

Session 5: Risk Perception: Why Our Fears Don't Match the Facts

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Abstract:

Why is it that we are often more afraid of relatively small risks, and don't seem to be afraid enough of the really big ones? How does this "Perception Gap" affect public behavior during emergencies? This fascinating talk will take you inside the psychology that helps explain why some threats *feel* more frightening than others, the facts notwithstanding, insights that can help radiological emergency responders anticipate public behaviors as they prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency events.

Biographical Sketch of David P. Ropeik:

David Ropeik is an international consultant and speaker on risk communication and risk perception to government, business, trade associations, health care and consumer groups, and educational institutions. He is an Instructor in the Harvard University Extension School's Environmental Management Program. He was an Instructor at the Harvard School of Public Health, and was co-director of the school's professional education course "The Risk Communication Challenge".

He served for two years as the risk communication member of the congressionally mandated Veterans Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction, which oversees the joint Department of Defense and Veteran's Administration program to compensate veterans exposed to nuclear radiation.

He has taught courses on media coverage of risk issues at the Harvard School of Public Health, the Kennedy School of Government, the Neiman Fellowship Program at Harvard, the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship program at MIT, Boston University's Program in Science Journalism, the Emerson College program in Health Communication, and to the National Association of Science Writers, the Council for the Advancement of Science Writers, and the Society of Environmental Journalists.

Prior to joining Harvard, Mr. Ropeik was a television reporter for WCVB-TV, Channel 5, in Boston for 22 years. He specialized in reporting on environment and science issues.

He has Bachelors Degree ('72) and Masters Degree ('73) in Journalism from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. He was a Knight Science Journalism Fellow at MIT, 1994-95, and a National Tropical Botanical Garden Fellow in 1999. He has taught journalism at Boston University, Tufts University, and MIT.