Alar and Apples: Newspapers, srisk and media responsibility

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Public Understanding of Science, 5, 1996 1-20.

US media –Alar growth regulator sprayed on apples = unsafe to eat, esp for children. Coverage in media has been criticised.

Alar became a turning point in reporting environmental risks. Began asking tougher questions and proposals for eliminating risks. Not selective enough in covering risk issues.

Schools removed apples and apple products. Supermarket came under customer pressure to remove apples, providing organic produce. Apple industry lost millions of dollars.

NRDC enlisted thousands of people to its anitpesticide campaign but lost confidence of journalists and policy makers.

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National Research Council “The mass media are widely perceived as playing a powerful role in constructing laypeople’s understanding of and attitudes about risk. Journalist and the media help identify conflicts about risk and are important channels of information during the resolution of those conflicts’ 8

Stallings, R. a 1990 “Media discourse and the social constuction of risk” *Social Problems* 31, Feb

Slovic mass media and interpersonal communication are the two most important infliences on te public concerning risk issues. 10 Perceptions of risk *Science* 236, 280-285

See Krimsky and Plough for case studies in risk communication 11 *Envionmental Hazards: Communicating risks as a social process.*  Book

Influence of royal commission of the press in Great Britatin - informational and serve public interest 22

Mass Media and Society, edited by Curran and Gurevitch

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NRDC enlisted Meryl Streep and other celebrities to publicise the formation of Mothers and Others for Pesticide limits.

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Despite potential for localised coverage, very few papers did. The LA times tested apples in the supermarket for residues, but interviews with customers, local health depts. And schools were not carried by 2/3rds of the reports.

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Most covered group of spokespeople were govt, then apple industry, anti alar lobby then chemical group.

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Britain’s Advisory Committee on Pesticides reviewed the Alar incident. Cancer risk from alar used on apples was very low. Some questions whether this finding accounted for long term exposure. 38