Thoughts on communicating climate change

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Resnick Institute Climate School
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Goal for today

Give you strategies for effectively communicating the science and urgency of climate change
Why communicate?

Mitigating climate change requires policies

Enacting policies requires political support

Political support requires engaging diverse populations
Goals of communications

To convince people to think about the problem

To convey urgency
Target audiences - 6 Americas

http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/global-warmings-six-americas/
Put another way

Goal: move people to Concerned

http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/global-warnings-six-americas/
Who thinks climate change is real?

Areas with low fractions: economy tied to oil and gas

Yale study, 2016
Oil industry and jobs

As California tries to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, unions have torpedoed proposals to curb fossil fuel use.

Reasons for climate denial

+ Jobs
+ Politics
+ Effective misinformation campaigns
Is global warming is happening?

Yale study, 2016
Will global warming will affect me?

People don’t think they will be affected!

Yale study, 2016
Trust of scientific community

Think about the 97% argument.

People don’t know who to trust...

Many don’t trust scientists.
A different strategy

Don’t ask for trust. Instead explicitly ask them not to trust!

Give guidance for how they can check themselves.
Example independent evidence

Exxon's Own Research Confirmed Fossil Fuels' Role in Global Warming Decades Ago

Top executives were warned of possible catastrophe from greenhouse effect, then led efforts to block solutions.

BY NEELA BANERJEE, LISA SONG AND DAVID HASEMYER
SEP 15, 2015

Exxon’s Richard Werthamer (right) and Edward Garvey (left) are aboard the company’s Esso Atlantic tanker working on a project to measure the carbon dioxide levels in the ocean and atmosphere. The project ran from 1979 to 1983. (Credit: Richard Werthamer)
To get attention, keep it local

People want to know how climate change will affect them.

Generally they will not change their lifestyle due to problems elsewhere.
Scaring people doesn’t work

A single catastrophic event cannot yet be attributed to climate change.

Substantial uncertainty exists in predictions.

What if your warning doesn’t happen?
Scientifically accurate warning

Climate change poses a risk - to you, and soon.

Analogy: texting while driving. Can you guarantee you will get in an accident?

Extreme events are more likely with climate change.
Local impacts of climate change

Venomous snakes in SoCal beaches
Local impacts

California’s Dungeness crab season facing second year of troubles due to algae toxin
Mudslides - Winter 2018
Ways to frame solutions

We need insurance given these risks.

We need external costs included in the price of fossil fuels.

Either way: we need a price on carbon emissions.
Realistic policy with bipartisan support

Senior Republican statesmen propose replacing Obama’s climate policies with a carbon tax

A carbon tax is quintessentially conservative, Baker’s group argues, because it would not increase the size of government ... Revenue from the carbon tax would go directly to taxpayers instead of toward new government programs.
Precedent of effective results
Questions I’ve received
What about scientists manipulating data?

Climatic Research Unit email controversy

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Climatic Research Unit email controversy (also known as "Climategate") began in November 2009 with the hacking of a server at the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) by an external attacker, copying thousands of emails and computer files, the Climatic Research Unit documents, to various internet locations several weeks before the Copenhagen Summit on climate change.

The story was first broken by climate change denialists with columnist James Delingpole popularising the term "Climategate" to describe the controversy. Several people considered climate change "skeptics" argued that the emails showed global warming was a scientific conspiracy, that scientists manipulated climate data and attempted to suppress critics. The CRU rejected this, saying the emails had been taken out of context and merely reflected an honest exchange of ideas.

People believe fraud occurred!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climatic_Research_Unit_email_controversy
What about global cooling?

In the 1970s, some scientists predicted global cooling. Now it’s global warming. What happened?
What’s the big deal about 1 C?
Doesn’t climate change occur naturally?

http://www.npr.org/tags/126937866/california-fires
Can we fix it later?

Not at present.

Economical technologies exist to prevent carbon emissions, not remove them.
What can you do?

1. Educate yourself. Can you explain precisely why the atmosphere traps heat? What is a carbon budget?

2. Communicate climate change with friends and family, and others.

3. Become active in effective organizations (in your personal capacity).
Resources: global weirding

globalweirding.is/here
Solutions: Citizen’s Climate Lobby

Help us solve climate change
JOIN US!

We exist to create the political will for climate solutions by enabling individual breakthroughs in the exercise of personal and political power.

http://citizensclimatelobby.org/