

Best Education Practices (BEPs) for Water Outreach Professionals
Defining BEPs, Refining New Resources and Recommending Future Actions

POSTER PRESENTATION

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Title: How does risk information shape protective behavior and support for policy to mitigate risk in the environment?

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to understand how experiential and external sources of risk information influence behavior to reduce arsenic exposure and opinions about policy to reduce arsenic in the environment. External information sources were the self-reported arsenic level and total information use. Experiential information was perceived overall water quality and arsenic-related health effects. We applied the common sense model (CSM) that illustrates how people process information to construct representations that guide responses to health threats. Of 649 surveys mailed to private well owners with arsenic levels that exceeded the current arsenic drinking water standard, 545 (84%) were suitable for analysis. Structural equation modeling quantified relationships based on the CSM and fit the data with behavioral outcomes (RMSEA=.045) or policy outcomes (RMSEA=.045) and explained 57% and 55% of the variance in behavior and policy opinions respectively. External information sources had their greatest effect on behavior through certainty about knowledge and control methods and on policy opinion through understanding causes of arsenic. Experiential information (predominantly water quality) had its greatest effect on behavior through the emotional representation, health and property value consequence dimensions and the exposure identity/cause dimension. Experiential and external sources of information influenced behavior while external information was the dominant influence on policy. Information should 1) promote understanding lab results and provide guidance for 2) interpreting and responding to perceived overall water quality and 3) selecting effective arsenic control methods in order to promote protective behavior. Public information should educate the public about arsenic causes to promote groundwater policy support. People need to understand how to identify, causes and consequences of, and how to control both risk exposure and risk in the environment to foster comprehensive environmental health prevention.

Target Audience(s): Agency partners, NGOs

Educational Purpose: Information, communications and education

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