

Simple Tools for Counseling Radiation Workers and the Public

**A Workshop for the
American Academy of Health Physics
West Palm Beach, FL**

June 25, 2011

Presented by

Ray Johnson, MS, SE, PE, FHPS, CHP

Director, Radiation Safety Counseling Institute

VP Training Programs, Dade Moeller

Radiation Safety Academy

301-990-6006

ray@radiationcounseling.org

Simple Tools for Counseling Radiation Workers and the Public

Ray Johnson, MS, SE, PE, FHPS, CHP
Director, Radiation Safety Counseling Institute

American Academy of Health Physics
HPS Annual Meeting
West Palm Beach, FL 8 am - 5 pm, June 25, 2011

Agenda

Part I – Understanding the Basis for Upset and Fears

- 8:00 Introduction – Identify Communication Scenarios
- 8:30 The Greatest Challenge for Health Physicists
- 8:45 Basis of Upset and Fears of Radiation
- 9:00 Anxiety and Images of Consequences of Radiation
- 9:30 What are Fears and the Role of the Subconscious
- 10:00 Role of the News Media and Perceptions Based on Radiation Mythology
- 11:00 How to Identify Fears
- 11:30 Apply Insights to Communication Scenarios
- 12:00 Review, Summary, Questions, Lunch Time Assignment

Part II – Tools for Effective Counseling and Risk Communication

- 1:00 Review Lunch Time Assignment and Communication Scenarios
- 1:15 Active Listening – The Primary Tool for Dealing
 with Fears of Radiation
- 2:15 Practice Active Listening on Your Scenarios
- 2:30 Eight Barriers to Effective Radiation Risk Communication
- 3:30 What to Say, When You Do Not Know What to Say
- 3:45 Ten Tools for Radiation Risk Communication
- 4:30 Responding to Questions about Radiation
 Gaining Worker / Public Attention and Cooperation
- 4:45 Review, Summary, Questions, Evaluation
- 5:00 Homework Assignment and Adjourn

Simple Tools for Counseling Radiation Workers and the Public

Ray Johnson, MS, SE, PE, FHPS, CHP
Director, Radiation Safety Counseling Institute

Part I - Understanding the Basis for Upset and Fears

What is the greatest challenge in the course of your work in radiation safety – technical issues or people issues? For those of you that may answer the latter, this class will provide insights on how to better understand and be more successful with people issues. Are you stressed when confronted by emotional issues at work? Do you know how to provide a helpful response for an upset or fearful person, or would you rather avoid these people? Do you find yourself perplexed about people who are afraid of radiation? Thus, fear of radiation is a common denominator for everyone, although the extent of such fears appears to be related to technical understanding of radiation. Without special training in radiation safety most peoples' understanding is based on radiation mythology which is not supported by good science. Radiation fears are driven at a subconscious level often related to mythical beliefs and images of terrible consequences that may result from radiation exposure. Often people make assumptions about radiation effects without understanding that there are a series of steps for answering the question, "Is it safe?" Fears are always based on what we imagine and not on reality. The basis of what we imagine can be identified by asking the question "What's so bad about that?" By repeating this question we can move down through layers of images to the real motivation for upset and fear. When we understand what drives upset and fears, we can then offer the most helpful responses.

Attendees should write down and bring to the class one or more specific scenarios where they would like to apply the insights from this class.

Part II - Tools for Effective Counseling and Risk Communication

Understanding the basis for worker upsets or fears can be helpful, but may not be enough without effective tools for risk communication. The most powerful tool for worker counseling is to hear, identify, and reflect their feelings (Active Listening). One of the reasons that worker upsets or fears escalate is because no one really hears them. Perhaps this should not be surprising because most health physicists are not trained to hear feelings. This class will show how this tool can be acquired and implemented in a short time. There are two keys to listening: 1) feelings are more important than what is said, and 2) listening is more important than solving problems. We will explore whether our role in radiation safety is to be the "giver of answers" or to be a resource for assisting others in deriving their own answers. We will also consider a number of barriers to effective communication, including perceptions, images, feelings, resistance, values, social roles, decision preferences, and defensiveness. Insights on dealing with each of these barriers will be presented with applications to specific radiation scenarios provided by attendees. We will look at how to best respond to concerns and questions about radiation. This class will include a list of things you can always say when you do not know what to say. *We will practice these tools on communication scenarios which each attendee is invited to write down and bring with them.*