Media Coverage of Risk Controversies:
Recommendations for Journalists

1. Pay more attention to intermediate views. Dichotomize and polarize less.

2. Pay more attention to hazard. Outrage is important too, and easier to cover and make interesting – but hazard deserves some coverage as well.

3. When covering hazard, pay more attention to data.

4. On important risk controversies, make time and space for interpretive articles that can explore the real issues – hazard as well as outrage – and the real uncertainties.

5. Keep the distinction between hazard and outrage in mind as you cover risk stories – the things that make people angry may or may not be the things that endanger them. Over the long haul, try to explain the difference to your audience.

6. Have a little patience with your sources – especially your technical sources – even when they're being impatient with you. Understand that they tend to see hazard as the whole story.

7. Do what you can to generate more coverage of the undercovered environmental stories – the low-outrage serious health risks like radon and the impersonal, still uncertain, long-range survival issues like global warming.

8. Keep writing investigative articles that expose environmental horrors. But think about what an investigative story might look like that debunked a supposed environmental horror that didn't really amount to much in health terms.

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