



# Hooks, Lines & Sinkers:

## *A Fishing Analogy for Messages*

Complete messages are more than just sound bites. With that in mind, the Safe Energy Communication Council (SECC) created a fishing analogy called “Hooks, Lines and Sinkers” to provide a simple model to help create a complete message that resonates with the intended audience. Here’s the SECC model:

**Hook:** A pithy, short, attention-getting statement crafted to evoke a desired response from the press and a general or target audience. Usually the leadoff part of a message, a hook can be a headline (a complete phrase) or a sound bite (one or two sentences).

**Line:** Elaboration, explanation and reinforcement of the hook. The “key” information presented in a clear, compelling manner.

**Sinker:** Anticipates the content of an opponent's attack on the hooks and lines and preempts it with a defense. Of course, in fishing, one should always remember to use non-leaded sinkers and practice the ‘hook and release’ method!

The hook has two purposes. The hook must interest either a general or target audience and, simultaneously, attract the press. With the fishing analogy, the hook is literally the thing that “grabs” the intended audience.

For an exercise in crafting the hook, think about well-known statements or “hooks” from former U.S. Presidents or other famous people. For example, start with President Kennedy and work forward to the current President. This simple exercise can help jump-start the process of crafting messages that will be remembered by the audience.

In fishing, the “Lines” serve as strong connections to the hook. In message development, the lines are an elaboration or an explanation that reinforce and add substance to the hook. To reiterate - the lines are the key information presented in a clear, compelling manner. While one cannot be sure that the press will use the hook as the soundbite, you can craft the hook and lines so they will be lively and interesting. The hope is that the press will take the hook and print or broadcast it, but because they may also take one or more of the lines, make them attractive and easily understood as well.

For example, if a line reads, “Tests confirm that 87.3942 percent of aquatic life forms have become contaminated between riparian zones of the XXX River as a result of lethal doses of formaldehyde, chloroform, vinyl chloride and benzene discharging at the point source and affecting a down river range of 1,000 meters from the mechanically compromised sewage outflow facility of the YYY industrial park.”, it is likely to only

resonate with scientists. However, if intended for a general audience, the line could be changed to read, “Nearly nine out of ten species of fish are dying because of toxic chemicals pouring into the XXX River from the YYY industrial site.” The line has been transformed by making the point simpler and clearer for the target audience while not compromising the truth. The more technically detailed statement can be included in supplemental materials.

In fishing, the sinker enables the line with the hook to be cast into a specific place in the water. The sinker protects the position of the hook against the stream’s current. When crafting a message, the sinker plays essentially the same role. The sinker anticipates the content of an opponent’s attack on your hook and lines and preempts it.

For example, many viable sustainable agriculture and environmental protection proposals are attacked with the claim that the proposal will be bad for the economy and cause a loss of jobs. In this case, a sinker could be prepared in advance which details the economic benefit of jobs created by sustainable and organic farming. The sinker could demonstrate the financial value of tourism from conserving the land or preventing water pollution. In developing the sinker, however, do not repeat (and thus reinforce) the attack or negative language that was used to attack your original message.