



Maastricht University

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Risk perception and risk communication

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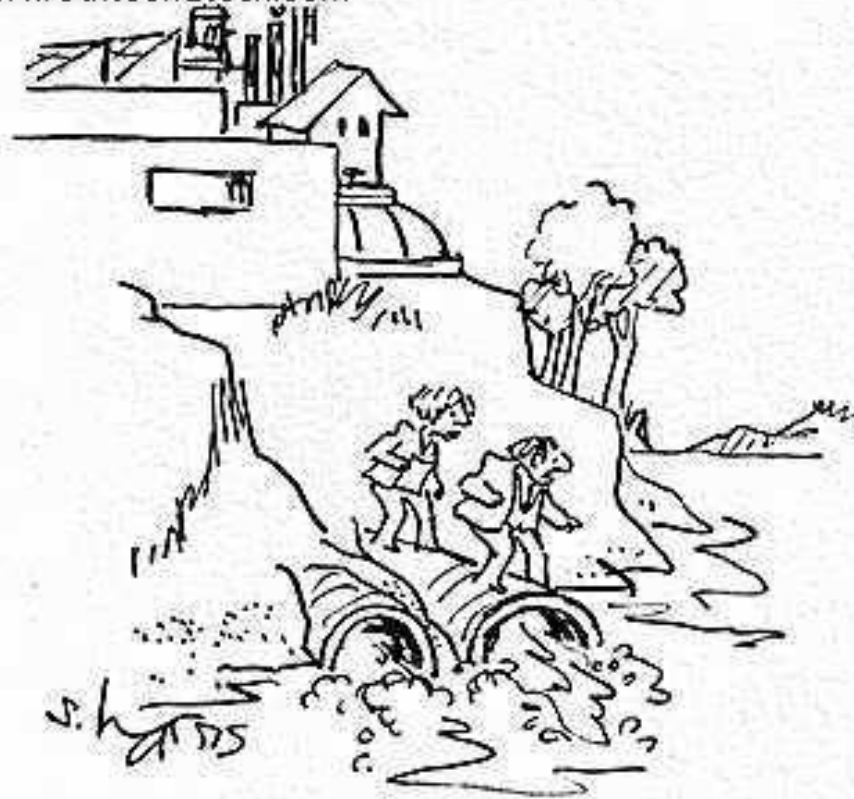
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Purpose of this presentation:

- What is risk communication about?
- What drives risk perception?
- State of the art of risk communication: what has been proved to work and what does not

What risk communication is not

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"HAVE OUR P.R. PEOPLE DO A REPORT ON THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF CYANIDE ON RIVER LIFE."

Lay vs./expert perceptions

Why do people care more about the chemical plant few miles away than the stuff in their kitchen?

A well-established field that can help risk communicators

Cognitive drivers that influence risk perceptions.
(e.g. Fischhoff, Renn, Slovic and White)

Understanding these drivers is the first step towards building an effective risk communication strategy
(Fischhoff 1995; Leiss 1996)

Perception drivers

Voluntary/involuntary

Natural/ technological



Control/no control

Familiar/ non familiar



Children/no children



Reproductive organs

Low probability high consequences/ high
probability low consequences

Other critical factors for risk decisions

Heuristics and affect

Slovic 2001

Risk Amplification/attenuation

Kasperson et al. 1988 ++ Pidgeon et al.
2003

Trust/no trust

Trust: Fairness, Competence, Efficiency –
Renn and Levine 1991

Building effective risk communication

Sender/receiver model of communication
(Laswell 1948)

Proactive and two-way (Fischhoff 1995;
Leiss 1996; Lofstedt 2005)

Non-persuasive (Fischhoff 2007)

Social amplification / attenuation of risk

Kasperson et al. 1988 ++
Pidgeon et al. 2003

Information passes from sender to receiver through intermediate stations of a communication chain (individuals; medias; NGOs etc.). This process, which also includes ripple effects, may amplify or attenuate perceptions

State of the art risk communication?

Lofstedt 2009

HSE 2010

Take home lesson - 1

Frequent dialogues between regulators,
industry , media and key politicians

Take home lesson - 2

Confrontations between the key parties will destroy public trust and could be amplified by the media

Take home lesson – 3

Lawyers tend to inject more disputes. Only involve them when absolutely necessary

Take home lesson - 4

Involve highly trusted individuals

Take home lesson - 5

NGOs can shape policy outcomes

Take home lesson - 6

The opinion of local policy makers is important

Take home lesson – 7

Taking responsibility is important

Thank you very much!

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