# How to defuse climate and water disinformation guide

## About this resource

The climate [misinformation](#) and [disinformation machines](#) have been working overtime to distract from real-time impacts and harmful rollbacks. This is made worse as information deserts [grow](#), more [people turn to social media for their information](#), social sites abandon [fact-checking](#), and [right-wing media makers](#) gain influence.

Hot tip before diving in! Countering disinfo is important work, but we can't sacrifice our long-term narrative-building. We need to continue to name the stakes, connect to universal values, and inspire people in our vision for a healthy water and climate future for all. Hope and solutions are the antidote to despair.

In this guide, you'll learn how to spot false facts, get tools, and suggested interventions.

## Definitions

Mis- and disinformation steal attention away from real issues and sow seeds of doubt:

- **Misinformation**: The unintentional spread of incorrect information.
- **Disinformation**: Manufactured false information that exploits pre-existing fears or biases. These targeted messages are distributed for political power, profit, or to discredit opponents and often harm communities of color and marginalized groups.

## How to spot misinformation and disinformation

- Ragebait: Is the claim outrageous? Is it designed to divide?
- Outlet: Read other articles and pay attention to the language on the homepage. Does it seem legit?
- Headline: Does it read like clickbait or is it fact-driven?
- Author: Look into the person behind the article or social post. What's their track record?
- Check their sources: Notice what's cited in the content and if it's credible.

# What we can do about it

<u>Before a media moment</u>

- Educate people about real causes, solutions, and human stakes behind our issues.
- Operation Pre-bunk 🧑: Counter mis- and disinformation *before* it spreads. This helps people spot and disregard false facts. Here's how you do it:
    - Identify possible common misconceptions about programs and policies we know are in the crosshairs (disaster preparedness and relief funds, lead and PFAS laws, pollution prevention rules, environmental justice programs, etc.)
    - Dispel myths early: Use your platforms to share facts and connect these abstract ideas to people's lives.
    - Use simple messaging: Use accessible language and visuals when you can!
    - Repeat, repeat, repeat
    - Work with creators (aka "influencers") as trusted messengers to make your message irresistible and lower the barrier to entry.
- Shift your digital dollars: Instead of running ads on Meta where fact-checking has gone out the window and it's easy for comments to spin out of control, invest in creator partnerships.

<u>During a media moment</u>

Mis- and disinformation can spike around (un)natural disasters or when new funding programs are announced. It's not realistic to put out every fire, but we can take strategic action while not losing sight of our long-term goals.

- Don't re-share disinfo on social media from the source— even to debunk it! You'll feed the algorithm making the post go further. If you want to educate your audience, take a screenshot instead.
- If you respond to false claims, use the fact-fallacy-fact sandwich 🥪

    **Example:** Responding to a viral post that says, "We need desalination now! I'm tired of government conspiracies telling us to stop using our water when we can get free water from the ocean!"
    - ✅ Fact: "Desalinated water is expensive, and can drive up monthly bills for families and businesses."
    - ❌ Fallacy: "Water saving programs are a common sense solution, not a government conspiracy, and they are designed to prevent water waste, not normal household use."

- ○ ✅ Fact: "Making wise use of water helps keep costs down while ensuring there's enough for everyone. Desalination should be a last resort after we've stretched current supplies."
- Follow the receipts: Is this story being shared across multiple trusted outlets?
- Shelf life: Check the date. Disinfo can be an old news story or social post intentionally taken out of context. This can also look like misinformation when people unknowingly recirculate something that's dated.
- Fact check: Run the information by resources that verify or debunk claims like Snopes, Politifact, or Chequebot for Spanish-speaking audiences.
- Reverse image search: Use tools like Google Images to see if a video or photo has been used before or manipulated.
- Report it: Flag misleading content on social media. This is especially important as some platforms are deprioritizing this process internally.
- Read the comment section 👹: Don't be a petri dish for mis- and disinfo to spread 🦠 Rebut false claims on your page. This is not to blow off steam, but to serve people who read through later. If you can't respond, then delete comments or turn off the comment function.

After the media moment passes
- Find your center: Continue focusing on how our work speaks to people's values. Keep talking about climate preparedness and disaster prevention.
- Protect your energy: Don't lose steam from playing whack-a-mole with false facts 24/7.
- Spark radical imagination ✨: We need to make our issues infectious as we still do rapid response work. It's the only antidote to despair— seeding an affirmative vision for the future we're dreaming into reality.

## Resources: Who to follow, what to read
- CAAD best practices for disinformation monitoring
- Debunking Handbook
- Water Hub's Defusing Water and Climate Disinfo Roundtable recording
- Abbie Richards- TikToker and TikTok misinformation researcher
- Water Hub's Digital Detox Guide- when and how to engage with trolls
- Digital Drumbeat by DemCast Substack