



Report on Discussion Group
"International conferences and agreements: usefulness and enactment"
Held on Wednesday, March 30, 2017

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International conferences and agreements can serve as useful news pegs and as sources of information. The UNFCCC process will make a major assessment at its 2020 COP and then a “global stocktake” at its 2023 COP. The IPCC process will produce a special report on the 1.5°C target in September 2018, special reports on oceans/cryosphere and desertification/food security in September 2019, and the Sixth Assessment Report in 2021. Other potentially relevant international forums include the annual meetings of the Montreal Protocol (which agreed an HFC phase-out in 2016), G20, C40 and other non-governmental events. The AMS and EMS meetings are also potentially useful.

Presenters who attend conferences can gain direct access to IPCC and other scientists and also policymakers and learn a lot about the policy making process. If they cannot attend in person they can also gain remote access through Skype and other channels. Climate COPs offer policy news hooks instead of the usual extreme events hooks. One idea could be to organize a one-day event at COP-23 in Bonn and provide remote access to participating scientists and policymakers.

The election of climate-sceptic leaders, while generally not helpful to climate action, can inspire greater interest on the part of editors in news coverage of climate, as we saw at COP-22.

International conferences are not useful for everyone however, as editors in larger countries in particular (e.g. USA) may not be interested. In these cases national and local events that feed into or support the international event may be more useful. Cities and mayors in particular organize events that can be interesting to local audiences.

Turning to the broader issue of messaging, climate messages can be stronger when linked to national and household economics. It is important to build awareness steadily, over time, rather than just when an annual COP is held or an occasional IPCC or other scientific story appears. Connect the message to day-to-day life – e.g. how warm winters increase allergies or diseases. Generalities are less compelling than specifics. The messenger is important – that is why weather presenters can play a strong role in climate communications.

More advice: Don't patronize but try to be engaging. Be entertaining but don't trivialize. The advancing science of event attribution has great potential for strengthening climate stories, but the attribution must come quickly or the news cycle moves on.

Most weather presenters have experienced hostile comments and pushback about their climate reporting. Sometimes presenters are trolled by well-organized groups like the Chemtrails fanatics. This is just part of the price of being a television personality who appears on the screen in people's living rooms.