



Communication Planning for the International Asteroid Warning Network

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IAWN Communication Workshop, 9-10 September 2014, USA

At its first meeting January 13-14, 2014, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the IAWN Steering Committee proposed to hold a communication workshop that would focus on message development, evaluation of past cases of NEO hazard warnings), and best practices in science communication, risk communication, and emergency communication.

The workshop took place in Broomfield, Colorado, USA.

Co-organizers/co-facilitators: Linda Billings/consultant to NASA NEO Observations Program and Laura Delgado Lopez/Secure World Foundation

Purpose: provide guidance and advice to managers and directors of IAWN member programs and institutions.

Participants

NASA, ESA, IAWN

MPC

FEMA, U.S. Dept. of State

SWF

Communication professionals

IAWN communication basics

A common communication strategy

A common language/vocabulary

Common messaging

Scholar-practitioner collaboration

**(Research informs practice, practice
informs research)**

A need for a common language

Hazard: potential to cause harm

Risk: assessment of probability and extent of harm

Threat: a declaration of an intention or determination to inflict punishment, injury, etc., in retaliation for, or conditionally upon, some action or course.

Findings

- IAWN can draw on well defined principles of risk communication in developing its communication strategy and plans.
- Trust, timeliness, transparency, understanding audiences, and planning for a range of scenarios are important to effectively communicate NEO impact hazards and risks.
- IAWN needs to operate as a global, round-the-clock communications network in order to become a trusted and credible source.
- Quantitative and probabilistic scales are of limited value when communicating with non-expert audiences.
- IAWN could play a role in promoting the development of national protocols to respond to IAWN messages.
- Employing a common language to communicate about asteroid impact hazards across the different IAWN institutions could help IAWN build its identity and credibility.
- IAWN does not, and needs to, have a unified online presence.

Recommendations

- IAWN should establish a five-year plan for becoming the global trusted and credible NEO information, notification, and warning network. This plan should consider the fundamental principles of risk communication.
- IAWN should employ a full-time communications officer to oversee the development and execution of its five-year plan.
- IAWN should sponsor briefings and workshops for reporters to improve NEO education within the mass media community.
- IAWN should develop and employ a new, non-probabilistic scale for characterizing asteroid impact hazards and impact effects. A qualitative impact effects scale is proposed for IAWN's consideration.
- IAWN should create a website as soon as possible.
- IAWN should employ a full-time Webmaster to create and maintain its website.

Political and institutional factors

- The need to address the time-zone challenge to keep the network functioning continuously.
- The need to identify appropriate spokespeople, to determine who has the authority to speak on behalf of IAWN, and when.
- The currently limited membership in IAWN, which now includes institutions from the United States, the European Space Agency (ESA), several Western European national organizations, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Japanese Space Exploration Agency (JAXA), and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA). Institutions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are largely not represented as yet.
- The need for a commitment of human and financial resources to enable IAWN to become fully operational.

Social and psychological factors

- The need to clearly distinguish among hazards, risks, threats.
- The stigma attached to nuclear-related examples in characterizing impacts and their effects.
- The need to focus on promoting awareness of impact hazards and avoid fanning people's fears.
- Established news routines that determine how the mass media frame stories about NEOs.
- The impact of context on how different audiences receive and respond to IAWN messages.