Crisis and 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
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

- **Precrisis**
  - Prepare
  - Foster alliances
  - Develop consensus recommendations
  - Test message
  - Evaluate plans

- **Initial**
  - Express empathy
  - Provide simple risk explanations
  - Establish credibility
  - Recommend actions
  - Commit to stakeholders

- **Maintenance**
  - Further explain risk by population groups
  - Provide more background
  - Gain support for response
  - Empower risk/benefit decisionmaking
  - Capture feedback for analysis

- **Resolution**
  - Educate a primed public for future crises
  - Examine problems
  - Gain support for policy and resources
  - Promote your organization’s role

- **Evaluation**
  - Capture lessons learned
  - Develop an event SWOT
  - Improve plan
  - Return to precrisis planning
The STARCC Principle

Your public messages in a crisis must be:

- **S**imple
- **T**imely
- **A**ccurate
- **R**elevant
- **C**redible
- **C**onsistent
By Leaders for Leaders

- Governor Frank Keating—Oklahoma City bombing
- CDC Director, Dr. Julie Gerberding—SARS
- Dr. Ivan Walks & John Agwunobi—Anthrax
- Montgomery County’s Douglas Duncan—sniper shooting
- Mayor Patricia Owens—Grand Forks flood/ fire
- Mayor Rudolph Giuliani—World Trade Center
- Fire Chief Jeff Bowman—San Diego forest fires
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

5 organizational concerns -- 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
5 communication failures that kill operational success

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
5. Public power struggles and confusion
5 communication steps that boost operational 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
Psychology of a Crisis
What Do People Feel Inside When a Disaster Looms or Occurs?

Psychological barriers:

1. Denial
2. Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
3. Hopelessness or helplessness
4. Seldom panic
Individuals at risk—the cost?

- Demands for unneeded treatment
- Dependence on special relationships (bribery)
- MUPS—Multiple Unexplained Physical Symptoms
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Stigmatization
Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Mental preparation reduces anxiety
- Taking action reduces anxiety
- Uncertainty must be addressed
Decisionmaking 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
Be Careful With Risk Comparisons

- Are they similarly accepted based on
  - high/low hazard (scientific/technical measure)
  - high/low outrage (emotional measure)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. High hazard</th>
<th>B. High outrage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Low hazard</td>
<td>D. Low outrage</td>
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Risk Acceptance Examples

- Dying by falling coconut or dying by shark
  - Natural vs. manmade
  - Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
  - Familiar vs. exotic
  - Controlled by self vs. outside control of self
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
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.”
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.
Six Principles of CERC

- **Be First:** If the information is yours to provide by organizational authority—do so as soon as possible. If you can’t—then explain how you are working to get it.

- **Be Right:** Give facts in increments. Tell people what you know when you know it, tell them what you don’t know, and tell them *if* you will know relevant information later.

- **Be Credible:** Tell the truth. Do not withhold to avoid embarrassment or the possible “panic” that seldom happens. Uncertainty is worse than not knowing—rumors are more damaging than hard truths.
Six Principles of CERC

- **Express Empathy:** Acknowledge in words what people are feeling—it builds trust.
- **Promote Action:** Give people things to do. It calms anxiety and helps restore order.
- **Show Respect:** Treat people the way you want to be treated—the way you want your loved ones treated—always—even when hard decisions must be communicated.
Messages and Audiences
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?
What the Media Will Ask First

- What happened?
- Who is in charge?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning?
Judging the Message

- Speed counts – marker for preparedness
- Facts – consistency is vital
- Trusted source – can’t fake these
# Match Audiences and Concerns

## Audiences
- Victims and their families
- Politicians
- First responders
- Trade and industry
- Community far outside disaster
- Media

## Concerns
- Opportunity to express concern
- Personal safety
- Resources for response
- Loss of revenue/liability
- Speed of information flow
- Anticipatory guidance
- Family’s safety
Where audiences seek information

- Urban—TV, radio, emergency response system
- Rural—Local health, responder and civil authorities
- Emphasis on local media
- Internet for detailed searching and social media
- Value multiple sources to enhance confidence in knowledge
Perceptions of government

- Wide range from distrust to confidence
- Government withholds information
- Importance of local health and elected authorities
- Government should operate with complete openness and disclosure
Emergency Information

- Any information is empowering
- Benefit from substantive action steps
- Plain English
- Illustrations and color
- Source identification
Accuracy of Information

Speed of Release

CREDIBILITY

Empathy + Openness

TRUST

Successful Communication = +
Initial Message

Must

- Be short
- Be relevant
- Give positive action steps
- Be repeated
Initial Message

Must Not

- Use jargon
- Be judgmental
- Make promises that can’t be kept
- Include humor
Writing for the Media During a Crisis

- The pressure will be tremendous from all quarters.
- It must be fast and accurate.
- It’s like cooking a turkey when people are starving.
- If information isn’t finalized, explain the process.
Spokesperson
Role of a Spokesperson in an Emergency

- Take your organization from an “it” to a “we”
- Build trust and credibility for the organization
- Remove the psychological barriers within the audience
- Gain support for the public health response
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right
Pitfalls for Spokespersons

- Use of jargon
- Humor
- Repeating the negative
- Expressing personal opinions
- Showing off your vocabulary
Spokesperson

- How to be an effective and trusted spokesperson in 5 minutes of less
Great Spokesperson Step 1

- It’s more than “acting natural.” Every organization has an identity. Try to embody that identity.
- Example: CDC has a history of going into harm’s way to help people. We humbly go where we are asked. We value our partners and won’t steal the show. Therefore, a spokesperson would express a desire to help, show courage, and express the value of partners. “Committed but not showy.”
Great Spokesperson Step 2

- Know your audience
- Your audience is NOT the reporter interviewing you
Two press conference killers

- Have “hangers on” from your organization circling the room
- Being visible to the media/public while waiting to begin the press conference
Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Consider the “what if” questions.
Spokesperson Recommendations

- Stay within the scope of your responsibility
- Tell the truth
- Follow up on issues
- Expect criticism
Spokesperson and the Media

- Their job is not your job.
- Communicate with a purpose.
- Media are less critical in an initial crisis response.
Your Interview Rights

- Know who will do the interview
- Know and limit the interview to agreed subjects
- Set limits on time and format
- Ask who else will be or has been interviewed
You Do Not Have the Right To:

- Embarrass or argue with a reporter
- Tell the news organization which reporter you prefer
- Demand that your remarks not be edited
- Insist that an adversary not be interviewed
- Lie or cloud the truth
- Demand that an answer you’ve given not be used
- State what you are about to say is “off the record” or not attributable to you
Media Availability or Press Conferences “In Person” Tips

- Determine in advance who will answer questions about specific subject matters
- Keep answers short and focused—nothing longer than 2 minutes
- Assume that every mike is “alive” the entire time
Television Interview Tips

- Do not make broad unnatural gestures or move around in your chair. Ask for a chair that does not swivel.
- Practice, practice, practice. Reply in 10- to 20-second phrases. With longer answers, pause every 20 seconds. Practice stopping the minute directed or suffer a hard break.
- Slow down. This will make the spokesperson appear in control.
Television Interview Tips

- Drive out monotone. The more practice, the less fear and the greater the prospect that animation will reappear in the voice.
- Don’t look at yourself on the TV monitor.
- Look at the reporter, not the camera, unless directed otherwise.
- Do an earphone check. Ask what to do if it pops out of your ear.
What To Wear on Television

Men

- Avoid patterned suits, stripes, and checks.
- Button double-breasted suits; unbutton single-breasted suits. Sit on your coattails.
- White or light blue shirts are the most conservative, serious shirts.
- Neckties should be somber. Do not “advertise” a product or point of view on your tie—you know what they are.
What To Wear on Television

Men

- **Urgent:** Wear knee-length socks darker than your suit. You lose credibility with a “skin shot” of your legs when your pant legs creep up.
- Be clean shaven.
What To Wear on Television

Women

- Tailored clothes work best.
- **Urgent:** Short skirts kill credibility as quickly as short socks on men.
- Neutral colors and less pattern work best.
- Wear dark shoes.
- Avoid jangles.
- Wear regular makeup. For women who never wear makeup, consider color on the lips.
What To Wear on Television

Men and Women

- Neat, trimmed hair is best.
- If your skin is shiny under the lights, ask for powder. Men, don’t forget powder for the top of your head.
- If you can take off the glasses without squinting, take them off. Consider nonglare glasses if you must wear them.
Effective Nonverbal Communication

- Do maintain eye contact
- Do maintain an open posture
- Do not retreat behind physical barriers such as podiums or tables
- Do not frown or show anger or disbelief through facial expression
- Do not dress in a way that emphasizes the differences between you and your audience
Social Media: Crisis Role
Sources of Social Pressure

- What will I gain?
- What will it cost me?
- What do those important to me want me to do?
- Can I actually carry it out?
CDC: Why social media in a crisis

- Need to be where people are
- Leverage unique characteristics of emerging channels
- Tailored health messages
- Facilitates interactive communication and community
- Empowers people in making health decisions
CDC Audiences Use Social Media

- Those who use social media on CDC.gov:
  - Have higher satisfaction ratings (84 out of 100) than those who do not use CDC social media tools (79 out of 100)
  - Are more likely to return and recommend the site to others than those who do not use CDC social media tools
  - Rate CDC as more trustworthy than those who do not use CDC’s social media tools
Trust, transparency & participation in government

- Pilot to measure TTP in government
- CDC scored higher than other Fed agencies/benchmark
- Largest difference for collaboration online

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<td>Trust</td>
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<td>81</td>
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www.cdc.gov/socialmedia
Stakeholder/Partner Communication
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.
Stakeholders can be . . .

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

- What will I gain?
- What will it cost me?
- What do those important to me want me to do?
- Can I actually carry it out?
Trust and Mistrust

- Stakeholders judge the response to an issue or crisis based on trust
- Trust is the natural consequence of promises fulfilled
- Mistrust is an outgrowth of the perception that promises were broken and values violated
- CDC fulfills trust by combining our best science with strong ethics and values
Consequences of mistrust

- Health recommendations ignored and disease and death go up
- Demands for misallocation of resources
- Public health policies circumvented
- Opportunists prey on others in the “trust gap”
- Fiscal and medical resources are wasted

We can’t accomplish our mission
Causes of conflict: perception by either party of

- Superiority
- Injustice
- Distrust
- Vulnerability
- Helplessness
Egregious Mistakes

- Deny the problem exists
- Shoot the messenger
- Respond with silence
- Respond with evasion/half truths
- Selectively tell the story
- Overtell the story
- Take an “I” perspective
- Point fingers
Why do people come to the town hall?

Then why do we conduct meetings the way we do?
Convening a Citizen’s Forum

- Acknowledge concerns
- Encourage fact-finding
- Share power
- Act trustworthy
- Offer contingent commitments
Empower Group
Decisionmaking

- Identify alternatives
- Analyze alternatives
- Present all scientific information
- Choose “want” versus “must” criteria
- Reach a clear, justifiable decision
Don’t lecture at the Townhall

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

Sometimes, anger arises when . . .

- Media arrive
- Damages may be in play
High-Outrage Public Meetings

“Do’s”

- The best way to deal with criticism and outrage by an audience is to acknowledge that it exists. (Don’t say, “I know how you feel.”)
- Practice active listening and try to avoid interrupting.
- State the problem and then the recommendation.
High-Outrage Public Meetings

“Don’ts”

- Don’t take personal abuse. You represent your agency and you are not alone. Bring along a neutral third party who can step in and diffuse the situation.
- Don’t look for one answer that fits all and don’t promise what you can’t deliver.
Acting Trustworthy

- Share information early
- Acknowledge the concerns of others
- Under-promise and over-deliver
- Select a spokesperson who is never condescending
- Use third-party validators/advocates
Working With the Media
Disasters Are Media Events

- We need the media to be there.
- Give important protective actions for the public.
- Know how to reach their audiences and what their audiences need.
Response Officials Should

- Understand that their job is not the media’s job
- Know that they can’t dismiss media when they’re inconvenient
- Accept that the media will be involved in the response, and plan accordingly
Response Officials Should

- Attempt to provide all media equal access
- Use technology to fairly distribute information
- Plan to precredential media for access to EOC/JOC or JIC
- Think consistent messages
Response Officials Should Not

- Hold grudges
- Discount local media
- Tell the media what to do
How To Work With Reporters

- Reporters want a front seat to the action and all information NOW.
- Preparation will save relationships.
- If you don’t have the facts, tell them the process.
- Reality Check: 70,000 media outlets in U.S. Media cover the news 24/7.
Media, Too, Are Affected by Crises

- Verification
- Adversarial role
- National dominance
- Lack of scientific expertise
Command Post

- Media will expect a command post. Official channels that work well will discourage reliance on nonofficial channels.
- Be media-friendly at the command post—prepare for them to be on site.
Media Errors—Now What?

“Declaring war on the press, tempting as it may sound, is a game you can’t win.”

—Stratford Sherman, in *Fortune* magazine
Analyze the Situation

- What is your relationship with this reporter and the media?
- Did the piece report both sides?
- Was it inaccurate or simply the facts with a negative slant?
Know What To Ask For

- Decide on your ideal as well as your minimal solution.
- Retraction or correction?
- Another piece that offers your perspective?
- An apology?
- Correction for permanent record?
- Letter to editor printed?
Know Whom To Contact

- Don’t go to the top first. Contact the reporter.
- If you have doubts about the integrity of the outlet, consider an alternate media outlet.
- Reach the public through channels other than the media.
Know What You Want To Communicate

- “Speak with one voice.”
- Frame the message in a positive way.
- It may include a call to action.
- Focus on your audience.
- Include no anger in the message.
Stakeholder Preplanning

- Do an assessment
- Identify stakeholders
- Query stakeholders
- Prioritize by relationship to incident
- Determine level of “touch”
Responding to Stakeholders

- Standby statement
- Reaction action plan
- Web page for partners
- Conference call
- Meet face-to-face
- Commit to a schedule of updates
Gaining Acceptance

- Accumulate “yeses”
- Don’t say “but”—say “yes, and”