

Report: Hazardous Near Earth Objects - communicating the risk

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To deal with potentially hazardous Near Earth Objects (NEOs) that could strike the Earth, there is need to establish an effective international communications strategy - but doing so is a daunting task, one that demands effective use of mass communication tools.

That key view is addressed in *The Near [Earth](#) Object Media/Risk Communications Working Group [Report](#)* issued by Secure World Foundation.

The report and its findings are being presented this week to the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and its Action Team-14 on NEOs during the 55th session of the UN COPUOS being held in Vienna, Austria.

The report stems from a two-day meeting held in November 2011, convened by Secure World Foundation (SWF) and the Association of Space Explorers (ASE). Nearly 40 scientists, reporters, risk communication specialists and SWF staff participating in the meeting, held at the University of Colorado, Boulder's Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics (LASP), Boulder, Colorado.

The meeting concentrated on assisting the United Nations Action Team-14 (UN AT-14) on NEOs in its deliberations about the makeup and focus of an Information, Analysis and Warning Network (IAWN), designed to gather and analyze NEO data and provide timely warnings to national authorities should a potentially hazardous NEO threaten Earth.

Communications strategy

The working group explored in more detail the views of risk communication experts and experienced science journalists on the development of a successful communications strategy.

The report delves into an assortment of NEO issues, such as:

- The Complexity of Communicating the NEO Story
- Need for a Warning Communication Strategy and Protocol
- Risk Communication and the Framing of NEO Alerts and Warnings
- Communications Staff as Trusted Sources
- NEO Messaging
- The Lessons of Reentering Spacecraft
- Building the IAWN Communications Infrastructure
- The Threat, Mystery and Promise
- Outreach and Education

“A lot of attention is focused on the catastrophic damage a large asteroid could do if it collided with Earth. This report focuses on how to prevent the even greater damage we could cause ourselves by mis-communicating or failing to work together on a common response to the threat,” said Dr. Michael Simpson, Executive Director of Secure World Foundation.

“In an important way, an eventual threat of impact with a large asteroid could be the challenge that shows all of us that our future depends on learning to work together,” Simpson said.

“In technical organizations, communications with the public are often treated more as an afterthought than a critical mission element,” said Dr. Ray Williamson, SWF Senior Advisor. “This report emphasizes how important clear, effective, and accurate assessments to the public of the

danger posed by a threatening [Near Earth Object](#) are to the ultimate goal of protecting human life and property.”

More information: To access NEOs: Media/Risk Communications Working Group Report, go to: swfound.org/resource-library/planetary-defense

Provided by Secure World Foundation

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