

A need for a code of ethics in science communication?

R.E. Benestad

Norwegian Meteorological Institute, Climate, Oslo, Norway (rasmus.benestad@met.no)

The modern western civilization and high standard of living are to a large extent the 'fruits' of scientific endeavor over generations. Some examples include the longer life expectancy due to progress in medical sciences, and changes in infrastructure associated with the utilization of electromagnetism. Modern meteorology is not possible without the state-of-the-art digital computers, satellites, remote sensing, and communications. Science also is of relevance for policy making, e.g. the present hot topic of climate change. Climate scientists have recently become much exposed to media focus and mass communications, a task for which many are not trained. Furthermore, science, communication, and politics have different objectives, and do not necessarily mix. Scientists have an obligation to provide unbiased information, and a code of ethics is needed to give a guidance for acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Some examples of questionable conduct in Norway include using the title 'Ph.D' to imply scientific authority when the person never had obtained such an academic degree, or writing biased and one-sided articles in Norwegian encyclopedia that do not reflect the scientific consensus. It is proposed here that a set of guide lines (for the scientists and journalists) and a code of conduct could provide recommendation for regarding how to act in media - similar to a code of conduct with respect to carrying out research - to which everyone could agree, even when disagreeing on specific scientific questions.