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Climate Matters: A Comprehensive Educational Resource Program for Broadcast Meteorologists



Kristin Timm
SNAP/IARC

Most Americans view climate change as a threat that is distant in space, time, and species. However, when people understand that they have personally experienced climate change, they are more likely to take the issue seriously. Therefore, TV weathercasters are ideally positioned to educate Americans about climate change in their community. TV weathercasters have tremendous reach, are trusted sources of climate information, and are highly skilled science communicators. In 2010 George Mason University, Climate Central and WLTX-TV (Columbia, SC) developed and pilot-tested Climate Matters, a series of short on-air (and online) segments about the local impacts of climate change, delivered by the station's chief meteorologist. After one year, WLTX viewers had developed a more science-based understanding of climate change than viewers of other local news stations, confirming our premise that when TV weathercasters report on the local implications of climate change, their viewers learn. Since then, Climate Matters has become a comprehensive climate communication resource program with a network of 313 local weathercasters nationwide. The project is a collaborative effort between social scientists, climate scientists, broadcast meteorologists, and other communication practitioners (i.e. graphic designers). This presentation will review the theoretical basis of the program, detail its development and national scale-up, and conclude with discussions about developing climate communication initiatives for additional professional communities of practice.

Kristin Timm is a graduate research assistant on the Climate Matters project and a PhD student in science communication at George Mason University in Washington, D.C.

For more information, contact Nate Bauer (nbauer3@alaska.edu).

