

Engaging your Audience

Slide 1: Introduction Slide

Victoria Ludwig: So, now, I'd like to introduce our next speaker, Surili Sutaria Patel. She is going to speak about how to engage your audience and the experience that the American Public Health Association has had in doing that. Surili is the senior program manager within environmental health at the American Public Health Association. Surili oversees the environmental health portfolio of the association, which includes climate change, transportation, working with tribal governments, healthy housing, chemical safety, building partnerships and more. She strives to bridge the gap between program and policy by representing needs and offering solutions to environmental health issues observed across the country.

Go ahead, Surili.

Surili Sutaria Patel: Great. Thank you.

Hi, everyone. I want to take a moment to thank Emma and Victoria for inviting APHA to share our perspective on engaging your audience when it comes to discussion climate change and health.

Today, I will provide an overview of APHA's longstanding work in the space of educating public health professionals, the general public and decision makers on the topic of climate change and public health. But, before I dive in further, I wanted to talk a little bit about APHA's role in climate change and public health and give you a little insight into APHA as an organization.

Slide 2: Central Challenge: Create the Healthiest Nation in One Generation

Surili Sutaria Patel: APHA is a global community of public health professionals and the collective voice for health of the public. Our central challenge is to create the healthiest nation in one generation. We were founded in April of 1872 and hold a 501(c)(3) and non-partisan status. And we are a membership organization, as many of you know.

We have over 50,000 individual and affiliate members. And because we have so many members, we have organized ourselves into sections. And one of the most active sections, I could say, is the environment section, which also has a subcommittee called the Climate Change Topic Committee.

The environment section is comprised of environmental health professionals who work in federal, state or local health and environmental agencies, academia, industry, health care professionals like nurses and so many more. And they decided to join the environment section because the networking with peers and learning the latest environmental health science, technology and findings benefits their home organization.

APHA's goal, and I could say my personal goal, is to engage a greater membership – the greater membership at APHA on the topic of climate change. For instance, extreme weather such as heat will impact other disciplines within – in public health. So, it will impact maternal and child health, infectious disease, injury prevention, epidemiology, mental health and so many more areas within the public health that's beyond environmental health.

And to put it basically, we just can't achieve the healthiest nation in one generation without talking about the imminent threat that occur like climate change and heat health across public health. So, recently, we started an intersectional Listserv to open a discussion to all of our members.

And in order to achieve this goal, we are engaging our members by talking their talk, going up to epis and saying – using terms that they are used to as opposed to the jargon environmental health specialists are used to.

And we are also sharing information in the format and using the channels they are more likely to take it in. So, if we have a section that is more tech-savvy, we will e-mail them information. If another section is very keen on Twitter, we will be sure to you know engage them via Twitter. But, more on this in a moment.

Slide 3: APHA has a Long History of Championing for Climate & Health

Surili Sutaria Patel: Before I dive in a little further on engaging your audience, I wanted to share with you why APHA believe extreme heat is an issue that we must address today. Since the early part of the last century, APHA has investigated and promoted the science behind and advocated for sound public policy to help reduce the harmful health impacts of climate change. As you can see on your screen, we have journal articles that date back to the early 1900s.

Following the best science available, APHA understands that when we burn fossil fuels like coal and gas for energy, we release heat-trapping gas such as carbon dioxide. And this gas builds up in the atmosphere and causes the earth's temperature to rise much like a blanket traps heat. And, then, the extra trapped heat disperses and disrupts many of the interconnected systems in our environment, which, in turn, creates real risks for people's health.

For example, the more heat in our atmosphere and oceans means that there is more available energy to drive the frequency and intensity of storms. These more frequent and intense storms can then lead to injury and death. Another example is longer, warmer seasons or milder winter can contribute to an increase of harmful insect population, which then can add to the spread of infectious diseases.

As the overall temperature of the atmosphere and oceans increase, global circulation patterns of wind, moisture and heat are really changing and distributing shifts in extreme weather events. Extreme summer heat is increasing in the United States, as Victoria mentioned, and the climate projections indicate that extreme heat events will be more frequent and intense in the coming decades. So, APHA is saying here it's to share this information and the science with the masses.

Slide 4: Knowing Your Audience Matters

Surili Sutaria Patel: But, how? This information is rather technical. Knowing your audience matters, especially when it comes to explaining a subject of this technicality at hand and getting it to your audience from your perspective. For starters, ask yourself how informed is your audience on the topic.

Well, a reminder of the science of the consequences of extreme heat is helpful to some. You don't want to risk telling your audience too much information they already know. It may turn them off or they may stop listening to you after a point.

On the other hand, if they don't know much at all, you may want to start from the basics. You don't want to assume people know what you think they know, especially if they are not scientists. And this could apply to different audiences like policy makers, community advocates, business leaders and more.

Another thing to consider is to ask yourself what you do you want them to do with this information. What their takeaway? Why should they care? Basically, what's the what? Is the information purely informational? Do you want them to just think about the information presented and empower them to make smart choices moving forward? Or do you want them to actually take action?

If so, identify what types of action. Do you want them to share this information with their peers and networks? Do you want them to write to their Congressperson? Or would you like them to incorporate what they have learned into their practice or work plan? If so, then give them some tools to help them accomplish your ask.

Something else to consider here is that no all audiences are equal. Some may have limitations. So, you need to tailor your ask based on their capacity. For example, most government employees think we cannot engage in advocacy activities. So, you wouldn't have to ask them to write to their representative.

So, it's often difficult – and we understand that here at APHA. It's often difficult to translate or break down scientific explanations to a level of comprehension to a non-scientific audience or a non-medical community member. To help explain such complex issues in environmental health, APHA has worked with the Frameworks Institute to develop the upstream-downstream metaphor. And we'll show you the video in just a moment.

Slide 5: What we do Upstream will Impact our Health Downstream

Surili Sutaria Patel: But, as we load it, I want to say that this video does a really great job to demonstrate what we do upstream will impact our health downstream. And climate change is really no exception to this metaphor. So, for instance, by burning fossil fuels like coal and gas for energy upstream, we release carbon dioxide into our atmosphere. And the health

consequences, basically injury and death, downstream results from the more frequent and intense heat waves and storms.

So, play the video now.

(Start of video presentation)

Female: The things that could impact our health aren't always visible right in front of us. We all live downstream from a range of environmental factors that travel down to us and end up in our communities, homes and bodies.

By ourselves, we can't control all the things that happen in upstream environments. But, there are people, highly-trained environmental health workers, who specialize in monitoring the upstream conditions that shape downstream health effects.

This behind-the-scenes team includes a wide variety of committed professionals, from research scientists who study how traffic moves in dense urban settings to community planners who pay attention to everything from sanitation to sidewalk design to local agencies that inspect houses and housing materials to make sure they are safe. When upstream solutions are put in place, such as increasing car and fuel efficiency, it affects the health of people downstream who enjoy better air quality.

And these actions can have cascading effects. For example, implementing better air quality allows more people to exercise outdoors, further improving your health and reducing the physical, social and economic cost of health problems like asthma. While we don't always see upstream environmental health professionals at work, what they do makes all of our lives better and healthier downstream.

(End of video presentation)

Surili Sutaria Patel: So, I like to share this video because it does a good job of explaining how a metaphor can help your audience get a better grasp of concepts and remember a message for a longer time.

As you see on the bottom of the screen, there is a link to a toolkit designed to help experts communicate a little better on complex environmental health issues. So, I encourage you to check it out. And, like Victoria mentioned, these slides will be available to you. You don't have to rush to copy them – copy the link down right now.

Slide 6: How APHA Engages their Audience

Surili Sutaria Patel: So, as I mentioned earlier, APHA communicates to several audiences. For us, this means we tailor our message based on whether we are talking to our members, the general public or decision makers.

Slide 7: How APHA engages their Audience

Surili Sutaria Patel: For our members, we know that they are thirsty for the latest science and breakthrough news. So, we hit them with long pieces of communicate such as The Nation's Health, which is our quarterly newspaper. We also have the Inside Public Health blog that goes out monthly.

Then, at the same time, we also hit them with shorter pieces of communication through social, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. And this is a way to deliver more immediate information that's cutting edge, timely and gets to them immediately.

Slide 8: How APHA engages their Audience

Surili Sutaria Patel: For the general public, we use social media and the Get Ready campaigns. And these are designed to give the general public a taste for public health information without going into the weeds as well as giving them actionable intel on how to prepare for or protect themselves against disasters.

The Get Ready campaign is a messaging campaign by APHA that helps Americans prepare themselves, their families and communities for hazards such as the pandemic flu or natural disasters like hurricane season.

Slide 9: How APHA engages their Audience

Surili Sutaria Patel: And, then, when it comes to decision makers, we use all resources that I previously described in addition to education visits on Capitol Hill, where we often meet behind short concise materials for staff to reference when making important policy decisions that impacts public health programs or funding.

Slide 10: Shaping the National Policy Discussion

Surili Sutaria Patel: In addition to our communications channels, APHA has been influential in shaping the national policy discussion through our partnerships. We do this by leveraging our partnerships to spread the message on climate and health to broader audiences. For instance, we work with NCAnet, which supports the efforts of the U.S. Global Change Research program through stakeholder engagement and on the national climate assessment.

We also work with Momenta, an organization that empowers leaders to effectively communicate and educate their constituents on climate change issues. APHA is part of the climate for health program under Momenta which focuses on medical and public health issues related to climate change. And this is part of a bigger – a larger effort Momenta is putting forward to work across sectors, including business, state, higher education and communities.

And last but not least, we also work with the National Center for Environmental Health at CDC, which has a robust climate and health program led by Dr. George Luber. APHA supports their initiative and the BRACE program, which is the Building Resilience Against Climate Effects

framework, which is a five-step process that allows health officials to develop strategies and programs to help communities prepare for the health effects of climate change.

And by working with these various partners – and there’s many more that we engage – we aim to get everyone in public health involved in the conversation. So, it’s not just environment, but it’s the other disciplines within public health.

We also aim to get public health to the table when debating some of the more difficult climate resiliency and adaptation conversations. We want to work across the health discipline as well – so, that includes health care and not just public health – to strengthen the public health infrastructure and capacity. And, finally, we want to empower the public to make informed decisions that impacts the climate and can improve or potentially save their health.

Slide 11: Resources and Activities

Surili Sutaria Patel: So, we have many resources to help us – to help us reach our audiences and disseminate some really good cutting-edge information, the first of which is a guide book called “Climate Change – Mastering the Public Health Role.” This is a document for public health practitioners at level practicing any type of public health.

It’s a six-part webinar series that was translated into a guide book. And the topics are basic climate science, health implications, climate change action planning and public health from a local perspective, climate change communication, climate adaptation and, finally, public health and climate change from a federal perspective, from EPA and APHA perspective.

Another resource we have is an infographic. And this infographic is intended to be a resource for the general public or decision makers or even public health practitioners who are addressing their constituents. And the infographic is a simplistic illustration of how climate change will threaten health and well-being of our – of our people.

And, finally, we have the Adaptation and Action Report. And this is meant for state and local health agencies to look for examples of good climate and health adaptation plans. I believe Kristin’s health agency has been highlighted in it. So, you will get a taste for what is written in this Adaption and Action Report. This report highlights many ways communities have responded to the climate change challenges.

For example, San Francisco – their climate and health program heat vulnerability index. So, they’re really good just in pointing neighborhood most susceptible to health effects of extreme heat. The index guides such efforts are where to designate cooling centers and helps city planners decide where more trees should be planted and offer shade and then boost cooling efforts at the same time.

Another resource which we are completing – and you will see a link at the bottom of the page – is a series of facts sheets. And these fact sheets – when complete, you can find it on our Web site. It’s intended for the general public, decision makers and, again, public health practitioners who are addressing their constituents to effectively communicate the linkage between climate

change and health. The topics in these fact sheets include extreme heat, extreme precipitation, air quality, water quality and security and, finally, infectious disease.

As you can see, APHA strives to protect – to provide the latest information on climate and health using the best science available. And while there are many impacts of climate change on our health, extreme heat is happening now and happening everywhere. APHA works very with members and partners to share these useful and digestible information, resources and activities because it's a priority for us.

Slide 12: Thank You

Surili Sutaria Patel: I want to thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you all about APHA's role in climate change and engaging our audiences. Please do contact me to continue this dialogue.

Victoria Ludwig: Thank you, Surili. Very great presentation. I like your video. And, I think, the video and the infographic are especially really great ways to convey messages to the audience. We know a lot of people like to just hang out on YouTube. So, videos are a great way to get their attention. So, thank you very, very much.

Before we begin our next speaker, just a quick reminder. Send your questions in please.

Poll Question #3

Victoria Ludwig: And we're going to do a poll question again. So, if you could participate, that would be great. The question is which of the following outreach and educational materials would be most useful to you in your – in your work? Webinars, guide books, fact sheets, infographics, reports? Again, it might be hard, but please try to select just one. Thanks.

OK. Great. Thank you. Sorry. The answers – I'm sorry. I lost it. There we go.

Wendy Jaglom: I can go ahead and read it. You got it?

Victoria Ludwig: Go ahead, Wendy, please.

Wendy Jaglom: OK. So, it looks like the largest number of folks, 39 percent, said that infographics would be the most helpful. Twenty-two percent said fact sheets and, then, 17 percent guide book, 12 percent webinars and 10 percent reports. So, it looks like infographics is out in front followed by fact sheets.

Victoria Ludwig: Thanks, Wendy.

I think that's what I would want the most, too. It's infographics. So, thanks a lot of your answers.