

Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication

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Communicating in a crisis is different

- In a serious crisis, all affected people . . .
 - Take in information differently
 - Process information differently
 - Act on information differently
- In a catastrophic event: communication is different
- Be first, be right, be credible

Yes, leaders communicate, and

- In a catastrophic event, your . . .
 - every word,
 - every eye twitch,
 - every passing emotion. . . resonates with heightened importance to the public

What the public seeks from your communication

5 public concerns. . .

1. Gain wanted facts
2. Empower decisionmaking
3. Involved as a participant, not spectator
4. Provide watchguard over resource allocation
5. Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication impacts

You need to . . .

1. Execute response and recovery efforts
2. Decrease illness, injury, and deaths
3. Avoid misallocation of limited resources
4. Reduce rumors surrounding recovery
5. Avoid wasting resources

Communication failures you should avoid

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
4. Public power struggles and confusion

5 communication steps that boost success

1. Execute a solid communication plan
2. Be the first source for information
3. Express empathy early
4. Show competence and expertise
5. Remain honest and open

Your Message Must Be....

Simple

Timely

Accurate

Relevant

Credible

Consistent



Psychology of a Crisis

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What Do People Feel When a Disaster Looms or Occurs?

Barriers:

1. Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
2. Hopelessness or helplessness
3. Seldom panic
4. Fight or flight

Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Uncertainty is greatest concern for most
- Reduce anxiety-Give people things to do
- Public seeks restored self-control
- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization

Decision-making in a Crisis Is Different

- People simplify
- Cling to current beliefs
- We remember what we see or previously experience (first messages carry more weight)
- People limit intake of new information (3-7 bits)

How Do We Communicate About Risk in an Emergency?

All risks are not accepted equally

- Voluntary vs. involuntary
- Controlled personally vs. controlled by others
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Natural vs. manmade
- Reversible vs. permanent
- Statistical vs. anecdotal
- Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Affecting adults vs. affecting children

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Don't over-reassure

- Considered controversial by some.
- A high estimate of harm modified downward is much more acceptable to the public than a low estimate of harm modified upward.

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

When the news is good, state continued concern before stating reassuring updates

“Although we’re not out of the woods yet, we have seen a declining number of cases each day this week.”

“Although the fires could still be a threat, we have them 85% contained.”

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Under promise and over deliver . . .

Instead of making promises about outcomes, express the uncertainty of the situation and a confident belief in the “process” to fix the problem and address public safety concerns.

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Allow people the right to feel fear

- Don't pretend they're not afraid, and don't tell them they shouldn't be.
- Acknowledge the fear, and give contextual information.

Messages and Audiences

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What the Public Will Ask First

- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Don't overreassure
- Acknowledge that there is a process in place
- Express wishes
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

Stakeholder/ Partner Communication

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Stakeholder/Partner Communication

- **Stakeholders** have a special connection to you and your involvement in the emergency.
- They are interested in how the incident will impact them.
- **Partners** have a working relationship to you and collaborate in an official capacity on the emergency issue or other issues.
- They are interested in fulfilling their role in the incident and staying informed.

5 Mistakes With Stakeholders

- Inadequate access
- Lack of clarity
- No energy for response
- Too little, too late
- Perception of arrogance

Stakeholders can be . . .

- Advocate—maintain loyalty
- Adversary—discourage negative action
- Ambivalent—keep neutral or move to advocate

Community Relations! Why?

- Community acceptance through community involvement (door-to-door)
- Involving stakeholders is a way to advance trust through transparency
- Our communities, our social capital, are a critical element of our nation's security

Dealing With Angry People

Anger arises when people. . .

- Have been hurt
- Feel threatened by risks out of their control
- Are not respected
- Have their fundamental beliefs challenged

Don't lecture at the Public Work Shops

- Easy but not effective
- Doesn't change thoughts/behaviors
- Key: don't give a solution, rather help audience discover solution by asking questions

High-Outrage Public Work Shops

“Do’s”

- Limit introductory remarks to 5 minutes
- Ask questions. If they’re talking they’re involved
- The best way to deal with criticism and outrage by an audience is to acknowledge that it exists (Never say, “I know how you feel” say “I know you need to talk about this and I’m here to listen”)

High-Outrage Public Work Shops

“Don’ts”

- Verbal abuse! Don’t blow your stack
 - Try to bring along a neutral third party who can step in and diffuse the situation
- Don’t look for one answer that fits all
- Don’t promise what you can’t deliver

4 Questions to help people persuade themselves

1. Start with broad open-ended historical questions
2. Ask questions about wants and needs
3. Ask about specifics being faced now
4. Ask in a way to encourage a statement of benefits