



Communicating Natural Hazard Risks to the Public through TV and Internet News Programs

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The scientific community can reach broader public audiences with messages about natural hazard risks by using outlets that serve as daily public news sources. According to the U.S. National Science Foundation’s Science and Engineering Indicators for 2010, the general public in the USA relies on local television news more than any other medium for their science and technology news and information – with the internet coming in as a fast-rising second. Ten years ago, the American Institute of Physics (AIP) created Discoveries and Breakthroughs Inside Science (DBIS) as a way to reach this large audience and provide them with accurate and reliable science information. DBIS is a syndicated science news service that distributes twelve 90-second news segments to local television stations throughout the USA and internationally each month. More recently, AIP has launched Inside Science News Service (ISNS) to reach the public through websites and newspapers.

DBIS has successfully been used to communicate risks about natural hazards in addition to educating the public about other topics in earth and space science. Story ideas go through a rigorous process of background research and peer review to make sure that they meet not only our science criteria, but also our television criteria standards to make sure that television stations will air the segments. ISNS is a science news service of that provides independent news content for use by news organizations, delivering fully reported articles, graphics, and videos. The service has enabled major web news outlets to post accurate scientific reporting about natural hazards and other topics.

We will describe the creation of these news services and how we increase the public’s knowledge about natural hazards using both television, print and online media outlets, while producing services that television stations and news services want. We will also highlight results from research that examined the impact DBIS has on viewing audiences. The study showed us that there is a statistically significant difference in television viewers support for STEM in cities where DBIS segments are broadcasted compared to cities where they are not showing that DBIS is having an impact in communicating science to the general public. The use of accurate graphic images in TV programs about natural hazards helped viewers understand and retain what they learned. Finally, we will summarize what we have discovered about the balance between reporting the details of STEM news and making it relevant to the public.