

The logo for the CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 Gold Winner. It features the text "CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019" in white on a black background, followed by "GOLD WINNER" in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple).

Category: Best Use of Media Relations

Company: University of East Anglia

Entry title: Global Carbon Budget

Brief and objectives:

The world is facing a climate emergency. In the words of climate activist Greta Thunberg in November 2018: “There are no emergency meetings, no headlines, no breaking news. No one is acting as if we were in a crisis.”

UEA Climate scientists lead a project that makes an annual prediction of global carbon (CO₂) emissions.

At this crucial time, CO₂ should be in decline. But in 2018, the research team predicted emissions would hit an all-time high, having grown by 2%.

Our brief was to ensure this news made headlines worldwide, and to increase the amount of coverage on last year’s campaign by 30%.

The idea, research and planning:

Each year global political leaders come together to discuss climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP).

In December 2018, this important conference took place in Katowice, Poland.

This was the ideal time to release the global CO₂ figures - to inform those with the power to make policy changes.

Each year, the data is published across three scientific journals, including Nature.

These journals dictate the embargo, which must be strictly adhered to. The publication of the data was set for December 5, 2018 - to coincide with the COP conference.

We planned to invite media to a press conference on the research at COP in Poland.

We also planned to issue a press release globally under a strict embargo. Prof Corinne Le Quere, who leads the research, would be our key spokesperson.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

While the Global Carbon Budget is led by UEA scientists, a global list of researchers from over 50 institutions contributed to the work. It was important to work collaboratively with stakeholders from countries including Norway, the US, Australia, France, Germany, China and India.

The wording of the PR was vital – to accurately convey the science for climate correspondents and a wider public.

To make this a global story, we needed to bring out news angles for different countries.

We also translated the PR for Chinese media. China is UEA target country for student recruitment.

Issuing the PR and associated documents under embargo was vital – giving correspondents enough time to understand the figures, read the scientific papers (shared via Dropbox) and interview key researchers.

It was crucial that media respected the embargo because embargo breaks can jeopardise the publication of research. To reduce the risk, untrustworthy journalists were excluded from our distribution lists, and we were on high alert for coverage during the embargo period.

A press conference was arranged for December 4, taking place under embargo at COP, Poland - featuring the key researchers, including UEA's Prof Le Quere.

To reduce our carbon footprint, all PR activity was handled remotely from the UK. To schedule interviews, we used a shareable document that could be updated with information about timings (including global time differences), location, method (eg by phone, skype, or in person), and the type of media (eg for TV, radio).

Delivery:

The press release and supporting materials were sent to 1195 journalists worldwide – across multiple time zones, and with embargo times for Poland, the UK, the US and China. Key environment correspondents were invited to the press conference in Poland, which was well attended.

A Chinese media outlet broke the embargo, which was hard to fix due to language barriers and time differences. But with help from Chinese-speaking colleagues, the break was dealt with swiftly to contain the story.

We also pitched Prof Le Quere for a prestigious slot on BBC Radio 4's Life Scientific.

Measurement and evaluation:

We used Vuelio media monitoring to track coverage achieved internationally (1151 items). To evaluate the campaign's performance we compared these figures with the previous year (513 items) with a particular focus on the prominence of news articles.

As well making headlines worldwide, we exceeded our 30% target coverage increase – with a whopping 124% increase.

We recorded media enquiries (40) and the number of interview requests received for Prof Le Quere (20).

We also tracked social media mentions and engagement.

Budget and campaign impact:

Budget:

This campaign was handled in-house by the UEA Communications office. Media Relations Manager Lisa Horton spent 10 days leading the campaign. Communications coordinator Beccy Eve spent three days dealing with incoming enquiries and communications assistant Lawrence Brown spent two days reporting media coverage.

There was no cost for the press conference venue or travel as the panellists were already attending COP.

The Chinese translation cost £236.55.

Media impact:

The campaign achieved 1,151 items of coverage – more than double the previous year's total (513 items). Top tier outlets to run the story included The Times, The Guardian, Daily Mail, BBC Online, USA Today, TIME Magazine, Washington Post, New York Post, Yahoo News, O Estado (Brazil), The Times of India, Le Monde, Figaro (France), Bangkok Post, Xinhua (China), FT Chinese, China Daily, Japan Times, Asahi Shimbun (Japan) and Arab News (Saudi Arabia).

The story made eight front pages, and was the main story on many media homepages, including the New York Times. Prof Le Quere also wrote an article for The Conversation.

Broadcast highlights included BBC News at 6, CNN, Sky News, The World Service, CBC World News, BBC Radio 4, ABC News, Deutsche Welle TV and National Public Radio.

Life Scientific:

Our pitch to the editor of Radio 4's prestigious Life Scientific led to an interview in London for Prof Le Quere, which was broadcast in March 2019.

Social Media:

We recorded 1.5k mentions on social media, with 56.8k engagements. Top social media posts came from The Guardian (3.3k Twitter shares, 11.1k Facebook shares), the BBC's Matt McGrath (784 Twitter shares, 18.6k Facebook), Doyle Rice at USA Today (194 Twitter shares, 2.9k Facebook) and Mark Tutton, CNN (440 Twitter shares, 2.7k Facebook).

Overall:

This important story raised the profile of climate and helped pave the way for movements such as Extinction Rebellion.