

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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Consulting, Training, and Research in Risk Communication

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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

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