



8th IAA Planetary Defense Conference

3 - 7 April 2023, Vienna, Austria

DEBUNKING THE PANIC MYTH AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR NEO COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

IAA-PDC-23-10-04

Alex Karl

The Panic Myth

Hollywood

Media

Academic literature



NEWS Asteroid threat in 2032? Don't panic, but don't brush it off

SCIENCE NEWS Asteroid threat in 2032? Don't panic, but don't brush it off

Nerdist READ WATCH PLAY TOPICS NEWS

SO, THERE'S A NEW 'PLANET KILLER' ASTEROID... BUT DON'T PANIC

An Asteroid Is Coming. Don't Panic

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Don't Panic: Despite the headlines, we're not about to die in Armageddon

asteroid warning panic

Scholar About 5,600 results (0.07 sec)

The Duty to Expect the Unexpected: Mitigating Extreme Natural Threats to the Global Commons Such as Asteroid and Comet Impacts with the Earth
ER Seamone - Colum. J. Transnatl L., 2002 - HeinOnline
... have criticized these imprecise warnings on the grounds that governments are accomplishing little more than the creation of mass panic.3 Others admit that these warnings are the best ...
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[PDF] The comet/asteroid impact hazard: A systems approach
CR Chapman, DD Durda... - Office of Space Studies ..., 2001 - boundarycondition.com
... an asteroid or comet, while of very low probability, has the potential to create public panic and ... (>1 km diameter) near-Earth asteroids and space-operations approaches to deflecting any ...
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The Chicken Littles of Big Science; or, Here Come the Killer Asteroids!
JT Bennett, JT Bennett - ... Lobby: Hype and Panic from Sputniks, Martians ..., 2010 - Springer
... But the man who panicked the world looked at the bright ... on asteroid searches — from \$1.5 million a year to \$3 million. Perhaps that decision is the result of the public interest in asteroid ...
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[BOOK] The Martians have landed! A history of media-driven panics and hoaxes
RE Bartholomew, B Radford - 2011 - books.google.com
... An asteroid scare prompted by a TV movie is the subject of Chapter 7. In October 1994, ...
Warning resulted in numerous phone calls to station affiliates by viewers fearful that an asteroid ...
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[HTML] It's behind you!
D Shiga - New Scientist, 2009 - Elsevier
... asteroids pose. Not only is there no plan for what to do when an asteroid hits, but our early-warning ... handled properly, panic and lack of coordination could lead to chaos on the roads. ...
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[HTML] When It Strikes, Are We Ready? Lessons Identified at the 7th Planetary Defense Conference in Preparing for a Near-Earth Object Impact Scenario
S Ravan, T De Groeve, L Mani, E Bjorgo... - International Journal of ..., 2022 - Springer
... realistic asteroid threat scenario illustrated how such a short-warning ... impacts are a global threat and the right early warning ... are powerful tools to counter irrational responses and panic. ...
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Decision Makers
(Delay warnings)

The Facts

on Panic & Public Behavior during disasters

Panic & Chaos

- Panic is very rare, and has never resulted from issuing disaster warnings
- Pre-event looting is an indication of social issues
- Fear of looting has consequences: people refusing to evacuate, disruption of traffic and diverting law enforcement personnel.



People

- Seek the proximity of familiar persons and places
- Separation from attachment figures is a greater stressor than physical danger.
- Learn about disaster risks and how to adjust to them as much via informal networks as via official risk communications.
- **During disasters expressions of mutual aid are common and tend to predominate.**



Reaction To Warnings

- Search and confirm response (social phenomenon)
- Uncertainty leads to stockpiling
- the problem in disasters is that people typically delay or fail to take appropriate evasive action when it is needed

Disaster Warning Communication Strategies

Myths

1. Public warnings will not lead to panic,
2. do not have to be short,
3. won't lead to cry wolf if explained why event does not occur as announced.

Source

Mixed panel: group of people and organisations

Content

Protective action recommendations: guidance what should be done, timing, who takes action and who doesn't, consequences and how taking action will mitigate, explain why, provide sufficient information to fill information vacuum

Style

Clarity, Specific, Certainty, Accuracy, Consistency

Channels

Number & type of communications channel and frequency

Highly recommended reference: White paper by Dennis Mileti: Public Response to Disaster Warnings

Summary & Recommendations



Warnings will NOT lead to panic, chaos, looting, etc.



Building trust is key. Entrust public with information.



Adhere to best practices: communicate early, clear, open, often, via different sources, prevent and fill any information vacuum



Warnings have to be adapted to specific events, nations and cultures.



Involve people with social science background and that understand public warning responses to draft messages and strategies