

NUCLEAR ENERGY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE PACIFIC BASIN

*How Has the Conversation about
Nuclear Energy Shifted?*

*A Joint Study by the Pacific Nuclear Council
and Potomac Communications Group, Inc.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Table of Contents 2
- Summary of Findings..... 3
 - Shifting Concerns 3
 - Adapting Communications Tactics..... 3
- Background on the Study 4
- Key Findings 5
 - Key Audiences Remain Constant 5
 - Shifting Topics of Concern 5
 - Communicators’ Perceptions..... 6
 - Shift in Most Effective Tactics 7
 - Emerging Digital Communication 7
- About the Sponsors..... 8
- Appendix 9
 - Sample Questionnaire: Nuclear Energy Communications in the Pacific Basin 9

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study on nuclear energy communications in the Pacific Basin was conducted by Potomac Communications Group, Inc. (PCG) from December 2013 through August 2014. The survey was jointly sponsored by PCG and the Pacific Nuclear Council (PNC).

The purpose of this study was to:

- engage communicators from Pacific Basin nations;
- ascertain current attitudes toward and knowledge of nuclear issues;
- learn most frequent, effective communication tactics used; and
- answer the question, “How has the conversation about nuclear energy shifted?”

This study is the second joint survey conducted by the PNC and PCG. The first PNC-PCG survey, conducted in 2012, explored post-Fukushima outreach trends in Pacific Basin nations.

More than 100 professional communicators from Pacific Basin nations were solicited to complete a web-based survey about their communications efforts related to nuclear energy, the most important communications tactics they use and what they believe their audiences think about nuclear energy. Fifty communicators participated in the survey; these industry professionals and communication experts were from more than 11 countries and four continents.

The results of the 2014 PNC-PCG study were unveiled at the 19th Pacific Basin Nuclear Council, held in Vancouver, British Columbia on August 24-28, 2014.

Shifting Concerns

The study found that, since the first survey conducted in 2012, topics of concern related to nuclear issues have largely remained the same. However, the priority levels that communicators and their audiences assign to these concerns have shifted.

In 2012, the PNC-PCG joint survey revealed that communicators most often faced concerns related to safety and waste issues. It also showed that correcting misinformation was a top issue for Pacific Basin communicators.

In 2014, respondents shared that their audiences’ concerns have diversified. Key topics of discussion now also include health effects, the impact of pollution and emergency preparedness.

Adapting Communications Tactics

In response to this shift in concerns, communicators in Pacific Basin nations have adapted their tactics. Correcting misinformation is no longer the top priority. Rather, communicators have moved to a more proactive stance, reporting that the most effective communications tactic is to develop and implement an effective communications plan for emergencies.

As evidence of this responsiveness, the survey reveals a continued emergence of digital communication tactics. The 2012 PNC-PCG study revealed that 30 percent of respondents intended to begin using social

media (such as Facebook and Twitter). The 2014 survey results showed that 32 percent intend to use social media more frequently. In addition, 42 percent plan to utilize their organization’s online assets and 36 percent intend to use digital media more frequently.

BACKGROUND ON THE STUDY

One hundred and three communicators from Pacific Basin nations were contacted as potential participants in the survey. Of these 103, 92 were successfully reached via email. Fifty responses were collected, translating to a 54 percent response rate.

Respondents were asked to complete a web-based survey about their communications activities. PCG solicited and collected the survey responses from December 2013 through August 2014.

Respondents identified themselves according to continent:

- 62 percent North American
- 30 percent Asian
- 4 percent Australian
- 4 percent European

Figure 1: Geographic distribution of respondents



Some respondents also self-identified as being from Mexico, Canada, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Thailand, Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and the United States.

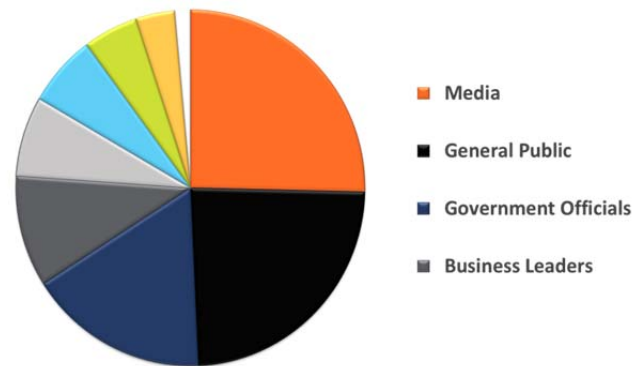
KEY FINDINGS

Key Audiences Remain Constant

Key audiences reported by the survey respondents remained constant, when compared to data gathered in 2012 but the intensity changed.

In 2014, the top four key audiences included media (25 percent), the general public (24 percent), government officials (17 percent) and business leaders (10 percent). Customers (7 percent), regulators (7 percent), international organizations (5 percent), and international NGOs (4 percent) were also identified. Those remaining (1 percent) indicated an alternative audience.

Figure 2: Key audiences

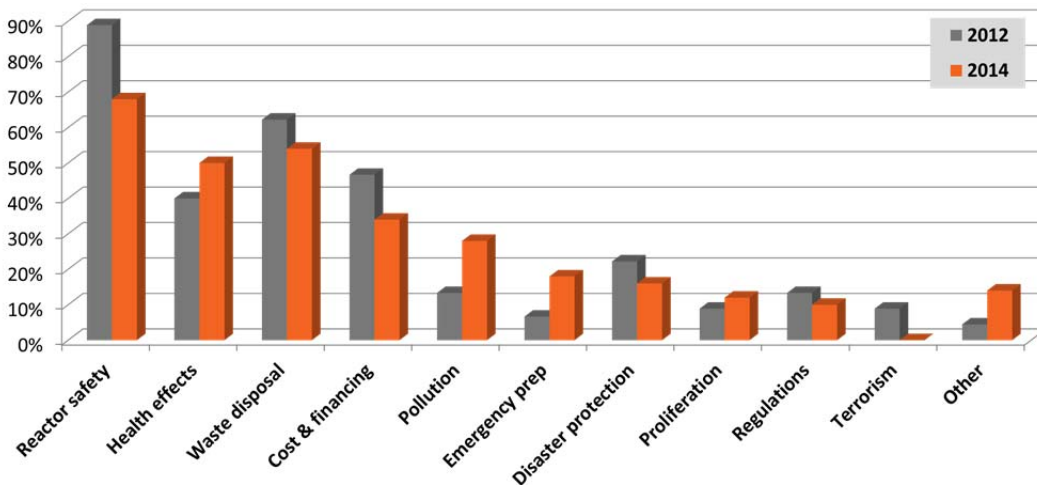


Compared to survey results from 2012, the general public, media and government officials remained the top audiences, while international organizations and international NGOs remained lower priorities.

Shifting Topics of Concern

When asked to identify the top three nuclear energy issues discussed most frequently with priority audiences, survey respondents indicated that reactor safety (68 percent), waste disposal (54 percent), health effects (50 percent), and cost and financing (34 percent) are the most important.

Figure 3: Shifting topics of concern for key audiences



Compared to data from 2012, it is clear that many of these topics of concern have remained the same. It is evident that communicators frequently discuss reactor safety, waste disposal, and cost and financing. However, concerns are now more diversified than immediately after the Fukushima accident.

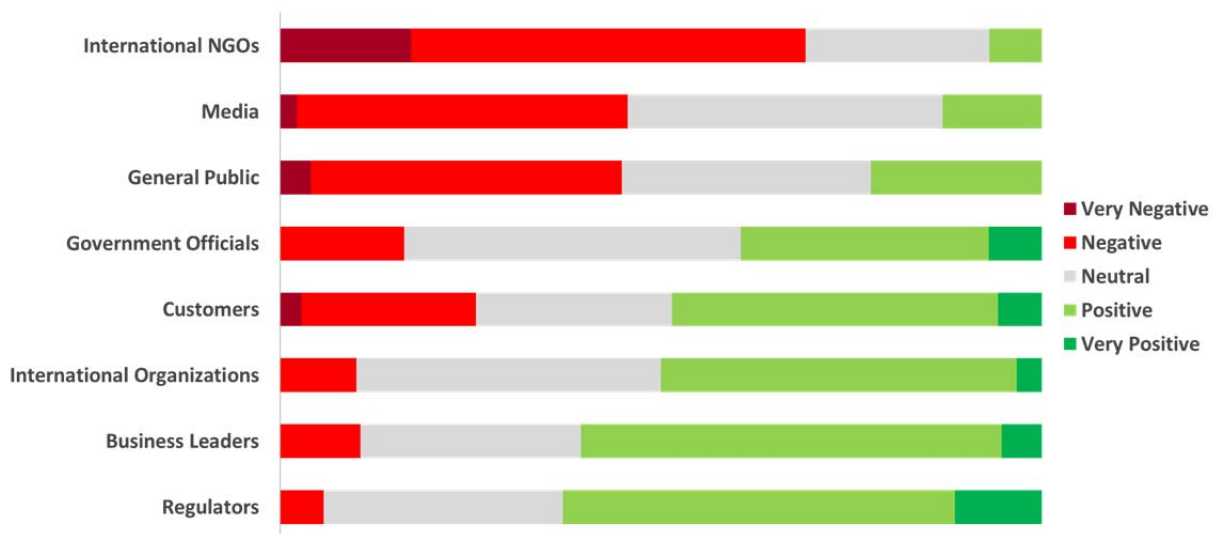
While it remains the top concern, reactor safety is less of a worry compared to 2012 data. Similarly, waste disposal, and cost and financing are of less concern. However, concern about the health effects of nuclear energy has increased since 2012, and the impacts of pollution and emergency preparedness are now higher priorities.

Communicators' Perceptions

It is clear that there is a shift taking place in the perception of nuclear energy in the Pacific Basin. The survey asked respondents to indicate their audiences' current attitudes towards nuclear energy.

Regulators (63 percent), business leaders (61 percent), international organizations (50 percent), customers (49 percent), and government officials (40 percent) were largely rated as either "positive" or "very positive" toward nuclear energy. However, the general public (45 percent) and the media (46 percent) were perceived as negative to neutral. International NGOs (69 percent) were rated as being largely "negative" or "very negative" toward nuclear energy.

Figure 4: Communicators' perceptions of their audiences' attitudes toward nuclear energy

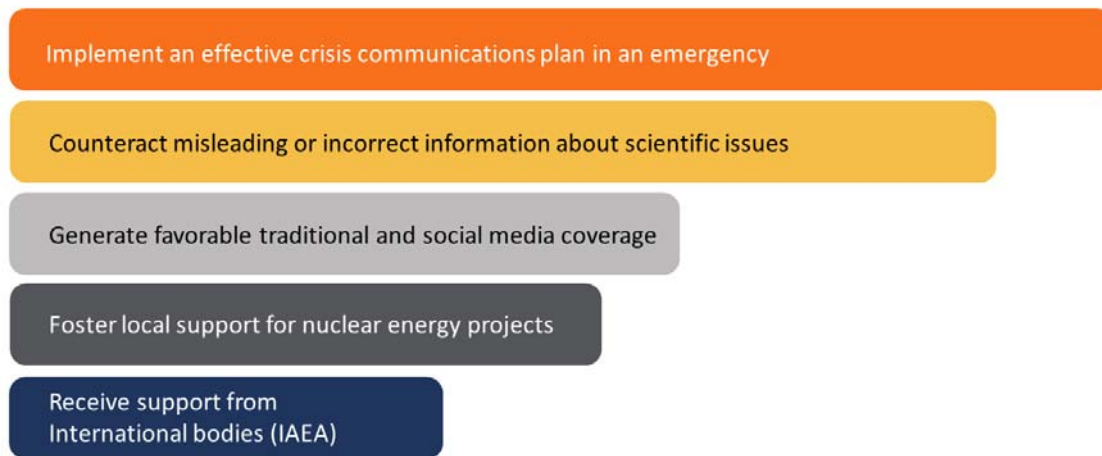


While the data is mixed, it seems that communicators often perceive that they have a receptive audience. However, since the media and the general public comprise nearly half of all key audiences for those surveyed (see [Key Audiences Remain Constant](#)), this negative perception can skew the communications tactics for communicators to a defensive position rather than proactive one.

Shift in Most Effective Tactics

Fifty-six percent of respondents consider implementing an effective crisis communications plan their most important and effective communications tactic. In 2014, Pacific Basin communicators ranked counteracting misinformation as the second most important tactic, with 50 percent of respondents saying it is “very important.” Interestingly, generating favorable coverage in traditional and social media is only ranked third most important. Local support is ranked by only 30 percent as being “most important,” and support from international bodies is considered important by only 22 percent of respondents.

Figure 5: Comparison of most effective tactics



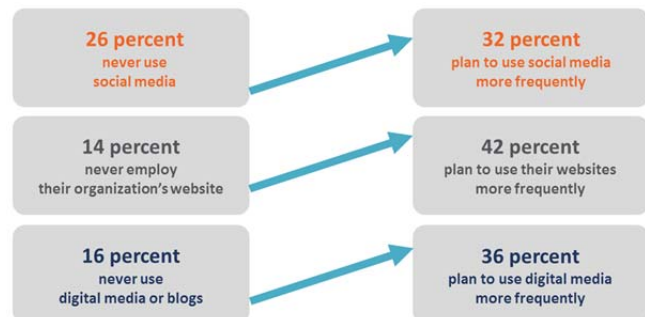
This is a shift from data gathered in 2012, which showed that correcting misinformation was the most effective tactic in a communicator’s toolbox, followed by effective crisis communications plans. The other tactics received similar rankings in both 2012 and 2014.

Emerging Digital Communication

Respondents revealed a continued emergence of digital communication tactics in the Pacific Basin. In 2012, data indicated that respondents placed a heavy reliance on print media while nearly 40 percent did not use social media and nearly 20 percent did not use digital media.

The 2014 data demonstrates a reduction in those that do not use any social or digital media, and a rise in those who plan to use these forms of communication. A full 32 percent of respondents intend to use social media more frequently in 2015, 36 percent plan to use digital media more frequently and 42 percent plan to utilize their organization’s online assets.

Figure 6: Digital communications trends



ABOUT THE SPONSORS

The Pacific Nuclear Council is composed primarily of nuclear societies and associations from nations around the Pacific Rim. Its mission is to unite Pacific Rim professional societies and associations to get together in common programs, to work together on common issues and to provide a forum for the transfer of information between nations more advanced in nuclear science to those beginning the search for the benefits of nuclear science and technology. www.pacificnuclear.net

Potomac Communications Group, Inc. serves clients in the nuclear energy and science, engineering, electrical energy and infrastructure industries. Over more than 30 years, PCG has evolved into a full-service agency helping corporate, government and association clients with their most demanding communications challenges. PCG's team consists of a staff of about 25 in Washington, D.C., as well as a dozen associates around the world who offer special contacts and skills that add to the company's services. www.pcgpr.com

For more information about the study, contact Sarah Dirndorfer at sdirndorfer@pcgpr.com.

APPENDIX

Sample Questionnaire: Nuclear Energy Communications in the Pacific Basin

This survey is conducted jointly by the Pacific Nuclear Council and Potomac Communications Group, Inc. Results will be presented at the 2014 Pacific Basin Nuclear Conference.

Where are you located?

- Africa
- Asia
- Australia
- Europe
- North America
- South America

Where do you work?

- Government
- Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)
- Academia
- Utility or Vendor
- Other:

What title best describes your role?

- Executive
- Analyst
- Researcher
- Engineer
- Public relations professional
- Government relations professional
- Legislator or legislative assistant
- Other:

Indicate how frequently you perform the following communication tasks.

	Never	Yearly	Bi-annually	Quarterly	Monthly	Bi-weekly	Weekly	Daily
Educate on the basics of nuclear energy								
Encourage people to advocate for nuclear energy								
Provide information on energy production								
Inform people about specific events								
Explain complex technical issues or research related to nuclear energy								
Educate on non-energy nuclear applications, such as medical or industrial uses								

How often do you create content for the following communication tools?

	Never	Yearly	Bi-annually	Quarterly	Monthly	Bi-weekly	Weekly	Daily
Print media (newspapers, magazines)								
Digital media (blogs, online forums)								
Social media (Facebook, Twitter)								
My organization's websites, blogs and forums								
Factsheets and brochures								
Newsletters								
Public meetings								
Exhibits at conferences and events								

How often do you plan to use the following communication tools in the next year?

	I do not use	Less frequently	Will use the same way	More frequently
Print media (newspapers, magazines)				
Digital media (blogs, online forums)				
Social media (Facebook, Twitter)				
My organization's websites, blogs and forums				
Factsheets and brochures				
Newsletters				
Public meetings				
Exhibits at conferences and events				

Choose the audiences that you give the most priority in your external communication activities.

- General public
- Media
- International NGOs
- Government officials
- International organizations
- Regulators
- Business leaders
- Customers
- Other:

For your audiences, what is their current attitude toward nuclear energy? Rank only your key audiences.

	Not my audience	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
General public						
Media						
International NGOs						
Government officials						
International organizations						
Regulators						
Business leaders						
Customers						

When you communicate about nuclear energy, how would you describe the people with whom you communicated? Please indicate which of the following words best describes your audiences.

	Not my audience	Informed	Misinformed	Confident	Fearful	Interested	Indifferent
General public							
Media							
International NGOs							
Government officials							
International organizations							
Regulators							
Business leaders							
Customers							

Please mark the three issues associated with nuclear energy that you discuss most frequently with your priority audiences.

- Cost and financing for projects
- Emergency preparedness
- Health effects
- Natural disaster protection
- Nuclear weapons proliferation
- Pollution in the local environment
- Reactor safety
- Regulations
- Terrorism
- Waste disposal
- Other:

Please mark the three benefits of nuclear energy that you communicate most frequently about with your priority audiences.

- Creates jobs, helps the economy
- Does not pollute the environment
- Enables leadership in science and industry
- Generates carbon-free electricity
- Mitigates climate change
- Offers energy independence
- Operates without interruption
- Provides a secure supply of electricity
- Provides low-cost energy for consumers
- Provides reliable electricity
- Reduces dependence on fossil fuels
- Reduces the need to less efficient fuels
- Other:

How have the opinions of your audiences changed since the Fukushima disaster? Indicate the impact on opinions about the following topics.

	More negative than before	No change	More positive than before
New reactor construction			
Continuing operation of existing reactors			
License extension of existing reactors			
Research reactors in operation			
Industrial use of nuclear materials			
Operation of current reactors			
Medical use of nuclear materials			

How effective do you believe each of the following communication tactics is in maintaining public confidence in nuclear energy in your country? (1 = not important; 5 = very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Implement an effective crisis communications plan in an emergency					
Counteract misleading or incorrect information about scientific issues					
Foster local support for nuclear energy projects					
Receive support from international bodies like the IAEA					
Generate favorable traditional and social media coverage					

Choose the greatest challenge you face while you communicate about nuclear energy issues.

- Reaching your target audience
- Identifying the issues that are most important to your audience
- Influencing on specific issues
- Making technical information understandable
- Getting feedback from your audience
- Other:

In your opinion, what is the most important thing you do in your job?

Please respond in 400 characters or less.

In your opinion, what is the most effective thing you do in your job?

Please respond in 400 characters or less.

What tools could an organization like the Pacific Nuclear Council provide that would be helpful to you?

Please respond in 400 characters or less.

Please share a "best practice" based on your experience that could benefit others communicating about nuclear energy.

Please respond in 400 characters or less.

Thank you for participating in the Pacific Nuclear Council's online survey. Please share this link with your colleagues who may also have experiences to share. Results of this survey will be made available when it is completed.

If you would like to receive the summary report, please let us know how to reach you. Your information will remain confidential.