

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Satellite Conference
Part 1 of 6
November 5, 2002
1:00-3:00 p.m., Central Time

Produced by
Video Communications
Alabama Department of Public Health



Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

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Purpose

- Emergency risk communication can help people cope, make risk/benefit decisions, and begin to return their lives to normal.
- Attempt to provide the public with information to make the best possible decisions within nearly impossible time constraints and to accept the imperfect nature of choice.

Learning Objectives

- Explain the psychology of a crisis and its impact
- Provide you with core planning tools to prepare for and respond to the communication challenges that occur in times of crisis

CERC Course Design

- Duplicatable
- Interactive and fast paced – easy exercises for small or large groups
- Individualized– 12 “stand alone” mix and match modules
- Scenarios – “Smallpox”, “Influenza-like illness”, “Sarin gas”, and “Dirty bomb”
- Crisis tools, templates, checklists
- Course topics explored within the context of crisis, emergencies, disasters

CERC Book Modules

- Introduction to Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication
- Psychology of a Crisis
- Crisis Communication Plan
- Spokesperson
- Working with the Media
- Stakeholder/Partner Communication
- Other Communication Channels

CERC Book Modules

- Terrorism and Bioterrorism Communication Challenges
- Human Resources for Crisis Communication
- Understanding the Roles of Federal, State and Local Health Partners
- Media and Public Health Law

CERC Audience

- New communicators – introductory basics
- Seasoned communicators – cutting-edge principles with new tools and resources
- Strong public health and local slant for key participants
- General principles and tools valuable to other emergency response officials: hospital/medical environments, non-government organizations, civic leaders, first response officials (a tool to share)

Conceptual Overview

There is:

- Crisis communication
- Issue(s) management communication
- Risk communication
- Crisis and emergency risk communication

Each has its own pressures. You must be familiar and prepared to deal with all of them.

Crisis Communication

Communicator: Participant

Time pressure: Urgent and unexpected

Message purpose: Explain and persuade

Issue(s) Management Communication

Communicator: Participant

Time pressure: Anticipated

Message purpose: Explain and persuade

Risk Communication

Communicator: Nonparticipant, neutral about outcome

Time pressure: Anticipated, no time pressure

Message purpose: Empower decisionmaking

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Communicator: After-event participant, invested in outcome

Time pressure: Urgent and unexpected

Message purpose: Explain, persuade, and empower decisionmaking

Crisis Communication Lifecycle



- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|
| • Prepare | • Express empathy | • Further explain risk by population groups | • Educate a primed public for future crises | • Capture lessons learned |
| • Foster alliances | • Provide simple risk explanations | • Establish credibility | • Examine problems | • Develop an event SWOT |
| • Develop consensus recommendations | • Establish credibility | • Gain support for response | • Gain support for policy and resources | • Improve plan |
| • Test message | • Recommend actions | • Empower risk/benefit decision-making | • Promote your organization's role | • Return to precrisis planning |
| • Evaluate plans | • Commit to stakeholders | • Capture feedback for analysis | | |

Precrisis Phase

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

Initial Phase

- 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 "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 Risk of Disasters Is Increasing

- Increased terrorism
- Population density
- Aging U.S. population
- International travel speed
- Emerging diseases

Emergency Risk Communication Is a Valid Tool

- Not mass mental therapy
- Mature approach to the selection of message, messenger, and method of delivery



Psychology of a Crisis

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Module Summary

- Role of crisis and emergency risk communication
- Common negative feelings and behaviors for people during a crisis
- How communication differs in a crisis
- Risk communication principles for emergencies

Role of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Customer Focus

- Gain wanted facts
- Empower decisionmaking
- Involve as a participant, not spectator
- Take feedback to responders
- Provide watchguard resource allocation
- Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

Role of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Organizational Focus

- Execute response and recovery efforts
- Gain support for crisis management plans
- Avoid misallocation of limited resources
- Ensure that decision-makers are well-informed
- Reduce rumors
- Decrease illness, injury, and deaths
- Avoid wasting resources

Contributors to a Poor Public Response to Recovery Plans

- Mixed messages from multiple experts
- Information released late
- Paternalistic attitudes
- No reality check on recommendations
- Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
- Public power struggles and confusion

Formula To Meet Customer and Organization Goals

- Executed solid communication plan
- Be the first source for information
- Express empathy early
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open
- Remain dedicated to customer long term
- Apply emergency risk communication principles

Psychology of a Crisis

Common human emotions—left without mitigating response—may lead to negative behaviors that hamper recovery or cause more harm.

What Do People Feel Inside When a Disaster Looms or Occurs?

Psychological barriers:

- Denial
- Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Seldom panic
- Vicarious rehearsal

What Is Vicarious Rehearsal?

- The communication age gives national audiences the experience of local crises.
- These “armchair victims” mentally rehearse recommended courses of actions.
- Recommendations are easier to reject the farther removed the audience is from real threat.

Negative Behaviors

- Demands for unneeded treatment
- Reliance on special relationships
- MUPS—Multiple Unexplained Physical Symptoms
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Unreasonable trade and travel restrictions

Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Mental preparation (action steps) reduce anxiety
- Revert to rudimentary “fight or flight” reasoning
- Limited intake of new information (3-7 bits)

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)

So How Do We Initially Communicate in a Crisis?

Simply
Timely
Accurately
Repeatedly
Credibly
Consistently

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)

A. High hazard	B. High outrage
C. Low hazard	D. Low outrage

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

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Don't overassure

- 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

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."

Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

Confidence vs. Uncertainty

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

Give people things to do - Anxiety is reduced by action and a restored sense of control

- Symbolic behaviors
- Preparatory behaviors
- Contingent "if, then" behaviors
- 3-part action plan
 - Must do X
 - Should do Y
 - Can do Z

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.

Psychology of a Crisis: Summary

- No “business as usual” in a crisis
- Psychological barriers must be overcome
- Risk communication provides context to overcome barriers
- Strong emotions affect decisionmaking in a crisis
- Prepare for death, dying, and grief

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Satellite Conference Series

November 19, 2002

November 26, 2002

December 3, 2002

December 10, 2002

December 17, 2002

1:00-3:00 p.m., Central Time