

# The Science of Scare Tactics

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Handout: [go.umd.edu/scare](http://go.umd.edu/scare)

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## Three things I hope we can agree on

- 1) Fear **changes** thought & behavior.
- 2) Thought and behavior can be **influenced**.
- 3) Science is a **good** thing.

[https://openclipart.org/image/240px/svg\\_to\\_png/19574/Scene-Expsbn.png](https://openclipart.org/image/240px/svg_to_png/19574/Scene-Expsbn.png) <https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/H23qDZpy8A/AAAAAAAAAAU/AAAAAAAAAY/6gH517AKPAc/jhdo.jpg>

## Psychological Outcomes

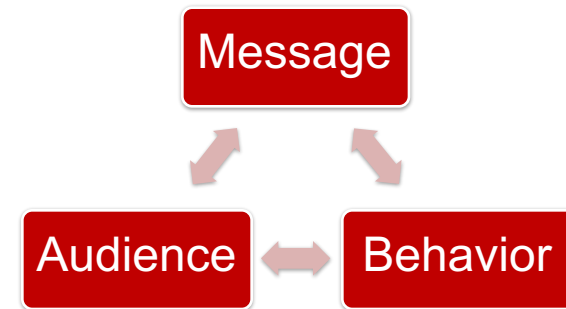


<http://1480-puk-eng/img/nc/omg/mgs48388/6204805-w68-A640/Seat-B41.jpg>

So... do fear appeals work?

“It depends...”

Conceptual Variables



Scary Science

Tannenbaum et al. (2015)  
*Psychological Bulletin*

meta-analysis of  
**127** experimental studies

participants across  
**27,372** experimental & control groups

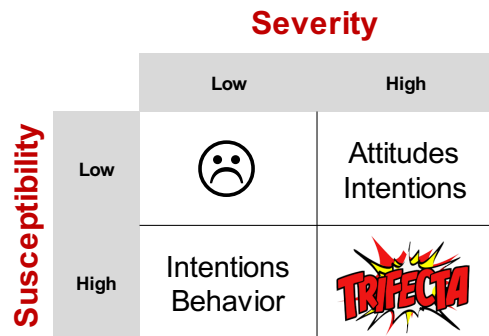
Tannenbaum, M.B., Hepler, J., Zimmerman, R.S., Saul, L., Jacobs, S., Wilson, K., & Albaracin, D. (2015). Appealing to fear: A meta-analysis of fear appeal effectiveness and theories. *Psychological Bulletin*, 141(6), 1178-1204. doi:10.1037/a0039729

Does Amount of Depicted Fear?

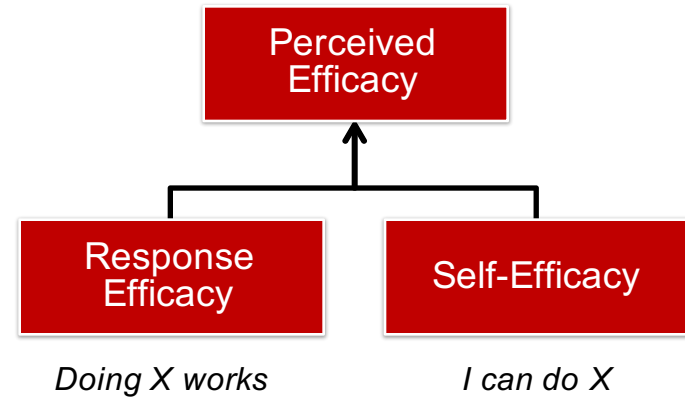
Yes, but afraid  
is roughly as  
effective as  
terrorized.



## How scared should you be?



## Efficacy Statements



## What might future campaigns do to...

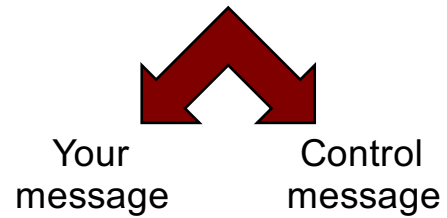
- ◇ Understand what its target fears more
- ◇ Show significant fear of severe outcome
- ◇ Focus heavily on susceptibility
- ◇ Reinforce response efficacy
- ◇ Bolster self-efficacy

## Evaluation Options

- ◇ **Collection methods**
  - Survey
  - Observation
  - Laboratory
- ◇ **Evaluation designs**
  - Pre- to post
  - Matched test vs. control
  - Randomized experiments

## Randomized Experiment

Will you drive in  
airplane mode?



The message does not  
**cause** a change until an  
experiment finds that it does.