



## WORKSHOP ON ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

22 November 2005

2:30 pm – 5:00 pm, Amaltas Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Conducted by Jim Detjen, Director, Knight Centre for Environment Journalism and Dave Poulson, Assistant Director, Knight Centre for Environment Journalism.





### **No. of participants**

Approximately 40 participants, mostly students.

### **Presentations**

The starting point for Detjen was why environment journalism is important. Natural disasters have encouraged new kinds of citizen journalism – blogs, cell phone photos and websites. Environment journalism is important as most of what the public knows about science and environment comes from news media – TV (80%), newspaper (50%), internet (20%) and radio (18%). Citizen's biggest concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is environment followed by war, poverty, crime, overpopulation, etc. Environment journalism helps combat scientific illiteracy.

Scientists, government agencies, environmental activists and eyewitnesses are people that have been interviewed by environment journalists in pursuit of stories. [www.proofnet.com](http://www.proofnet.com) and [www.mediaresourceservice.org](http://www.mediaresourceservice.org) are two sources of finding thousands of science experts. Some ways of obtaining information are public documents, court reports, databases and libraries, eyewitnesses reporting, aerial and satellite images and hiring experts to do testing (in the case of investigative reporting).

Detjen cited some useful journalism organizations – the Society for Environmental Journalists ([www.sej.org](http://www.sej.org)), Knight Centre for Environmental Journalism, International Science Writers Association, National Association of Science Writers, Investigative Reporters and Writers and International Federation of Environmental Journalists ([www.ifej.org](http://www.ifej.org)).

The big question here is: how do you make sense in evaluating environment risks? The best environment journalism is grounded in sound science and put into a historical context. It is important to know who you are writing for, to include multiple sources of information and double-check information for verification and confirmation.



Environmental journalists face such challenges as evaluating risks, translating jargon, making technical information interesting, dealing in uncertainties besides the hazards in covering environment disasters. There is also the dilemma on ethics. He concluded that journalism is in the middle of an epochal transformation as momentous as probably the invention of the telegraph and television. Technology is rapidly changing things for journalists.

Dave Poulson's presentation was entitled 'Frontiers of environment journalism – get out of the office and learn some skills'. He stressed that being an environment journalist is not the same as an environmentalist reporter. One has to look for facts, and in searching for these facts, one should think about pushing one's limits. He referred to the two journalists who worked on the loss of wetlands in Florida by generating their own data from satellite images. Poulson emphasized on the use of technologies and visual references to communicate, as this would not only increase impact but also has the possibility of leading to stories.

### **Discussion**

Blogs become important where information is critical of governments, especially in environmental issues and in a situation where hardly any TV channels chase such stories. Questions were raised regarding international platforms to share and report issues and possibility of payment in e-journalism.

### **Key issues of concern**

Marketing environment to editors and the question of linking environment to other issues were key issues in the workshop.