

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND  
RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

UR STUDENT RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

APRIL 8, 1988

SPONSORED BY AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY STUDENT  
AFFILIATES

WARNING COMPLIANCE: BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS OF COST AND CONSENSUS. N. McKenna and Dr. Wogalter, Department of Psychology, University of Richmond.

Recent research on the behavioral effect of warnings has primarily examined within-warning or warning construction factors such as salience and type of statement. Recent social psychologist research indicates that a number of other factors affect persuasion and compliance, including the expertness of the source of influence, the number of arguments presented, consensus, and cost. However, little research has investigated these extra-warning factors with regard to warning compliance.

Two extra-warning factors are examined. One is whether warning compliance is affected by the amount of effort expended to perform the instructed behavior. The other factor examined concerns the issue of social modeling/consensus, specifically, whether the presence of another person who complies or does not comply with the warning affects the rate of compliance of another. Subjects performed a laboratory demonstration task and compliance was assessed by the use of safety equipment as directed by the warning.

The results show reduced compliance to a warning when the cost of compliance was high suggesting that warning instructions should not contain directions that require effortful behavior. In addition, the data show that the behavior of just one other person can increase or decrease the compliance of another person suggesting that having others model the appropriate behavior may facilitate compliance.