The Other Side of Risk Communication: Alerting People to Serious Hazards (p. 1)

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The Four Kinds of Safety Problems:

- 1. Problems of safety policy unsafe policies lead to accidents.
- 2. Problems of safety training the policies are sound, but people don't know what to do or how to do it.
- 3. Problems of safety attention the policies and training are sound, but people's attention lapses.
- 4. Problems of safety attitudes *motivated* unsafe practices.

Some Examples of Safety Attitude Problems:

- Like an adolescent (or an infant) who resents parental interference, an employee may be outraged at the company's safety rules, or a motorcyclist outraged at the state's helmet laws ... and ignore them for that reason.
- People who feel invulnerable may agree that X is dangerous, but doubt it is dangerous to *them*. Conversely, people who feel very vulnerable may be too frightened to pay attention to the rules (many women, for example, can't bring themselves to do breast self-examinations).
- An employee may believe (sometimes rightly) that the boss wants the safety rules ignored in the interests of productivity and may be loyally disobedient. Another employee, of course, may act unsafely to spite the boss.
- Most people try to maintain the level of risk that they find most comfortable. When the road is straightened to make it safer, we drive faster.

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Diagnose Your Safety Problem:

How much is attitudes, as opposed to attention, training, or policy? More training won't help if the problem isn't training to start with.

If it's attitudes, which attitudes? "Correcting" the wrong problem can do more harm than good.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Medicine and Mass Communication: An Agenda for Physicians (1976) www.psandman.com/articles/medicine.htm
- Chapter 11, "Media Campaigns" in *Environmental Education & Communication for a Sustainable World* (2000) www.psandman.com/articles/chap11.pdf
 Mobilizing outrage on environmental causes anger as antidote to apathy (Aug 2001) –
- www.psandman.com/gst2001.htm#jeffrey
- Motivated Inattention and Safety Management (Oct 2001) www.psandman.com/articles/psandman3.pdf
- When people are under-reacting to a risk (Mar 2003) www.psandman.com/gst2003.htm#Ben