BOOK REVIEWS

doi:10.1093/occmed/kqv085

Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks

The fifth edition of this book is published by two US risk practitioners with a wealth of experience in the field of risk communication in environmental, safety and health matters. It aims to present scientific research, with practical, hands-on advice, to a target audience consisting of practitioners, students and teachers of risk communication. This latest edition contains updated research findings and lessons learnt from some major disasters in the past decade, as well as expanded sections on social media, technology-based applications and public health campaigns.

The book is divided into five self-contained sections. The first section introduces the reader to the theories and principles that underpin risk communication. The second section explains how to plan the risk communication effort by determining its purpose and objectives, analysing the audience, developing the messages, determining the methods and the communication plan.

The third section is about putting risk information into action, by utilizing information materials, visuals, face-to-face messages, news media, stakeholder participation, technology and social media. The fourth section discusses how to evaluate the risk communication efforts, including techniques for measuring success. The final section focuses on special cases in risk communication, such as communicating risk in disasters and other emergencies, in the international context and as part of public health campaigns.

I read with interest the chapter on constraints to effective risk communication posed by the communicator and/or the audience, including emotional constraints. The chapter on ethics is thought-provoking, by highlighting a few of the ethical issues facing those who are communicating risk, such as the fairness of risk across social groups and the use of persuasion. Of particular interest and relevance to occupational health professionals are the chapters on techniques depicting probability and uncertainty and on public health campaigns.

The book provides comprehensive coverage of the topic of risk communication in a clear and easily understandable format. Key messages are highlighted, and the theory is illustrated by real-life examples, including the tsunami, the BP oil disaster and radiation release in Japan. The tables and checklists are particularly useful for at-a-glance reference when preparing a risk communication effort. Each chapter concludes with a comprehensive reference list and recommended additional resources.

Occupational health professionals, and indeed anyone whose work involves communicating risk, will find this book an informative and interesting read. I will certainly dip into it the next time I am asked to deliver a presentation on the hazards of a workplace agent or lead a health promotion campaign.

Rating
★★☆☆☆ (Reference only)

Anna Trakoli