



Weather Live - sugar-coating the pill of science

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Weather Live is a series of one-hour television programmes broadcast on the Irish public-service network RTE over three consecutive days in an "early-evening" time slot, aimed at a very general audience. The presentation will outline the philosophy behind the series and how it approaches the task of communicating elements of meteorological science in an entertaining and informative manner. Setting the series in the National Botanical Gardens in Dublin facilitates the telling of stories that connect Irish weather to the landscape and culture of the country as well as allowing universal scientific topics to be explored.

Having a full three hours, spread over three different programmes, to explain and discuss weather and climate matters on prime-time television is both a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous challenge. The challenge is to retain the interest of the viewer - who is typically not a scientist and may be of any age from eight to eighty and beyond. The approach of the programme is to provide stories of human interest, and link these to aspects of the weather or specific weather events. Thus, one story is of a man hit by lightning, and the effect is had on his life - which is then followed by a discussion on the meteorological phenomenon of lightning and how it comes about. Another strand concerns the amount of rain that falls on the island of Ireland every year, and tries to put that much water into context.

Communicating science to a non-scientific audience forces us to ditch the traditional approaches we use in our profession, where we focus on data and on experimental results, and move instead to a story-telling paradigm. The realisation of the strength of story-telling in communicating scientific facts and information is vital if we are to effectively communicate the messages of climate change to the non-specialist audience.