

Research on communication and communication of research – pinpointing the best practice to improve our outreach

CHAIRS: Thomas-Benjamin Seiler, Henner Hollert, Ursula Klaschka,
Katharina Tarnacki



Wednesday 14th May 2014, 10:45 – 12:50, room: Shanghai 3/4

This special session will review and combine practical experiences and theoretical backgrounds to elaborate principles and strategies of science and risk communication for increasing the visibility of environmental sciences. Proper communication of research topics and findings is crucial for environmental sciences to have an impact with the public and policy. This became more than clear during the sessions on science communication at the SETAC World Meeting 2012 in Berlin and at the SETAC Europe Meeting 2013 in Glasgow. However, we also concluded that successful communication requires particular communication skills to engage with policy makers and the public, and that environmental scientists usually are not educated (enough) to do so. Actually, this is no surprise since communication as a subject is not part of most environmental scientists' curriculum. It is, however, astonishing that a research field as relevant to people's everyday life as environmental sciences seems to have a large deficit regarding communication with the public – and thus is still nearly invisible on daily news. Environmental sciences almost exclusively come into focus on the occurrence of emergencies and disasters; but they also disappear as quickly. With the first and acclaimed session on science and risk communication at Berlin 2012 we started a process to lead into a broad discussion about why environmental sciences fail to effectively translate their message, and how to change this situation for the better. The follow-up event at Glasgow – this time featuring a panel discussion – was also well-received. This strong attention definitely revealed a need for such topics at annual meetings and for a forum to further analyse and discuss the state of communication in environmental sciences. With a special session at the SETAC Europe Meeting 2014 in Basel we seek to bring together two sides of the story: colleagues with experience in science and risk communication from a practical point of view, and those with theoretical background based on their education. The idea is to have presentations about both research on communication and communication of research. The session would present an overview the state of science and risk communication within the SETAC community from a scientific and a practical point of view. We want to combine in one session practical experience and theoretical background, rather commentary/opinion/discussion/report-like contributions with actual research and hard science. Of interest are presentations from several geographical regions to linking environmental science, health and risk communication in different parts of the world. We are especially interested in the methods used for communicating research findings to lay populations. The platform session would start with a block of practical presentations of examples of good and poor risk communication, separated by geographical regions and each section starting with a more general discussion. This would aid in linking practical experiences with the circumstances under which they were made. Next would be a block of theoretical presentations, featuring risk communication concepts, survey studies, sociological views, risk perceptions, translating research findings, as well as approaches for scientists to communicate their research findings. This block could give the deeper background for what was presented before from the practical side. It would help to better understand the cases and should lead to a good discussion about the best practice.

SESSION TYPE: Platform (invited speakers) and Poster Corner