



Academy of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Malaysia

Challenges in Communicating Occupational Health Risk at the Workplace

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Outline

- Introduction
- Risk perception
- Factors affecting risk perception
- What is risk communication?
- Why communicate risk?
- When communicate risk?
- Issues & challenges
- Conclusion

Health & Safety Risk at the Workplace

- Disease/illness, injury, mortality/fatality risks
- Hazardous substances, toxic materials, biological agents
- Unsafe working conditions
- Poor ergonomic working conditions
- Organization of work and psychosocial strains
- Any combination – often all

Risk Perception

- Experts and the public (workers) differ in their perception of risk
- Experts try to evaluate risk using:
 - numbers and statistics
 - relative ranking
- The public (workers) evaluate and rank risk intuitively
- But there are patterns in risk perception

Intuition overestimates risk when ...

1. The effect is larger (especially catastrophic)
2. Exposure is not voluntarily
3. Risk/Effect is lesser known
4. Sensory perception is difficult
5. There is less personal control
6. Effects are long-term

Intuition overestimates risk when ...

7. Risk is man-made
8. Previous incidents have happened
9. Experts are not consistent
10. There is less confidence in people in control
11. There is more media attention

Factors Affecting Risk Perception

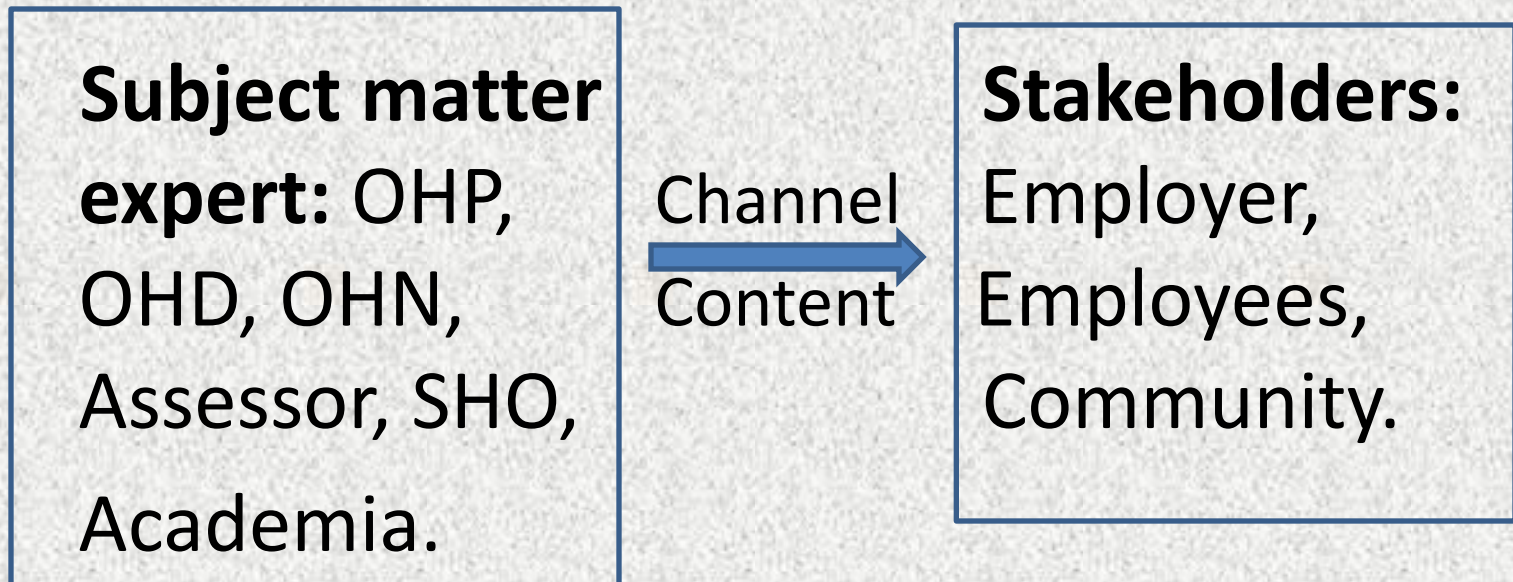
- Dread
- Risk to future generation
- Global catastrophes
- Fatal consequence
- Risk increasing
- Affects me
- Effect immediate
- Uncontrollable
- Unknown to the exposed

The Need to Know Risks

- Risk communication is a first step
- Need training “in a manner that can be applied in workers’ daily work” – literacy, health literacy, language, culture, etc.
- Right to Know – but what about Right to Act?
- Do we provide training about how to engage in action to prevent morbidities and mortality?

What is Risk Communication?

- Transfer of information about risk from a party with the knowledge to the stakeholders



Why Communicate Risk?

- Risk communication is an essential element of Risk Management
- OSHA 1994 states the need of those who create the risk to manage the risk
- Workers' health and safety
- Employer compliance and liability prevention

Why Risk Communication is Important?

- Increasing job demands and productivity
 - ➔ potentially conflicting with safety goals
- Increasing personal responsibilities through empowerment
- Perceived risk is more important
- Less chemical and physical hazards
 - ➔ stress-related influences are more important

When is Risk Communicated?

- Day to day
- Investigation finding
- Medical finding
- Risk assessment
- Training
- Disaster

Risk Communication

1. Know your target group(s)
2. Know your goal
3. Know the expectations
4. Be trustworthy
5. The message should be unequivocal
6. Be timely
7. Be open and transparent
8. Be consistent
9. Keep the initiative

Lessons Learned

- Risk perception shows a consistent pattern
- Individuals may be very different from each other
- Knowing the perspective of the worker is very important
- There is more than an expert role for professionals
- After incidents, give information on causes and circumstances
- Take health complaints seriously
- Communicate on group level, but also on individual level

Issues & Challenges

- How are communicated risks understood and used by workers:
 - to protect individual health & safety?
 - to engage in building a health & safety movement?
- What outcome measures will best inform us of successful risk communication to workers?
- Interventions where workers have a major role in developing effective risk communication programs.

Conclusion

- Communicating occupational health (and safety) risk is a very important activity at the workplace.
- Transfer of information is not usually the goal, but it has been used to inculcate safe behaviour, prevention of stress (reassurance), ensuring compliance, prevention of reliability.
- The main challenge remains ... how successful is risk communication to the workers?