

Michnowicz, S. and I. Kelman. 2009. "News is the opiate of the masses? Science-media interaction during volcanic eruptions". Presentation at the International Conference on Science in Society, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, U.K., 5-7 August 2009.

Presentation abstract:

Communication between scientists and the media has long been a topic explored in literature and in practice, especially with regards to ethical conduct of communication, and of reporting that communication, between the two groups. With the often rapid pace at which disasters manifest and develop, both scientifically and journalistically, disaster research provides some of the more challenging ethical situations regarding science communication and science reporting. This presentation focuses on volcanic eruptions. Illustrative case studies of two Caribbean islands, Guadeloupe (1976) and Montserrat (since 1995), are the focus, but lessons from other examples through the decades are also considered in order to demonstrate the changing nature of volcanology (e.g. the addition of social volcanology to standard physical volcanology approaches) and the media (e.g. the addition of the internet and live 24/7 coverage).

While professional guidance already exists for both volcanologists and the media, implementing the good governance framework from UNDP (participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, and equity) is proposed as a possibility for moving forward with science-media relations for volcanology along with providing a basis for the ethical conduct of each during a volcanic eruption. Unfortunately, this theory faces numerous practical obstacles, particularly the perceived objectivity of science and the corporatisation of the media, which might make codes of conduct and ethical frameworks ineffective in many on-the-ground instances.