The 13th EMS General Assembly adopted the following as the EMS Code of Practice

Code of practice – communicating knowledge on climate change to the public

Preamble

This code of practice resulted from discussions of the EMS Media Team and participants of the Media Session at the EMS Annual Meetings 2009 and 2010. It was discussed by the EMS Member Societies and then the 13th EMS General Assembly 2011 adopted this code of practice as guidelines for individuals of the meteorological community in Europe on how to communicate honestly and reliably, with the general public, including the media, on issues of meteorology and in particular on complex or controversial issues such as climate change.

This code of practice is intended to be:

- Adopted by EMS Member organizations if it meets their requirements
- Adapted by EMS Member organizations to address their specific situations and requirements
- Used as guidance for individuals in the European community to support their interaction with media and the public

Introduction: Ethics

It is recognized that scientific knowledge is valuable for society, but it also becomes vulnerable in a media-dominated society where any misrepresentation of facts clouds the credibility of information. This situation is aggravated by the intrinsic level of unpredictability of the atmosphere and other earth system components resulting in uncertainty of information. Taking into account that scientists are often not trained in communication or ethics, freedom of speech is fragile in the sense that it can lead to the dissemination of incorrect or misleading information. High standards in science-related communication and media exposure, openness to rational debate and criticism, and honesty will increase the public confidence in science, relevant academies and scientists, in addition to benefitting society itself.

A set of guidelines may make the challenge easier for scientists to communicate with and through the media. Also awareness about the ethical aspects of science and science communication may aid scientists in having a clearer idea of the limits of knowledge and the current “state of art” in meteorology, and, consequently, making decisions about what to say and how, depending on each situation.

Principles and Guidelines

Those communicating with the public and the media must:

1. Be aware that speaking as a scientist implies expectations of high standards regarding the exactitude of the information presented.
2. Have a high level of scientific knowledge and experience and master scientific practices and methods.
3. Draw their statements from well-established and unequivocal scientific practices, methods and tests, and avoid ‘cherry-picking’ and any misrepresentation of data.
4. Provide information on the uncertainty of results and knowledge.
5. Avoid providing too much or too little information, concentrate on the relevant issues, and be concise and clear.

6. Ensure that the information is to the greatest possible degree openly available and then processed through transparent data and methods.

In addition, it is essential that those communicating with the public and media are well-prepared and where possible get training to develop the skills required to make presentations in public. Also they need to stay calm and exercise appropriate self-control, discernment and sense of responsibility.