

Peter M. Sandman: Brief Biography

Creator of the “Risk = Hazard + Outrage” formula for risk communication, Peter M. Sandman is one of the preeminent risk communication speakers and consultants in the United States today, and has also worked extensively in Europe, Australia, and elsewhere. His unique and effective approach to managing risk controversies has made him much in demand for other sorts of reputation management as well.

Dr. Sandman has helped his clients through a wide range of public controversies that threatened corporate or government reputation – from oil spills to labor-management battles; from vaccine autism scares to the siting of hazardous waste facilities. In the terms first popularized by Dr. Sandman, these are usually situations where the “hazard” is low, the “outrage” is high, and the core task is outrage management.

Dr. Sandman also works on the other side of risk issues, helping activists arouse concern about serious hazards, for example, and helping companies persuade employees to take safety rules seriously. Here the task is precaution advocacy in a high-hazard, low-outrage situation.

Finally, Dr. Sandman works on crisis communication – terrorist attacks and epidemics, for example – where hazard and outrage are both high and the goal is to help people bear their emotions and take appropriate actions.

A Rutgers University professor from 1977 to 1995, Dr. Sandman founded the Environmental Communication Research Program (ECRP) at Rutgers in 1986, and was its Director until 1992. During that time, ECRP published over 80 articles and books on various aspects of risk communication. In 1995 Dr. Sandman left the university and became a full-time consultant. He received his Ph.D. in Communication from Stanford University in 1971.

“The engine of risk response is outrage,” Dr. Sandman argues. “Sometimes the problem is too little outrage; people are apathetic and I help my client arouse more outrage so they protect themselves. Other times the problem is too much outrage; people are excessively angry or frightened – usually because of things my client has done wrong – and I help find ways to calm the situation. Still other times the outrage is rightly high about a risk that is genuinely serious, and the job is to help people bear it and sustain it and act on it.”

Dr. Sandman’s sense of humor, his sense of realism, and his ability to help people understand all sides of risk controversies make him much in demand for all three jobs.

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Consulting, Training, and Research in Risk Communication