, much less preparing for, bad things that might happen in the future. Add to that the segment of the population who think climate change is overblown, or just can't get comfortable with something that is presented in terms of probabilities.

But climate change is real, and for many locations, the impact will be huge. For those of us in this field, we are not doing our jobs justice if we don't do what we can to prepare citizens and help them understand what they can do to protect themselves. But first our message has to be heard. And understood.

There are numerous organizations and courses focused on helping scientists talk to James and Josephine Citizen. That's really important. At my organization, we have a section in our training department that offers several courses and publications designed to help people improve their risk communication skills, and the resources offered are excellent.

My favorite starting point is this publication: "[Risk Communication Basics](#)." It's only 15 pages long, but it is packed full of good information that is easy to digest.

Know Thy Audience

I know, I know. "Knowing your audience" is the number one requirement of any communication strategy. But when it comes to talking about climate change, target audiences may represent demographics you aren't familiar with. To be successful, you need to understand each audience's perspectives and values, and be able to address their specific concerns.

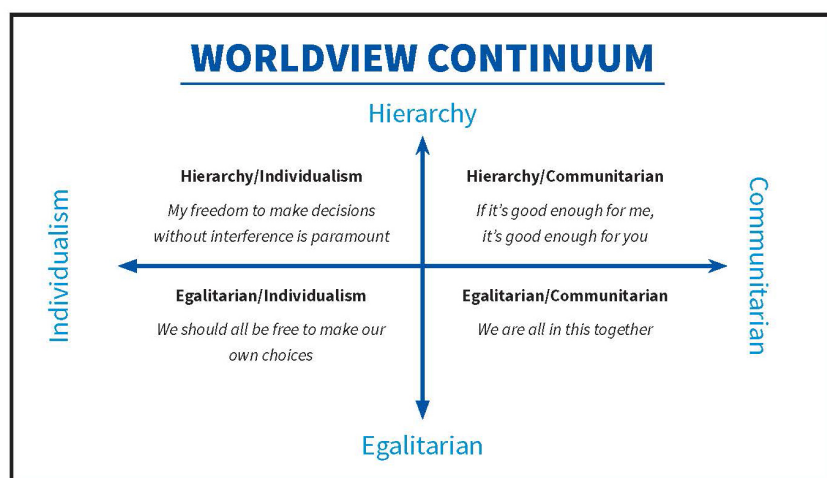
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“Risk Communication Basics” focuses on the science concerned with figuring out how people see the world, which is a good thing to know for effective communications to occur. One consideration has to do with the “worldview” the person holds. Social science studies show how people unconsciously connect perceived risk to the proposed solutions; if the solution conflicts with their worldview, they are likely to downplay the risk or dismiss the threat altogether. Understanding your audience’s worldview provides clues for conducting a successful communication strategy.

- For those with egalitarianism values, equality of all people is important. Emphasizing what the community can gain is an approach to consider.

Inspiring Risk-Wise Behavior

Risk communication research shows people will gradually change their minds and behaviors when presented with information that affirms how they view the world and what they already believe. This means the communicator must listen to the audience to understand their worldview and what matters to them, and to shape or frame the message to affirm these values.



Adapted from Kahan, 2012

This transfer certainly doesn’t happen overnight, and there are no magic words or perfect phrases to make this happen. Simply providing more information is not enough. Presenting the same facts over and over again doesn’t work either. You have to provide information that the audience wants, and present it in the way they are most likely to respond to. Make it local. Make it personal. Focus on what residents are already observing, and avoid a debate about technical details.

- People who lean toward individualism think society functions best with fewer regulations, letting people decide things for themselves. A conversation framed around individual preparedness may resonate best.
- Those on the communitarian side of the equation think society functions best when people work together for the common good, with rules and regulations to guide everyone. Framing the conversation around “community preparedness” would be a good bet.
- Those with a hierarchy worldview tend to value more clearly defined ranking systems. The research suggests a “loss”-framed message (talking about what the audience stands to lose) might be more successful.

None of this is easy, which is why I believe our [risk communication resource page](#) is so helpful. Take a class. Review a document or two. Or contact our risk communication specialist, Stephanie.Fauver@noaa.gov. I’m sure she would love to hear from you.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product: Risk Communication Strategy Template

Source: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, Digital Coast Training Resources (coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-communication-strategy.html)

Submitted by: Stephanie Fauver, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management


What it is: A step-by-step approach to risk communication that walks users through the process using a series of questions.

Why I like it: There are many benefits to using this as a starting point, including the following:

- It helps users get to know their audience—and figure out how they will connect with them—by thinking about the answers to the questions in the template.

- It's great for people working as a team. They can work through their strategy together and get on the same page with what they want to accomplish with their risk communication efforts, and avoid communication missteps. This [newsletter](#) talks about how we provided a one-day training, followed by a day of technical assistance, where we walked folks through the strategy.
- The companion video helps users avoid having too broad of an audience and goal, and can help them get to an actionable goal—not just simply wanting people to understand their risk—which is a common mistake we see all the time.
- There is also a companion product—[Connecting with Your Audience: Planning Your Next Interaction](#). Once people complete their strategy using the template, they can use this quick reference to think about the format, logistics, materials, supplies, and partners that will be part of their next interaction with their audience, whether it's a large event or a small focus group.

Quick Reference



Risk Communication Strategy Template

Our goal is to help people understand their coastal hazard risks and take actions to keep their communities, families, and homes as safe as possible.

This template provides a place for you, the risk communicator, to identify the priority audience and determine how to best engage this audience. You can use this template to quickly capture ideas or to build a foundation for a detailed communications strategy.

Keep in mind that there is no such thing as the "general public." The more specific your priority audience, the more effective your risk communication efforts will be. Use this template multiple times to capture information about different priority audiences.

Need extra help? Contact coastal.info@noaa.gov. You can also attend the Building Risk Communication Skills training.

Learn more at coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/building-risk-communication-skills.html.

STEP 1: DEFINE

Use your biggest challenge to define your priority audience and goal


STEP 2: UNDERSTAND

Understand more about your priority audience and what they care about

STEP 3: CONNECT

Connect with your audience to inform action

Quick Reference



Connecting with your Audience: Planning Your Next Interaction

Each interaction with your audience provides a powerful opportunity to learn about that group and share information about coastal hazard risks. This quick reference leads you through the planning process and provides examples of how others are approaching this task.

Part 1 – Identify Audience and Goal

Part 2 – Outline Content and Format

Part 3 – Identify Logistics

Part 4 – Identify Materials and Supplies

Part 5 – Read about Tools, Techniques, and Examples of How People Are Interacting

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Before you start filling in this worksheet, have you determined your priority audience? Is your audience narrowed down as much as possible to ensure that your interaction is most effective? Have you defined your risk communication goal? Do you know what ways your audience likes to interact on this topic? If you responded "no" to any of these questions, start with the risk communication strategy template found at this address:

coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-communication-strategy.html

OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT | DIGITAL COAST
From the Building Risk Communication Skills Training

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05/2020

FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – OCEANREPORTS VIDEO

There's a good chance that many of the coastal management professionals you work with can benefit from using [OceanReports](#)—the web-based mapping tool that provides users with a better understanding of their ocean “neighborhood” of choice. Now, thanks to this snazzy new video, you can introduce them to the tool in just one minute, easily showing them why and how they can use it to their advantage. View it here: coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/oceanreportsuses/video.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), and tag along with these campaigns:

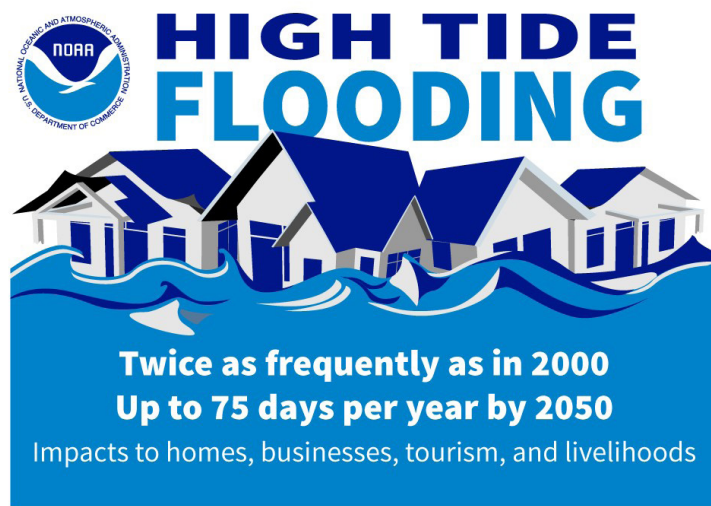
- June 14 to 18: Use [#WestCoast](#) to share stories of the region's work and accomplishments.

- All month: Use [#TeachersOnTheEstuary](#) to advertise your upcoming workshops and tell the tales of the program's myriad achievements.
- All month: Use [#30DaysOfOcean](#) to celebrate a month of ocean awareness.

RISK COMMUNICATION TOPIC PAGE

We've highlighted several risk communication products in this issue, and (we hope!) got you excited about delving into the topic and ready for more. Don't worry—we won't leave you hanging. You can find an array of risk communications resources, including publications, trainings, and quick references, on the Digital Coast. Find them all here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/topics/risk-communication.html.

FAST FACTS – HIGH TIDE FLOODING



This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/recurrent-tidal-flooding.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

Coastal Communicators is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

To subscribe to this newsletter, visit coast.noaa.gov/contactform.

Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.