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Flood emergencies and hydrological science communication

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Flood emergencies are a cauldron of politics, media, operational agencies working hard on the ground and of course people's lives, livelihoods, property and wellbeing put at risk by floodwaters. Government and humanitarian agencies need to rapidly understand the gravity of a situation and their options to respond. To help them make decisions, and to ensure these decisions are based on evidence and not speculation, they often draft in advisory groups made of up experts in relevant fields. For floods this could include engineers, flood and weather forecasters, agricultural economists or land owners. For a hydrologist, being asked to advise governments in an emergency situation is scary and exciting, but also a wonderful opportunity to put your scientific expertise to use helping people. The key skill in these situations is understanding how and when to speak up. You must speak clearly, use simple language that non-scientists can understand, and you often only have a few seconds to convey your points. You may be faced with opposition, yet you must rely on your training and expertise to make rapid judgements and to point to the best evidence available. Using real-life examples from flooding crises in the UK, Africa and elsewhere, we will see how it is possible to use scientific skill to directly help people by influencing decisions. By working with governments, emergency agencies and NGOs, scientists can help them to make best use of resources and even save lives.