

Healthy Planet, Healthy People

A Quick Guide for Public Health Communicators

While human health has improved over the past century, the health of our planet has drastically deteriorated over that same time period. In February 2026, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reversed a long-standing scientific finding that greenhouse gases are harmful to human health. This change will make it much harder to regulate emissions from cars, power plants, and other pollution sources under the Clean Air Act, making the situation even more urgent.

Without careful consideration for life-sustaining resources such as water, air, and food, progress in human health will backslide. Use this guide to communicate about the ways public health and the environment are interconnected and underscore that people need a healthy planet to thrive.

Give global ideas a local grounding. For many people, the concept of environmental protection feels abstract. Consider which changes – such as extreme weather or increased pollution – are most likely to impact your audience and find ways to make your content feel real and relatable.

- Trusted messengers or local influencers can share first-person experiences and bring credibility to issues, like firefighters discussing the impacts of extreme heat.
- Crowd-sourced content that highlights stories from your community can also foster connection.

Match the tone of your content to the size of the task. Protecting the environment can feel overwhelming; balance alarming facts and information with actionable steps for change. Emphasize that no one person bears the burden of caring for the Earth and that everyday actions can lead to significant impacts.

Communicate that “small” wins can add up to big change. Behavior changes that improve the environment do not always have an immediate or visible payoff. Create public health initiatives that foster community and emphasize both individual action and collective effort: for example, a community clean-up day or neighborhood recycling campaign. Remind your audience that no one person is alone in their effort.

Avoid jargon that can increase confusion and limit participation. Use plain language – not medical or scientific terms – to describe environmental changes and health impacts. For example:

- » **Instead of** Particulate Matter > **Say** Polluted air
- » **Instead of** Water Scarcity > **Say** Lacking access to clean water
- » **Instead of** Climate-Induced Weather > **Say** Hurricanes, floods, or severe storms
- » **Instead of** Arable Land > **Say** Healthy soil used to grow food

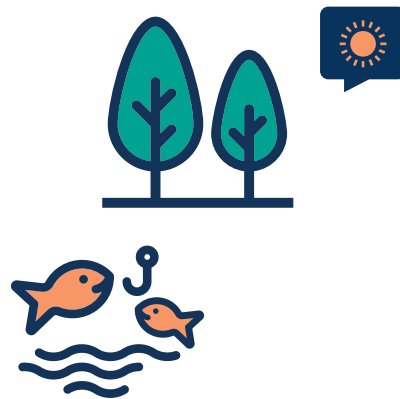


Build trust by tackling the growing threat of false claims.

False claims about the environment – particularly climate change – are rampant. [Learn how to identify false narratives](#) and respond with clarity, accurate information, and accessible language.

Avoid polarizing language.

In some contexts, environmental policy can be politically divisive. Emphasize that environmental changes and health impacts affect everyone, regardless of political affiliation. Develop public health communications that focus on the clear link between environmental changes and a person’s health. Work with trusted messengers in the community to help spread information and find ways to connect on shared values. Depending on your audience, consider swapping politically charged language like “climate change” for descriptive language like “protecting nature and wildlife,” and use [bridging statements](#) to stay on message.



Bring nature to life through your public health communications.

The majority of people in the U.S. [live in cities](#) and may benefit from increased opportunities to engage with, appreciate, and understand the natural world. Consider visual storytelling with attention-grabbing nature photos or informational videos about food production. Utilize art and music to evoke emotion and inspire action. These approaches go beyond messaging to help bridge cultural or political divides and connect with a wider audience.

Responding to Misconceptions about Public Health and the Environment

Misconception

Key Message

Environmental protection is just another way to say climate change, and climate change isn't real.	Environmental protections are aimed at keeping our entire planet healthy, including the climate. Climate change is one sign of an unhealthy planet, but so are outcomes like increased pollution, a lack of clean water and healthy soil, and loss of wildlife. While different people and places will experience different environmental impacts, protections are put into place to make everyone healthier.
One person's actions can't improve the environment.	Creating a healthy environment requires both individual action and collective effort. Even though this may feel overwhelming at times, every community has things they can do and these actions add up. We all have the power to help respond.
I don't see pollution where I live, so environmental protections don't matter.	Many protections are put into place to prevent pollution before it occurs. When environmental protections are weakened, pollution can increase – impacting nearly every organ in the body and posing a direct threat to your health.