



How to communicate about clean water

- 1. Create a vision**

So much environmental messaging gives the impression that we must all make great sacrifices to avoid a hellish future. This isn't very appealing and it certainly isn't working. Instead, we need to create a vision of a world with clean, vibrant water. Tell people about *your* vision: safe drinking water, water safe for fishing, children wading in their local stream without fear of disease, streams free of trash, etc. We need to model the vision of clean water.
- 2. Be brief**

Use the fewest and simplest words possible to make your point. Strip down your messaging to one core idea. Emphasize this. Like a journalist puts the key information at the beginning of an article, you need to put your core idea first.
- 3. A picture tells 1,000 words.**

Images are easier to understand and more memorable, so focus on impacts that are easy to visualize.
- 4. Be specific, concrete, and local**

Specificity is key. Don't tell people to "save the Bay, save the river." Talk about specific steps and local choices. We have to *choose* clean water. Tell them how...and tell them in concrete language. Jargon is unintelligible and ambiguous terms mean different things to different people. When possible, use concrete phrases – those that people can imagine using their senses. So don't tell people to "stop polluting the water," tell them to stop buying bottled water. Don't talk about "green futures," tell them what a green future is.
- 5. Use quick statistics**

Use with caution: a little bit of numbers goes a long way. Put statistics in quantities per person, and make comparisons to common experiences. Highlight to each person their impact, so that they feel like they will make a difference and emphasize the benefits for them as an individual. Tap into their identity.
- 6. Testable credentials**

Make a claim your audience can test for themselves.
- 7. Tell a story**

The power of stories is two dimensional. First, it provides simulation (knowledge how to act) and, second, it empowers people through inspiration (motivation to act). This generates action. A strong story will have longevity. Inspirational stories take a life on of their own, especially when you have a social web multiplying their effectiveness.
- 8. Stop using jargon**

Instead of talking about the TMDL and WIPs, use blueprint instead. It creates a vision that people can understand. More examples of jargon to avoid are included below.



Words we will NOT use	Instead, use these words
TMDLs	Pollution limits
WIPs	State and local clean water plans or clean water blueprints
Pollution diet	Pollution limits
Words that <i>may</i> have issues	Try these words instead
BMP's	Conservation practices
Regulations	Protections or safeguards
Stormwater	Polluted runoff
Low impact development (LID)	Modern and efficient infrastructure Green infrastructure
Watershed	Land around rivers and streams
Agricultural land	Working farms
Urban sprawl	Wasteful and inefficient development
Environment	Land, air, water and animals
Nutrients	Over fertilization

Values: Incorporating values into your communications

- Pride: Local rivers and streams, local pride, national pride
- Cooperation: We'll make progress when government, business and individuals work together.
- Legacy: Clean water for our children and animals
- Fair share: Everyone is asked to do their fair share.
- Health: Polluted water is a health hazard.
- Economics: Reducing pollution creates green jobs.