

ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS: *We Need More*

PROJECT FOR IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

AN INAUGURAL RANKING REPORT
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The report, in its entirety, can be downloaded from:
environmentalcoverage.org/ranking

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ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS: *Executive Summary*

A UNIQUE PLACE IN HISTORY

We are at a point like none other in history. With seven billion of us and counting, our footprint is impacting our children's future like never before. And we are already seeing and feeling its effects in the form of resource wars, climate shift, trillions in economic impact, food scarcity, endangered indigenous cultures, body toxicity, and much more.

But, we are an ingenious species and have the ability to nurture a more restorative society if we put our mind to it. Now is the time to better understand our unprecedented predicament so that we can chart a different course: a course of stewardship and caretaking of our shared future.

THE NEWS MEDIA PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN HELPING THIS POSITIVE SHIFT TAKE PLACE.

While this report focuses on the lack of environmental coverage in the news and compares it to entertainment and crime coverage, it could be any one of a number of issues that affect humanity as a collective. Fortunately, improved environmental coverage, if done well, will equate to a better understanding of the broad range of critical challenges we face and will help to make solutions more visible and viable. Our future requires us to know more and do better, and the news media needs to play a more constructive role in this process.

In this day and age, visibility equates to value. Despite its intrinsic importance, however, **coverage of the environment represented just 1.2 percent of news headlines in the United States¹** from January 2011 through May 2012 for the thirty nationally prominent news organizations ranked in this report. Meanwhile, for some news organizations, entertainment and crime garner twenty times and sixty times more coverage, respectively, than the environment. News consumers overwhelmingly know that something needs to change on this front as a recent poll shows that nearly eighty percent of Americans want improved environmental coverage in the news.²

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS

Using data provided by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism for a wide range of national and local news organizations across platforms over a seventeen-month period, this report compares and ranks news organizations among their peers according to how they are prioritizing environmental headlines. This report also examines coverage ratios, citizen attitudes, pathways for innovation, and a host of other topics.

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ On average, entertainment headlines get over three times more coverage than environmental stories for nationally prominent news organizations.
- ❖ Most nationally focused news platforms have very high crime-to-environment ratios despite the fact that many of the crime stories are local in nature and can be classified as not being nationally relevant.
CRIME-TO-ENVIRONMENT RATIOS
 - Morning network news: 69-to-1
 - Cable news: 9-to-1
 - Online news: 6-to-1
 - Evening network news: 5-to-1
- ❖ Fox News had the highest percentage of headline environmental stories³ (1.57%) among cable and network news outlets, even beating out PBS (1.43%); with CNN having the lowest (0.36%).
- ❖ Local newspapers prioritize environmental coverage nearly three times more on the average compared to nationally focused news organizations (with the Daily Herald [WA] leading at 7.3%).
- ❖ The Huffington Post was the environmental coverage leader for nationally focused news organizations with 3% of headlines (nearly 3x the national average).
- ❖ Anecdotal evidence shows that independent news organizations are also prioritizing environmental coverage much more than mainstream news organizations; with some outlets averaging 15x more than the national average.

1 According to source data provided to the PIEC by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, journalism.org.

2 Caravan ORC International, Caravan Environmental News 2012 Study, April 12-15, environmentalcoverage.org/docs/Environmental%20News%202012%20Study%20-%20Standard%20Banners.docx.

3 It should be noted that quantity is not a proxy for quality as discussed later. Fox has been called out for not adhering to quality journalistic principles when covering environmental stories and misleading viewers, see www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/Is-News-Corp-Failing-Science.pdf.

FOLLOWING THE LEADERS: LOCAL NEWSPAPER LEADERS AS MODELS FOR REPLICATION

The Huffington Post was the leader among nationally focused news organizations with three percent of headlines being environmentally-focused. This is nearly three times the national average and more than twelve times that of some other online news aggregators and should be applauded. All things are relative, however, and with environmental stories representing 7.3 percent of headlines, the leading local news organization (Daily Herald, WA) covered environmental stories nearly six times more than the national average. On the whole, local newspapers perform better than any other news platform when it comes to prioritizing environmental coverage with nearly three times more environmental headlines on the average compared to nationally focused news organizations. The sector had the lowest entertainment-to-environment ratio and the second lowest crime-to-environment ratio (leaving more room and resources for better environmental coverage).

Many independent news organizations are also prioritizing environmental coverage and can be looked to as models for replication.

QUALITY VS. QUANTITY

To be certain, quantity of environmental coverage is not a proxy for quality of coverage, and it can be said that if one had to choose, quality is likely better than quantity. Case in point: running a plethora of headline stories that undermine the science of climate change is irresponsible in the face of facts, as Fox News has been criticized by the Union of Concerned Scientists.⁴ In contrast, if a news outlet has produced quality environmental stories, but neglects to prioritize these stories and place them in high visibility locations, then these stories aren't reaching as wide an audience as they could or should. In other words, improved environmental coverage is dependent upon both better quality of coverage, a greater quantity, and higher visibility of that coverage.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION

While there are clearly news organizations that are leaders when it comes to prioritizing environmental reporting, the findings of this report demonstrate that there is much room for innovation within the mainstream news media at large and a strong public desire to see this happen. To this end, a group of journalism professionals crafted the [Vision for Improved Environmental Reporting](#)⁵ and defined four core pillars and varying strategies for improving environmental coverage including:

THE FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT DEMONSTRATE THAT THERE IS MUCH ROOM FOR INNOVATION WITHIN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA AT LARGE AND A STRONG PUBLIC DESIRE TO SEE THIS HAPPEN.

- I **Integrate the environmental angle into other stories and make that connection explicit**
- II **Make environmental stories appealing to a larger cross section of society**
- III **Focus more on solutions**
- IV **Increase the visibility of environmental stories**

Fortunately, there are more resources on this topic than ever before such as environmental news services, academic institutions, science-based research organizations, and others that are able to support news organizations in deepening coverage and making it more visible.

What is needed is recognition of the problem and the will to innovate.

4 Aaron Huertas and Dena Adler, "Is News Corp. Failing Science?" September 2012, www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/Is-News-Corp-Failing-Science.pdf.

5 Available at: environmentalcoverage.org/vision.

ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS: *We Need More*

"We must go through a natural revolution if we are to survive on earth. We need to change people's perceptions. If there's no environment, there's no human race. We are in a state of global denial." - Ted Turner, CNN Founder

INTRODUCTION

As CNN founder Ted Turner so aptly conveys in his quote above, we need environmental understanding and concern to be a more integral part of our collective mind-set. We are inextricably linked with the environment and our prosperity, health, security, and well-being are intimately tied to it. News coverage of the environment has a significant impact on public opinion, policy making, and whether we, as a society, expand and deepen our stewardship ethic. Recent polling shows that nearly eighty percent of Americans want improved environmental coverage in the news.⁶ Despite its value, however, coverage of the environment represented just 1.2 percent of news headlines in the United States⁷ during a seventeen-month period (January 2011 –May 2012) for the thirty nationally prominent news organizations ranked in this report. Meanwhile, for some news organizations, entertainment and crime garner twenty times and sixty times more coverage, respectively, than the environment.

The news media is a critical conduit that can engender better environmental understanding and a corresponding national stewardship ethic.

SUPERFICIAL NEWS VS. ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

When the frequency of reporting on environmental issues is compared to reporting on celebrities or entertainment-related topics, it becomes clear that there is a need for many mainstream news sources to reconsider what issues they prioritize. One recent study by Media Matters found that between January 1, 2011 and June 26, 2012 prominent newspapers and television news from major network and cable stations **mentioned reality TV stars the Kardashians a combined 2,133 times while ocean acidification was only mentioned 45 times over the same period.**⁸

Table 1 underscores this same concern.

TABLE 1

Search Results from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archives January 1, 2011 to May 31, 2012	
Search Term	Number of Television News Stories
Entertainment Phrases Searched	
LeBron James	348
Dancing With the Stars	124
Donald Trump	111
Environmental Phrases Searched	
Deforestation	0
Fracking/Hydraulic Fracturing	6
Environmental Health	28
Climate Change	244

Table 1. Source: tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/

Searches were performed using Vanderbilt University's television news archive and included the names of several celebrities as well as other entertainment-related phrases and compared the number of results to searches for terms related to important environmental issues. Vanderbilt's collection consists of regularly scheduled newscasts from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News.

6 Caravan ORC International, [Caravan Environmental News 2012 Study, April 12-15, environmentalcoverage.org/docs/Environmental%20News%202012%20Study%20--%20Standard%20Banners.docx](http://environmentalcoverage.org/docs/Environmental%20News%202012%20Study%20--%20Standard%20Banners.docx).

7 According to source data provided to the PIEC by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, www.journalism.org.

8 Shauna Theel, "Study: Kardashians Get 40 Times More News Coverage Than Ocean Acidification," June 27, 2012, Media Matters, mediamatters.org/blog/2012/06/27/study-kardashians-get-40-times-more-news-covera/186703.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE MAINSTREAM NEWS

Using data provided by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism for a wide range of national and local news organizations across platforms (from January 2011 –May 2012), this report compares and ranks news organizations among their peers according to how they are prioritizing environmental headlines. This report also examines coverage ratios, a critical factor of quality of reporting, and also looks at success models for replication, citizen attitudes, and a host of other topics.

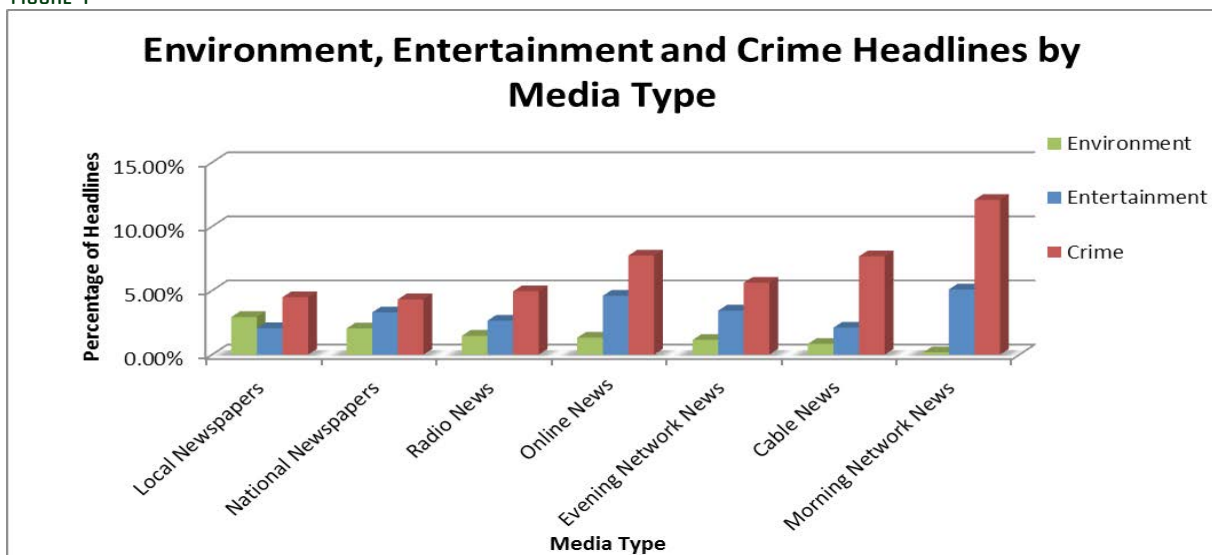
KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ On average, **entertainment headlines get over three times more coverage than environmental stories** for nationally prominent news organizations.
- ❖ Most national news media platforms have very high crime-to-environment ratios despite the fact that many of the crime stories are local in nature and can be classified as not nationally relevant.
 - CRIME-TO-ENVIRONMENT RATIOS**
 - Morning network news: 69-to-1
 - Cable news: 9-to-1
 - Online news: 6-to-1
 - Evening network news: 5-to-1
- ❖ Fox News had the highest percentage of headline environmental stories⁹ (1.57%) among cable and network news outlets, even beating out PBS (1.43%); with CNN having the lowest (0.36%).
- ❖ Local newspapers ranked highest in terms of the quantity of environmental headlines at nearly 2.5 times the average for the national news organizations ranked in this report.
- ❖ The Huffington Post was the environmental coverage leader for nationally focused news organizations with 3% of headlines (nearly 3x the national average).
- ❖ Anecdotal evidence shows that independent news organizations are also prioritizing environmental coverage much more than mainstream news organizations; with some independent outlets (Commondreams.org/ National Radio Project & others) averaging 15x more than the national average.

AN INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

Figure 1 illustrates how varying news media types are prioritizing environmental coverage. Local newspapers are the only news format that prioritizes environmental over entertainment headlines on average.

FIGURE 1



⁹ It should be noted that quantity is not a proxy for quality as discussed later. Fox has been called out for not adhering to quality journalistic principles when covering environmental stories and misleading viewers with biases and false facts

TABLE 2. RANKING: NATIONALLY PROMINENT NEWS OUTLETS BY PERCENTAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEADLINES

Rank	News Organization	Environmental Coverage	Entertainment Coverage	Crime Coverage	Crime-to-Environment Ratio	Entertainment-to-Environment Ratio
1	huffingtonpost.com	3.00%	1.72%	3.36%	1.12	0.57
2	LA Times	2.66%	3.08%	4.82%	1.81	1.16
3	NY Times	2.50%	2.55%	3.60%	1.44	1.02
4	NYTimes.com	2.43%	1.16%	5.21%	2.14	0.48
5	NPR	2.15%	2.31%	2.80%	1.31	1.08
6	foxnews.com	2.13%	2.81%	12.62%	5.92	1.32
7	Wall Street Journal	1.89%	1.48%	3.76%	1.99	0.78
8	USA Today	1.64%	7.55%	6.00%	3.67	4.61
9	Fox News Total	1.57%	1.68%	8.07%	5.15	1.07
10	Washington Post	1.55%	1.82%	3.38%	2.18	1.17
11	PBS Evening	1.43%	2.02%	2.61%	1.82	1.41
12	MSNBC.com	1.42%	3.46%	10.54%	7.41	2.43
13	usatoday.com	1.38%	14.02%	7.87%	5.72	10.20
14	latimes.com	1.37%	4.97%	7.40%	5.40	3.62
15	NBC Evening	1.36%	4.45%	6.01%	4.42	3.28
16	washingtonpost.com	1.32%	1.76%	2.97%	2.26	1.34
17	wsj.com	1.03%	0.92%	4.44%	4.32	0.90
18	CBS Evening	1.02%	3.10%	6.57%	6.42	3.03
19	CNN.com	0.90%	6.68%	8.03%	8.92	7.42
20	ABC Evening	0.77%	4.17%	7.25%	9.39	5.40
21	CBS Radio Headlines	0.63%	4.08%	7.09%	11.22	6.46
22	MSNBC Total	0.59%	1.39%	5.11%	8.63	2.35
23	ABC Radio Headlines	0.57%	3.88%	11.53%	20.26	6.82
24	Yahoo.com	0.42%	1.52%	6.77%	16.01	3.59
25	CNN Total	0.36%	3.25%	9.83%	27.51	9.09
26	abcnews.com	0.31%	3.28%	16.06%	51.12	10.44
27	Google news	0.25%	12.84%	7.57%	30.09	51.04
28	ABC Morning	0.25%	7.85%	14.07%	55.97	31.21
29	CBS Morning	0.24%	3.40%	8.26%	35.09	14.45
30	NBC Morning	0.04%	3.99%	13.89%	340.69	97.81
	Average	1.24%	3.91%	7.25%	5.85	3.15

TABLE 3. TOP THREE LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Rank	News Organization	Environmental Coverage	Entertainment Coverage	Crime Coverage	Crime-to-Environment Ratio	Entertainment-to-Environment Ratio
1	Daily Herald (WA) †	7.33%	2.80%	5.22%	0.71	0.38
2	Traverse City Record†	6.37%	0.00%	1.09%	0.17	0.00
3	Spokesman Review*	5.81%	1.95%	4.28%	0.74	0.34

As is evident from figure 1 and table 2, most nationally recognized news organizations tracked by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism have ample room to improve environmental reporting, especially when compared to crime and entertainment reporting. In contrast, local newspapers as a whole perform much better in this area, as represented by the leaders (shown in table 3), and can be looked to as models for replication.

ENTERTAINMENT-TO-ENVIRONMENT HEADLINE RATIOS

Figures 2 and 3 represent both the problem and the spectrum of opportunity.

FIGURE 2

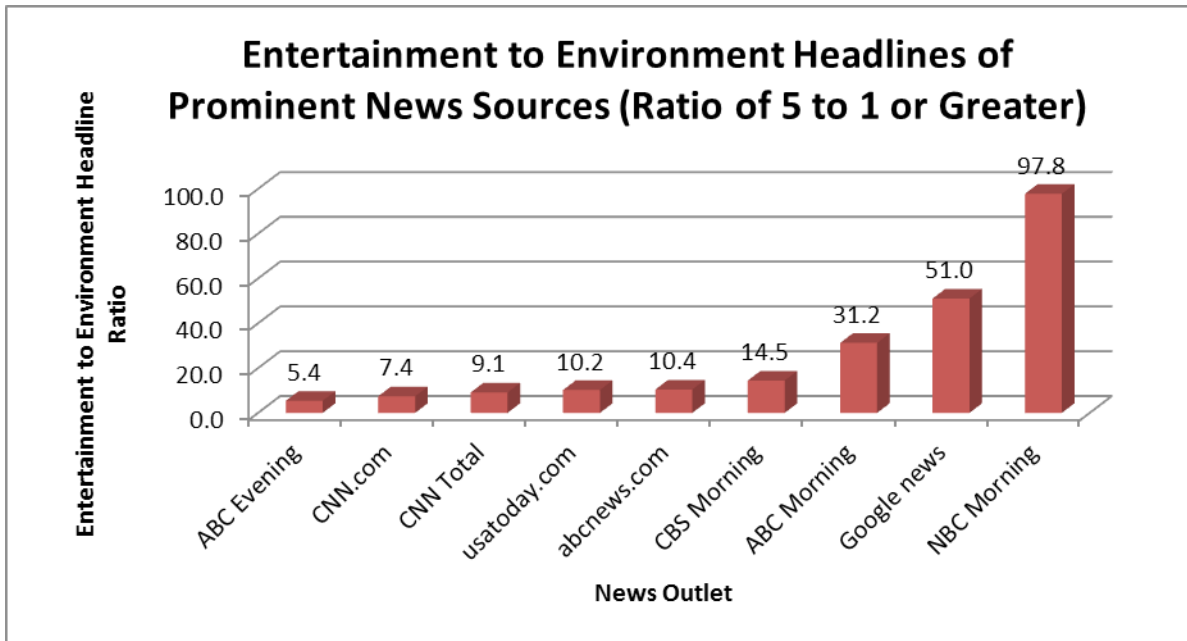
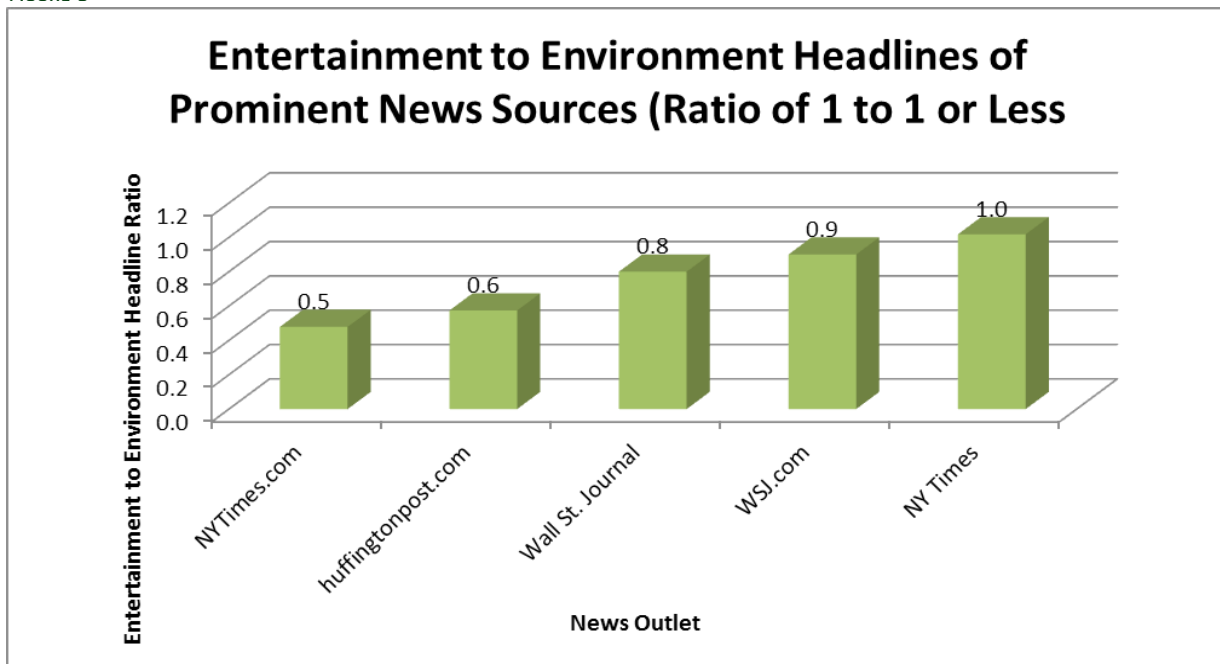


Figure 2 highlights nationally recognized news sources that average at least five times as many entertainment headlines as environmental headlines. NBC Morning News has the highest ratio with nearly one hundred times more entertainment than environmental coverage.

Figure 3 highlights which news organizations have an entertainment-to-environmental headline ratio of 1-to-1 or less (meaning they report on the environment as much as or more frequently than entertainment topics). The leader is NYTimes.com, which publishes environmental headlines twice as frequently as entertainment headlines (entertainment-to-environmental coverage ratio is 0.5-to-1). It should be noted that figure 3 only demonstrates the leaders among prominent nationally recognized news outlets, and there are several local newspapers that have entertainment-to-environment headline ratios below that of NYTimes.com (eight out of the thirteen local newspapers evaluated had an entertainment headline ratio of 0.5-to-1 or less).

FIGURE 3



AMERICANS WANT IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

NEARLY EIGHTY PERCENT OF AMERICANS BELIEVE NEWS COVERAGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT SHOULD BE IMPROVED

According to a 2012 national poll commissioned by the Project for Improved Environmental Coverage and conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation over the weekend of April 14–15, seventy-nine percent of Americans believe news coverage of the environment should be improved. Taken together, the results of the poll confirm that regardless of age, race, income, or region of the country, an overwhelming majority of Americans believe news coverage of our environment should be improved.

AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BELIEVE NEWS COVERAGE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT SHOULD BE IMPROVED.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The difference between men and women was minor with slightly more women (82%) than men (76%) believing the news media should improve coverage.

- ❖ By race, 88% of African-Americans polled shared this view, versus 79% of Hispanics and 77% of whites, suggesting that concern over environmental issues may actually be slightly higher for nonwhites than whites.
- ❖ Regionally, there was very little variation with 77% of those polled in the Northeast, Midwest, and West feeling news coverage could be improved while 83% of those in the South felt this way.
- ❖ As household income increased, belief in the need for better coverage decreased slightly: 84% of those with incomes below \$35,000/year and 74% of those whose incomes exceed \$100,000/year felt coverage should be improved.
- ❖ Level of education also had little impact on Americans' views, with 83% of those who have a high school diploma or less and 76% of college graduates believing coverage should be improved.
- ❖ Somewhat surprisingly, age made no difference. In fact, 79% of 18–24 year-olds and 79% of those over 65 felt coverage should be improved.

METHODOLOGY

Approximately 1,000 individuals responded to a question posed over the phone by Opinion Research Corporation staff. The question asked was “Do you think news coverage of the environment should be improved?” Here is a link to the [summary](#).¹⁰

MEETING THE DEMAND

While many news organizations claim that individuals are more likely to click on or tune in to a crime or entertainment story, this is simply human nature. It doesn't mean that people actually want the quantity of those types of stories or that they want those types of stories instead of critical information about local, national, or international environmental issues. Progress on this front need not be an either-or proposition. Regardless of the reaction to the data, the poll results clearly show that a large majority of citizens want better environmental coverage and the news media industry has a unique opportunity meet this need.

10 Project for Improved Environmental Coverage, “Poll Summary – Citizen Attitudes re: Environmental Coverage,” environmentalcoverage.org/docs/Summary%20of%20Citizen%20Attitudinal%20Poll%20April%202012.docx

WHY IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE MATTERS

While many people get their news from a variety of media types, it is reasonable to assume that more than 100 million individuals in the United States are “news consumers” via print, television, online, and radio news formats combined. This number represents a huge cross section of society and a critical mass of individuals whose knowledge base about environmental issues can ultimately translate to improved policy making at local and national levels, collective actions that reduce impacts, and the cultivation of an expanded national stewardship ethic.

So where do adult Americans typically acquire their environmental knowledge? According to the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), for most adults, particularly those older than thirty-five, the media is by far the leading source of environmental information for adults. A NEEF/Roeper Report¹¹ found that about eighty percent of Americans are heavily influenced by incorrect or outdated environmental myths and there is little difference in environmental knowledge levels between the average American and those who sit on governing bodies, town councils, and in corporate board rooms—those whose decisions often have wider ramifications on the environment. Their conclusion is that “low levels of knowledge about the environment is a signal that members of the public will be unprepared for increasing environmental responsibilities in the coming years.”

In a recent study conducted by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, researchers found that only eight percent of Americans have climate-change knowledge equivalent to an A or B grade, forty percent would receive a C or D, and fifty-two percent would get an F. The study also found important gaps in knowledge and common misconceptions about climate change and the earth systems. According to the study “these misconceptions lead some people to doubt that climate change is happening or that human activities are a major contributor, to misunderstand the causes and therefore the solutions, and to be unaware of the risks. Thus many Americans lack some of the knowledge needed for informed decision making in a democratic society.”¹² For example, only

- ❖ 57% know that the greenhouse effect refers to gases in the atmosphere that trap heat;
- ❖ 50% of Americans understand that global warming is caused mostly by human activities;
- ❖ 45% understand that carbon dioxide traps heat from the earth’s surface;
- ❖ 25% have ever heard of coral bleaching or ocean acidification.

In addition, the study also found that Americans also recognize their own limited understanding of the issue. Only one in ten say that they are “very well informed” about climate change, and seventy-five percent say they would like to know more. Likewise, seventy-five percent say that schools should teach children about climate change and sixty-eight percent would welcome a national program to teach Americans about the issue. Perhaps the news media can be the engine for such a “national program.”

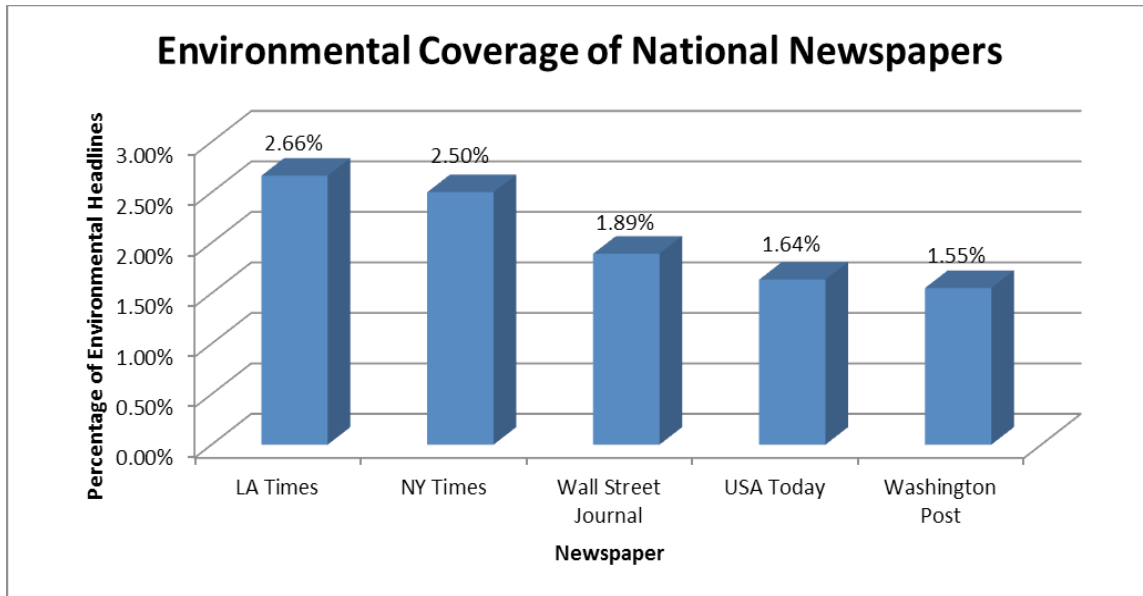
11 Kevin Coyle, “Environmental Literacy in America,” September 2005, neefusa.org/pdf/ELR2005.pdf.

12 Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, “American’s Knowledge of Climate Change,” October 12, 2012, environment.yale.edu/climate/publications/knowledge-of-climate-change/

RANKING CHARTS

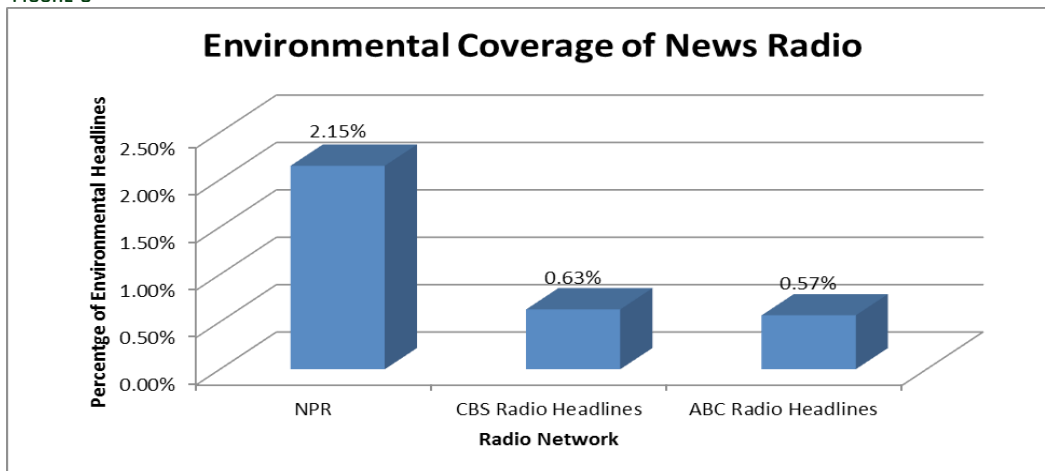
It should be noted that tables 2 and 3 and figures 4 through 11 are based upon the data averages over a seventeen-month period (all of 2011 and Jan–May 2012) provided by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. While this data is representative of a wide range of news organizations, it is merely a representative sampling that is focused almost entirely on mainstream (and not independent) news organizations. The Pew Research Center’s data is also guided by their [methodology](#).¹³

FIGURE 4



While nationally recognized newspapers as a whole are somewhat closely grouped together when it comes to environmental reporting, it should be noted that the *LA Times* features environmental headlines seventy-two percent more than the *Washington Post*.

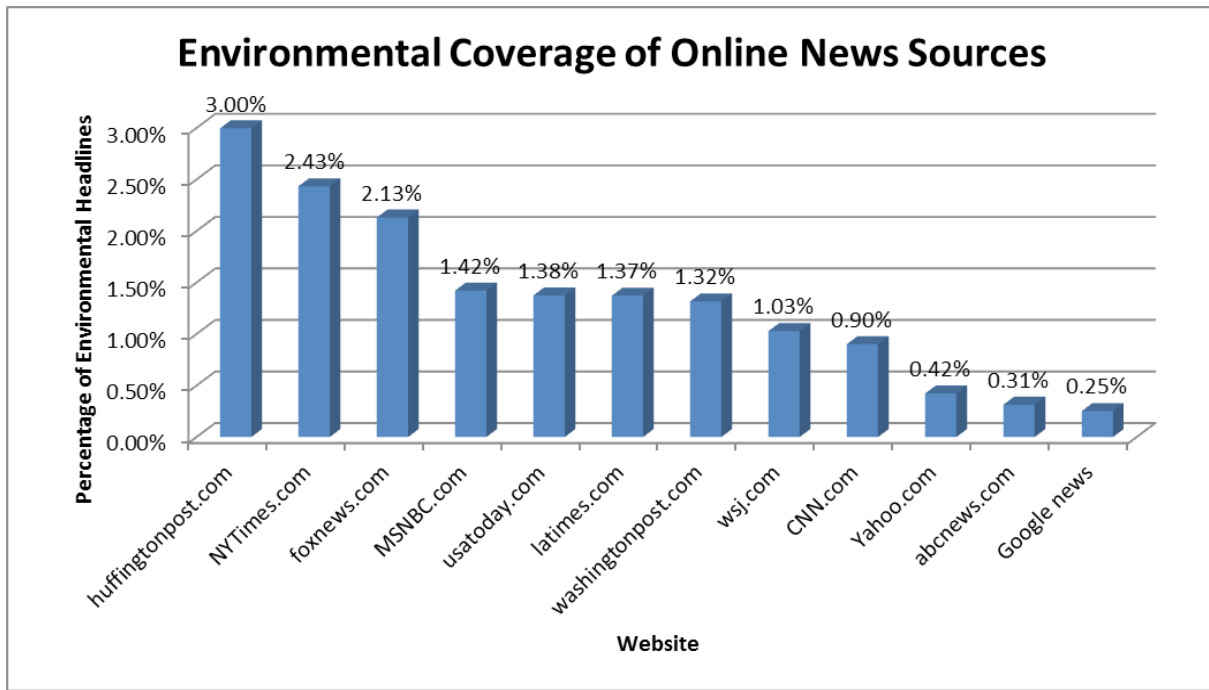
FIGURE 5



While NPR’s environmental headline average is still quite small for a public-interest news organization, their average is over three times more than ABC news radio. In contrast, the National Radio Project maintains a coverage mix of approximately fifteen percent for environmental stories.

13 Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, www.journalism.org/about_news_index/methodology.

FIGURE 6



Huffington Post leads the pack in this category at three percent, prioritizing environmental stories more than twelve times that of Google News, which is in last place at 0.25 percent. It should also be noted that CNN.com, Yahoo News, ABCnews.com, and Google News are all less than the 1.2 percent average for the study period.

FIGURE 7

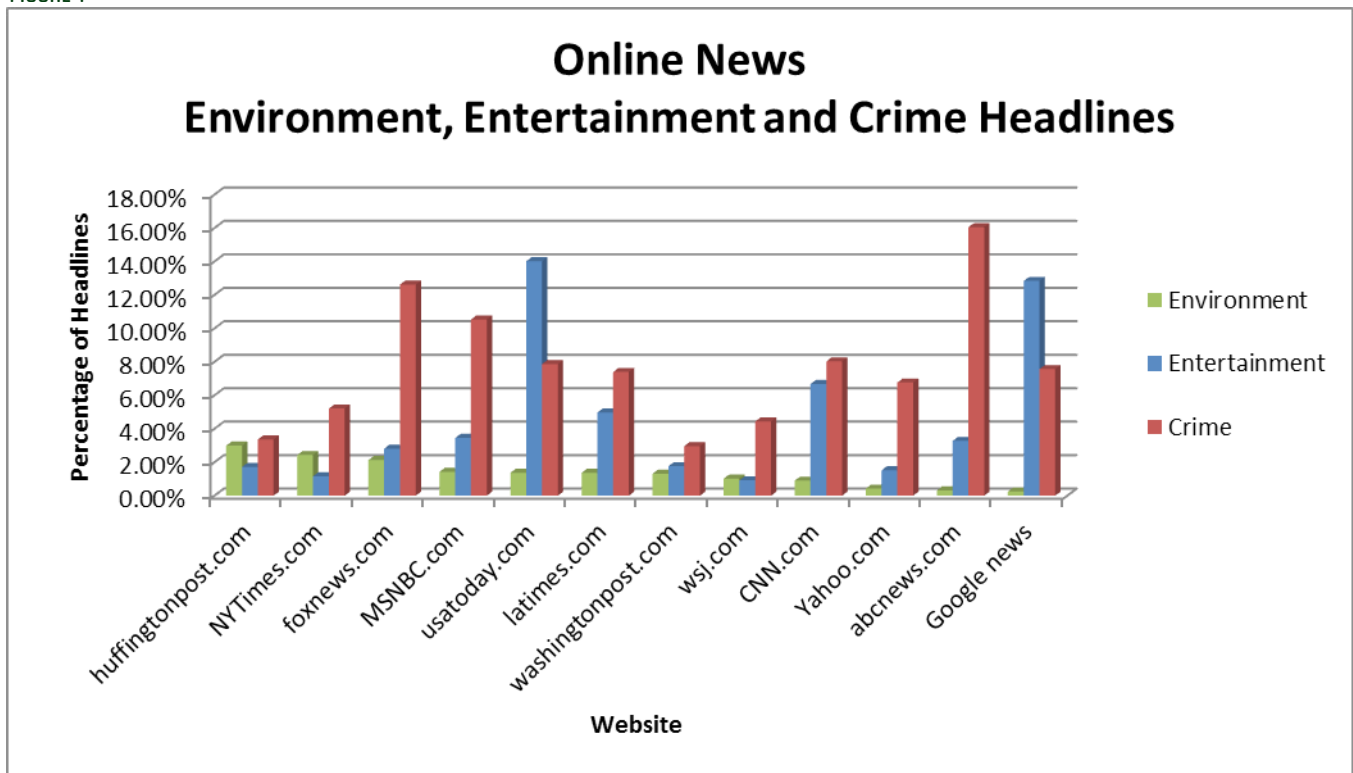
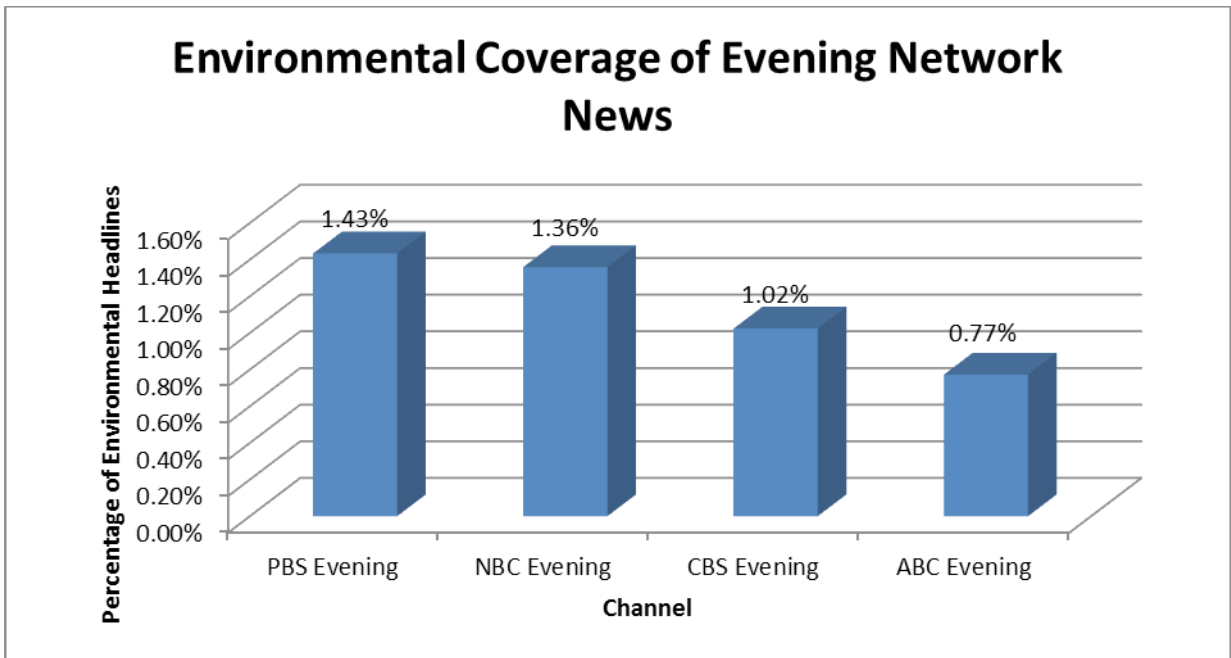


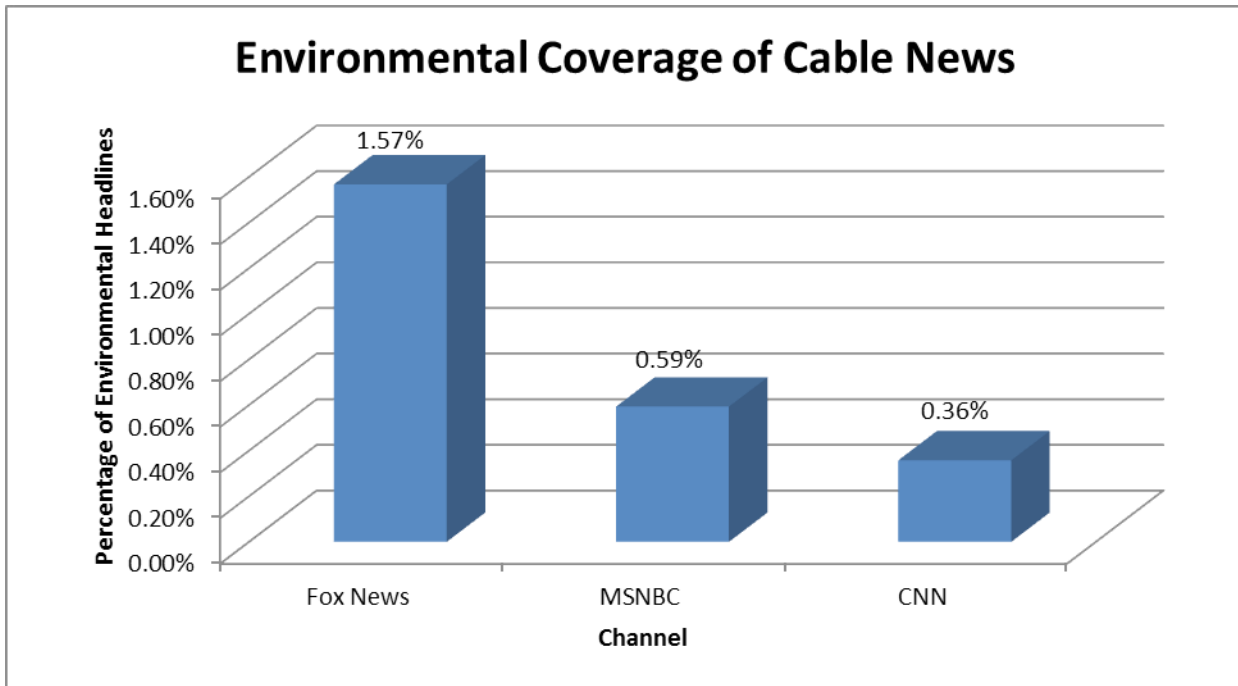
Figure 7 provides a glimpse of how environmental headlines stack up against entertainment and crime for online news portals.

FIGURE 8



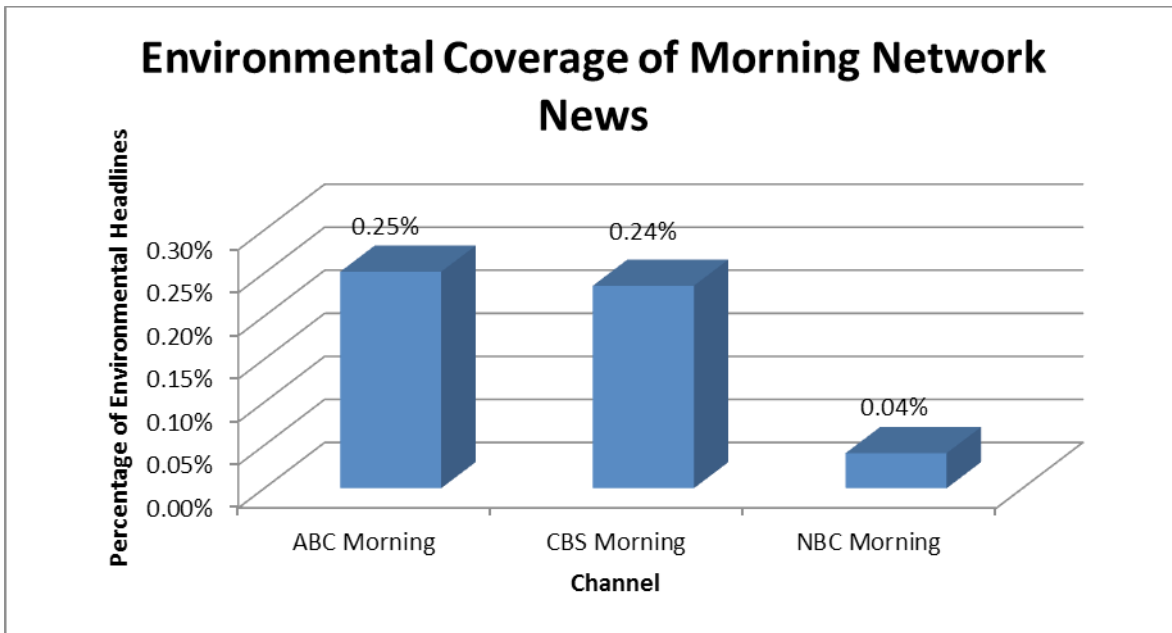
Given the audience reach with nearly fifty million nightly viewers of evening network news, it is surprising to see how PBS and the networks compare to the national average of 1.2 percent for the study period. Unlike other news formats, the networks are grouped somewhat close together with PBS Evening (1.43%) just under twice the environmental headline coverage of ABC Evening (0.77%).

FIGURE 9



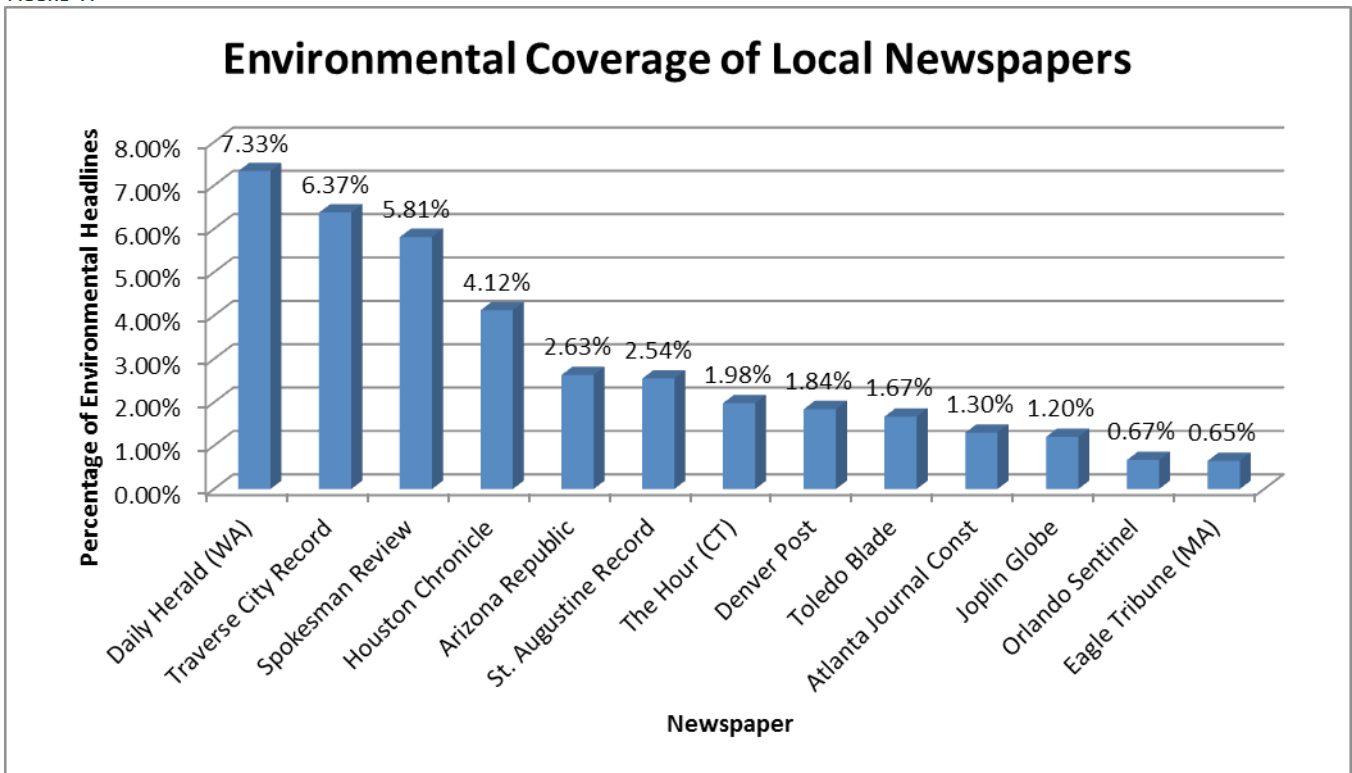
While there are a fewer number of news organizations to compare in the cable news format category, it is interesting to note that Fox News covers environmental headlines nearly four times more than CNN and approximately 2.5 times more than MSNBC. As stated previously, Fox News is often criticized for having a blatant anti-environment bias and accordingly quantity is not a proxy for quality of coverage on this issue. It does, however, lead one to ask why Fox might be covering environmental topics so much more than its counterparts and conversely why environmental headlines on CNN and MSNBC seem to garner so little visibility.

FIGURE 10



As is evidenced in figure 10, morning network news as a format is devoting very little coverage to environmental news with the three networks averaging 0.18 percent—nearly seven times less than the national average of 1.24 percent during the seventeen-month study period. With an entertainment and crime to environment ratios of 27-to-1 and 69-to-1 respectively, there are certainly opportunities for a few less stories in these topic areas and more environmental headline stories.

FIGURE 11

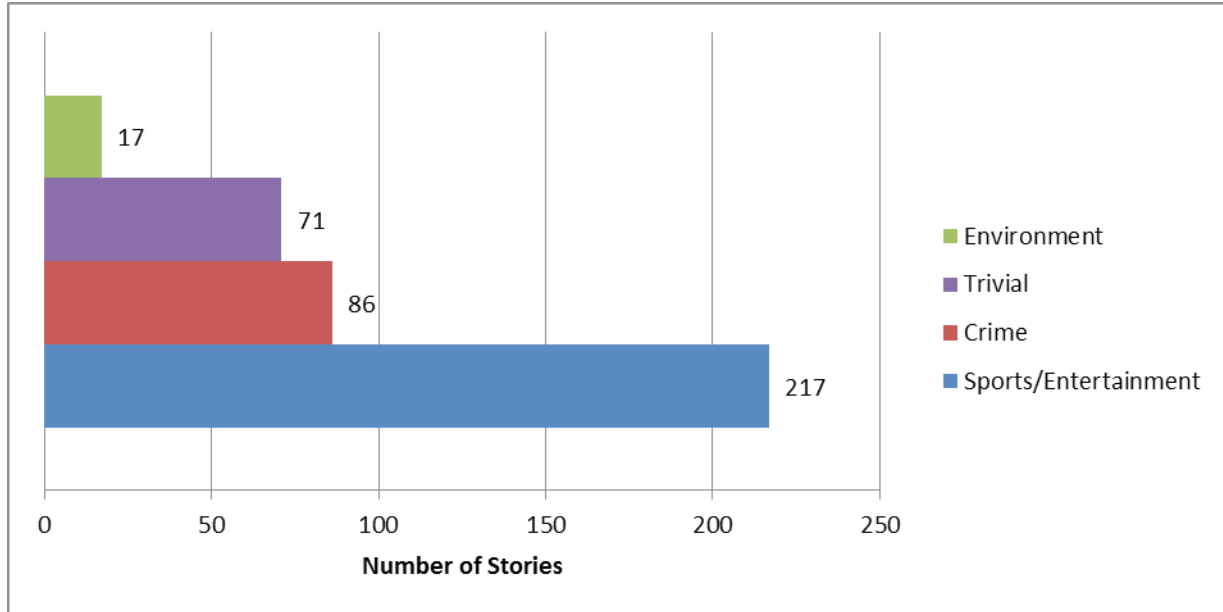


As is evident in figure 11, environmental headlines at the *Daily Herald* in Washington (7.33%) are prioritized nearly six times more than the average for nationally recognized news organizations over seventeen months and have the highest ranking of any news portal tracked by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. As a whole, local newspapers run environmental headlines nearly 2.5 times more than nationally focused news orgs.

A CLOSER LOOK AT CNN.COM

The CNN brand and news platforms are viewed by many as a source for unbiased news coverage. CNN's leadership in this area and quality of coverage is deserving of praise. But, it is also worth looking at how CNN.com prioritizes environmental stories with a finer scale of detail. Below is a snapshot of CNN.com's headlines as tracked and categorized by the Project for Improved Environmental Coverage over the course of four weeks in Spring 2012. This is merely a month of data, but it aptly captures the scope of opportunity for CNN.com.

FIGURE 12. CNN.COM NEWS HEADLINES FROM 4/18/12 – 5/23/12



THREE ENVIRONMENTAL STORIES UNREPORTED BY CNN.COM DURING THIS TIME PERIOD (4/18/12 – 5/23/12):

- Mayors group pledges big greenhouse gas reduction effort*
- Changing sea conditions threaten a major world food source (a U.N. report)*
- Report warns of pesticide residue in conventionally grown produce*

EIGHT NONSENSICAL STORIES COVERED AS NEWS HEADLINES BY CNN.COM DURING THIS TIME PERIOD (4/18/12 – 5/23/12):

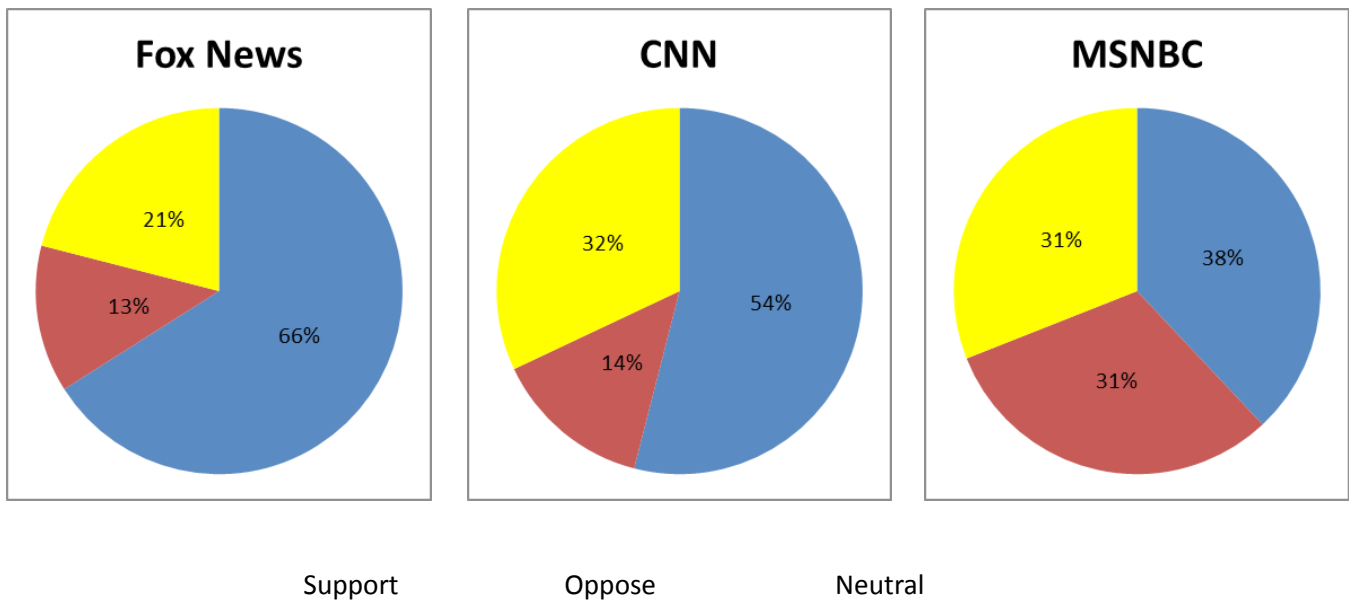
- Cat weighs almost 40 pounds*
- Photos: A home made of beer cans*
- The RidicuList: Drunk friends steal penguin*
- Mom denies taking 6-year-old for tan*
- Being a porn star saved my life*
- Charlie Sheen sues strip club*
- Hot dog stripper goes back to work*
- Grad Gift Trend: Breast Implants?*

FOX NEWS: “FAILING SCIENCE”

Though Fox News leads cable and network news in reporting on environmental issues, with 1.57 percent of headlines focusing on the environment, it has been noted by several sources that Fox News and its parent company News Corporation have anti-environmental agenda and that much of the discussion about environmental issues is in fact dismissive of concerns about environmental issues.

For example, Media Matters conducted an analysis of media coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline between August 1st and December 31st 2011. At the time, there was a great deal of controversy surrounding a proposal to extend the pipeline. Supporters of extending the pipeline viewed the project as one that would create jobs and help spur the economy while opponents of the extension feared it would pose an undue environmental risk. Media Matters found that Fox News also mentioned environmental issues the most frequently of any cable news channel when discussing the Keystone XL Pipeline. However the Media Matters study found that in Fox News stories about the pipeline, sixty-six percent of those quoted or hosting shows favored the pipeline extension compared to only thirteen percent who opposed it as indicated in figure 13.

FIGURE 13. PERCENTAGE OF COMMENTS SUPPORTING OR OPPOSING EXTENSION OF KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE



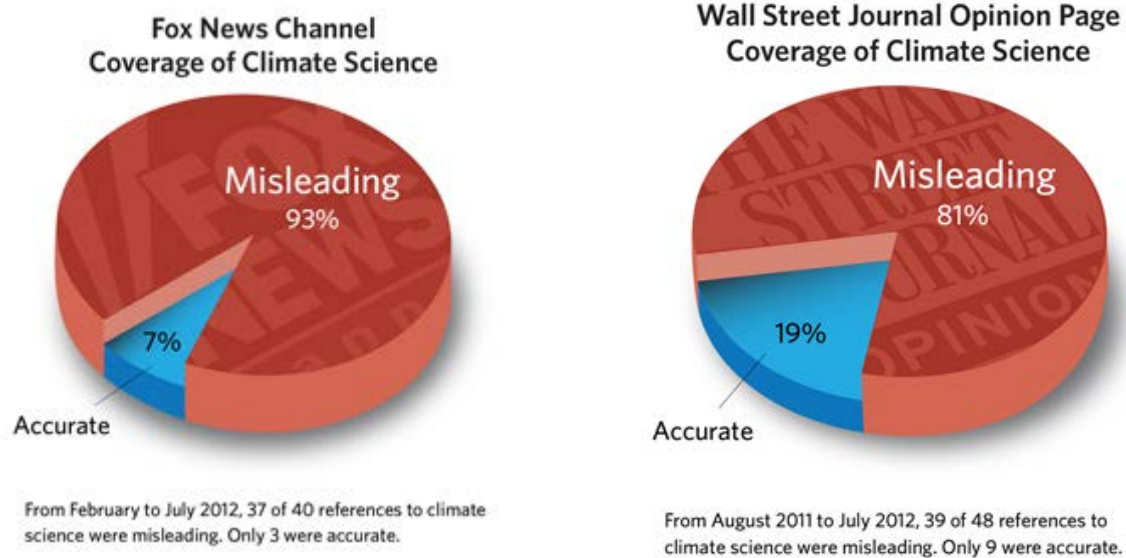
The Media Matters report also noted that Fox News along with *The Wall Street Journal* (both are owned by the same parent company, News Corporation) mentioned protests of the pipeline extension less than other news outlets.¹⁴

¹⁴ [Jill Fitzsimmons and Jocelyn Fong, “Study: The Press and the Pipeline,” January 26, 2012, Media Matters, mediamatters.org/research/2012/01/26/study-the-press-and-the-pipeline/186559.](http://www.mediamatters.org/research/2012/01/26/study-the-press-and-the-pipeline/186559)

Another study by the Union of Concerned Scientists indicated that Fox News and News Corporation often mislead the public about scientific facts related to key environmental issues. An analysis of Fox News' coverage of climate change between January and July of 2012 found that ninety-three percent of the station's coverage was misleading, and a similar analysis for the *Wall Street Journal* found that it was misleading in its coverage of climate science eighty-one percent of the time. For both Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*, misleading comments dismissed the scientific consensus that climate change was occurring or that it was human-caused.¹⁵

FOR BOTH FOX NEWS AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, MISLEADING COMMENTS DISMISSED THE SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS THAT CLIMATE CHANGE WAS OCCURRING OR THAT IT WAS HUMAN-CAUSED.¹⁵

FIGURE 14



Attempts by News Corporation to dismiss climate change and downplay other environmental issues are in some ways perplexing given the company's own commitment to being carbon neutral and statements by the company's founder, Rupert Murdoch saying, "I think when people see that 99 percent of scientists agree about the serious extent of global warming, it's going to become a fact of life."

Given the popularity of Fox News and the fact that it reports on environmental issues more than other cable news channels, it is difficult to argue that increasing coverage of environmental issues at other news organizations potential viewers or readers. In fact, given the frequent dismissal of environmental concerns and scientific consensus at News Corporation, additional environmental coverage that is more balanced and science-based would not only increase viewers and readers but would provided a much needed public service.

15 Aaron Huertas and Dena Adler, "Is News Corp. Failing Science?" September 2012, www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/Is-News-Corp-Failing-Science.pdf.

A PATH FORWARD: *A Vision for Improved Environmental News Coverage*

In an effort to chart a path forward for their industry on this issue, a range of journalism professionals participated in a process to envision core principles for improving environmental coverage. These goals are contained within the Vision for Improved Environmental News Coverage (available at environmentalcoverage.org/vision).

An advisory group of environmental journalism professionals from the following organizations were involved in the development of the Vision during 2011–12:

Bryan Walsh, *TIME Magazine*

Jennifer Grayson, *Huffington Post*

Peter Fimrite, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Rebecca Williams, *Michigan Radio*

Beth Parke, *Society of Environmental Journalists*

Dave Poulson, *Knight Center for Environmental Journalism*

Libby Waldo, *Grist Magazine*

Tess Croner, *Solutions Journal*

The stakeholder group affirmed that:

- **Journalism has a tremendous influence on the public’s environmental literacy.** The nature and level of environmental news reporting is one of the most important influences on the perception and understanding of the environment, according to numerous studies.
- **The public wants better and more environmental news.** Seventy-nine percent of Americans think news coverage of the environment should be improved, according to an April 2012 poll conducted by Opinion Research Corp.
- **The news media bridges the political divide on environmental issues.** With the divisiveness that often occurs in politics, there is a danger of distorting and marginalizing environmental issues that are critical to our economy, health and quality of life. The news media can hold a bright spotlight on such issues and provide an unbiased analysis.

INDUSTRY GOALS

I **Integrate the environmental angle into other stories and make that connection explicit.** The environment affects or is affected by many areas of public interest including the economy, health, social issues and national security. Illuminating these connections dispels the belief that the environment can be separated from other issues or simply ignored.

II **Make environmental stories appealing to a larger cross section of society.** The technical or scientific nature of some environmental stories challenges understanding. Making the content accessible by relating it to other issues and reporting with clarity overcomes these barriers.

III **Focus more on solutions. Including potential solutions makes environmental news stories more useful.** Reporting them adds to the momentum for solving the environmental challenges we face.

IV **Increase the visibility of environmental stories.** Limiting environmental stories to a special section or program suggests that the environment is a special interest rather than a public concern. This limits the likelihood of the consumption of important news. In fact, stories with an environmental focus comprise just one percent of the top stories, according to the Pew Center. Featuring environment-related headlines on front or home pages or as one of the top stories of a broadcast gives them greater visibility and helps to increase public awareness.

FOLLOWING THE LEADERS: *Local Newspaper Leaders and Independent News Organizations — Models for Replication*

On the whole, local newspapers perform better than any other news platform when it comes to prioritizing environmental coverage—with environmental story headlines appearing nearly three times more than the average compared to nationally focused news organizations. With environmental stories representing 7.3 percent of headlines, the leading local news organization (*Daily Herald, WA*) covered environmental stories nearly six times the national average. Influencing factors for the leader title include:

- **The sector had the lowest entertainment-to-environment ratio and the second lowest crime-to-environment ratio (leaving more room and resources for better environmental coverage).**
- **Environmental stories work best when citizens can connect as individuals to the content and local environmental coverage is in line with this approach.**

Snapshot tracking of news aggregator Comondreams.org and the National Radio Project show that both independent news organizations are prioritizing environmental stories in meaningful ways, with environmental stories representing approximately fifteen percent of the story mix during varying months.

If, at some point in the near future, the news industry covered the environment at seven percent of headlines or more, it would actually be close to what citizens are looking for in regards to attitudinal data that shows that citizens would like to see environment-related stories representing eighteen percent of headlines according to PIEC's 2010 poll conducted through the Opinion Research Corporation.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

After examining environmental coverage levels across thirty nationally recognized news organizations, the most important finding is that the industry has a huge opportunity to improve how it prioritizes environmental stories. **Many would say that the opportunity is also a responsibility.** Of course, with headlines representing a narrow slice of “real estate” above the fold and newsroom budgets decreasing, the question becomes what gets covered less and what is the budget for improving coverage. The short answer is that it could be as simple as covering entertainment and crime less and environment more and without any significant impact to the bottom-line. There are more resources to support robust environmental reporting than ever before in the form of news services, academic institutions, journalism training organizations and science-based civil society organizations, and making use of these resources enables a news organization to increase coverage of environmental stories without necessarily having to incur additional costs.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDING IS THAT THE INDUSTRY HAS A HUGE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE HOW IT PRIORITIZES ENVIRONMENTAL STORIES.

THE WRAP UP: *There's A Lot of Room for Innovation and Improvement*

THE NEWS AFFECTS ENVIRONMENTAL UNDERSTANDING, POLICY, AND MORE

Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.” He understood the powerful role of the news media in shaping our society and, alas, this importance still reigns today. Our level of environmental understanding directly impacts the policies we establish, the daily choices we make, and the extent to which we deepen a national ethic of stewardship. And similar to the way feedback loops work in nature, this stewardship ethic ultimately reinforces our ability to thrive as a species and will enable future generations to enjoy the same comforts and stability that we have.

A PUBLIC INTEREST PRIORITY

Undoubtedly, news organizations face a daunting challenge when it comes to determining which stories reach the public. There are so many competing topics that are important and deserve coverage. With entertainment and crime headlines receiving over three and five times more headline coverage than environmental ones, however, there is a real opportunity for nationally prominent news organizations to do a much better job in this area. In fact, environmental coverage could likely improve across the full spectrum of news organizations—from local to independent news outlets. Fortunately, there are ways to track and measure quantitative shifts in headline priorities, and it will be a great day when we see less entertainment and crime coverage and more coverage of topics like the environment that are in the public interest and affect our shared common good. It is important to note that environmental stories can be connected to so many varying topics from health and economy to jobs and security.

AMERICANS WANT MORE ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

As referenced earlier, seventy-nine percent of Americans want improved environmental coverage and this desire cuts across all demographic and geographic lines. This data shouldn't come as a surprise because it can be argued that most Americans have an intrinsic inclination to recognize that the environment isn't some external thing. It is core to the foundation for our existence and well-being and connected to virtually every aspect of our lives.

FOLLOW THE LEADERS

There are leading news organizations that are at the front-end of prioritizing environmental coverage from both a quantity and quality standpoint. For example, environmental headlines at the *Daily Herald* in Washington (7.33%) are prioritized nearly six times more than the 1.2 percent average for nationally recognized news organizations. A range of other more prominent news organizations such as the *New York Times*, Time, NPR, Huffingtonpost.com and independent news organizations such as Commondreams.org, Grist.com, *Mother Jones*, *Yes! Magazine*, and others can be looked to as leaders in this area. It will be a good thing when, at some point in the near future, our future ranking analysis is able to point to an industry average where environment receives three times more coverage than entertainment instead of the other way around. Fortunately, there are news organizations that are already there and whose leadership in this area can be replicated.

News organizations are a vital part of the health and functioning of any society. At the Project for Improved Environmental Coverage, we recognize this verity and look forward to continuing to work with news outlets and other stakeholders to support and report on positive progress in this area.

RESOURCES

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS SERVICES

Bloomberg Environmental News: www.bloomberg.com/news/environment/

ClimateWire: www.eenews.net/cw

Earth Gauge: www.earthgauge.net/environment

Environment & Energy Daily: www.eenews.net/eed

Environment News Service (ENS): www.ens-newswire.com

Environmental Health News: www.environmentalhealthnews.org/

Environmental News Network (ENN): www.enn.com

Greenwire: www.eenews.net/gw

Inside EPA: www.insideepa.com

National Science Foundation Environmental News: www.nsf.gov/news/index.jsp?prio_area=6

NPR Environmental News: www.npr.org/sections/environment/

Reuters Environmental News: www.reuters.com/news/archive/environmentNews?date=today

Scientific American Environmental News: www.scientificamerican.com/earth-and-environment

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Columbia Journalism Review –The Observatory, www.cjr.org/the_observatory/

Knight Center For Environmental Journalism, ej.msu.edu

Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting, www.metcalfinstitute.org

National Environmental Education Foundation, www.neefusa.org

Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, www.journalism.org

Project for Improved Environmental Coverage, environmentalcoverage.org

Society of Environmental Journalists, www.sej.org

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, environment.yale.edu/climate/

ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE METHODOLOGY

This ranking report utilizes news outlet content analysis data provided by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (www.journalism.org) for forty-six news and related organizations for all of 2011 and January through May of 2012. The report also presents coverage ratios that compare the quantity of environmental news headlines to entertainment and crime headlines. It should be noted that the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) categorizes "sports" and "celebrities and entertainment" as two separate categories. However in our analysis and presentation of the data, we have combined these categories into one given that they are both entertainment-related. It should also be noted that, for clarity, we have segmented ranking data into nationally recognized news organizations (30) and local news organizations (13) and left out several outlets that don't fit the mold as a "news organization" in the traditional sense including Ed Shulz Radio, Sean Hannity Radio, and Rush Limbaugh. The methodology used by the Project for Excellence in Journalism to collect this data is summarized below, however, the full methodology published by Pew is available at: www.journalism.org/about_news_index/methodology.

Other than the primary topic of the story, the index created by PEJ does not address other issues such as tone, sourcing, or quality. For the purposes of this index, the PEJ has identified five sectors of "mainstream news": network TV news, newspapers, online news sites, cable news, and radio news. PEJ archived and reviewed news media from a sample of news outlets from each of the five sectors of mainstream news. Due to time constraints, PEJ does not review the entirety of every news source but instead codes and classifies the most prominent news stories (i.e. those in the first thirty minutes of a radio, cable or network news program, the top five headlines on a news website, or the first page of a newspaper). The PEJ acknowledges that this may skew the data toward the more serious stories, but they state that it should include the main stories from each news source each day. The news sources sampled by the Project for Excellence in Journalism are regularly updated based on a variety of factors including "audience ratings, sector reach, and assessments of [the project's] coding processes." The methodology used by PEJ was developed with assistance from a team of academic advisors.

Using the data collected by PEJ, the Project for Improved Environmental Coverage conducted an analysis of the quantity of environmental headlines for each sector of the mainstream news identified by PEJ and for each of the news outlets included in PEJ's sample. For the purposes of this report, the percentage of total news headlines that were classified as "environmental" were calculated, as well as the ratios of crime headlines to environmental headlines and sports/celebrity/entertainment to environmental headlines. As mentioned previously, PEJ counts sports as its own category and celebrity/entertainment as a separate category.

The data used for this report includes all data from PEJ for the 2011 calendar year as well as PEJ data for the first five months of 2012. Because only five months of 2012 were included in the dataset it would be inaccurate to compare that data to the full year of data obtained for 2011. To create a weighted average, the averages for environmental coverage and the crime-to-environmental headlines and the sports/celebrity/entertainment to environmental headlines ratios for each year were weighted by the percentage of the total seventeen-month timeframe they represent. Thus the averages and ratios from 2011 were given a weighting of 70.59 percent (equivalent to 12/17) and the averages and ratios for January through May 2012 were given a weighting of 29.41 percent (equivalent to 5/17). The weighting was used to create averages and ratios that were representative of the entire seventeen-month period which covered January 2011 through May 2012. It is these weighted averages and ratios that are presented and discussed in this report.