Module 8
Risk Communication and Decision Support
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The Tasks of Risk Communication

- To inform and to educate
- To initiate behavior change and support protective action
- To warn of disaster and provide emergency information
- To support joint problem solving and conflict resolution
Communication Process Simplified

What?  How?  To whom?
Risk Communication Process

Message

Channel

Source

Receiver
Potential Source Problems

- Disagreement among scientific experts
- Limited resources for addressing risk issues of public concern
- Failure to disclose limitations of (risk) assessments and resulting uncertainties
- Limited understanding of interests, concerns, fears, values, priorities, and preferences of individuals and public interest groups
- Use of bureaucratic, legalistic, and technical language
- Lack of trust and credibility

Source
Potential Message Problems

- Deficiencies in scientific understanding, data, models, and methods resulting in large uncertainties in risk estimates
- Highly technical analyses that are often unintelligible to lay persons
- Sheer amount or complexity of the analysis
Potential Channel Problems

- Selective and biased media reporting that emphasizes drama, wrongdoing, disagreement and conflict
- Premature disclosure of scientific information
- Oversimplifications, distortions, and inaccuracies in interpreting technical risk information
Potential Receiver Problems

- Inaccurate perceptions of levels of risk
- Lack of interest in technical complexities
- Strong beliefs and opinions that are resistant to change
- Exaggerated expectations about the effectiveness of regulatory actions
- Desire and demand for (scientific) certainty
- Reluctance to make tradeoffs between risks, costs and benefits
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived risk</th>
<th>Actual risk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>Education and awareness campaigns to align low risk perception to actual high risk</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Type of Information

- Very easy to understand simple messages
- Very specialized and detailed research findings

Target Audiences

- General public
- Experts, specialists, academia
Risk Message Checklist

- Information about the nature of risks
- Information on alternatives
- Uncertainties in knowledge about risks
- Information on risk management
Levels of Risk Communication

- **Global**
  - Liaison with international authorities

- **Region**
  - Liaison with authorities from neighboring countries

- **Country**
  - Information and education
  - “Master plan” for crisis handling (horizontally at all levels as well as vertically)
  - Practicing the emergency situation
  - Liaison with private sector and Civil Society Organizations
  - Contact with mass media

- **State**

- **Community**

- **Family**

- **Individual**

How can I minimize risks?
What to report a suspicion or case?
Internal Communication

- Ensure smooth communication among members of the project team
- Provide members of the project team with easy access to relevant information (e.g. website, wikis, accessible repositories)
- Update donors and developing country collaborators on progress of the project