

Cognitive Barriers to Risk Communication

Copyright © 1992 by Peter M. Sandman

1. “Nobody around here is especially outraged about our activities, so there is no need to change.”
 2. “Addressing the outrage might make things worse, so it is best to let sleeping dogs lie.”
 3. “Admitting the merits of the opposition’s arguments will only make them stronger. The best defense is a good offense.”
 4. “Once people are outraged, the die is cast and it is too late to reduce the outrage.”
 5. “Outrage is caused by environmental activism, and a beleaguered regulator or company should say so.”
 6. “It is unscientific and dishonest to accept exaggerated hazard claims in the name of outrage reduction.”
 7. “Outrage is irrational, and giving in to outrage is a victory for emotion and a defeat for reason.”
 8. “Quantitative risk assessment is an increasingly strong science that makes continuing deference to the public’s outrage unnecessary and even unethical.”
 9. “No matter how attractive outrage reduction might be, it increases liability and is therefore an unfeasible strategy.”
 10. “Outrage reduction is likely to work *too* well, leaving an apathetic and therefore unsafe public.”
-

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- “Chapter 5: Yes, But: The Cognitive Barriers” in *Responding to Community Outrage: Strategies for Effective Risk Communication* (1993) – www.psandman.com/media/RespondingtoCommunityOutrage.pdf
- *Implementing Risk Communication: Overcoming the Barriers* (1994) – <http://vimeo.com/20353084>
- *Lawyers and Outrage Management* (Jul 2002) – www.psandman.com/col/lawyers.htm

Peter M. Sandman, Ph.D.

59 Ridgeview Road
Princeton NJ 08540-7601

Email: peter@psandman.com
Web: www.psandman.com

Phone: 1-609-683-4073
Fax: 1-609-683-0566

Consulting, Training, and Research in Risk Communication