Module Summary

- How response officials should and should not deal with the media
- Ways in which the media are affected by crises
- Pros and cons of different tools you can use to reach the media (e.g., press conferences)
- Writing for the media during a crisis

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

Diminished Information Verification

- Initially, expect errors. “If you have expertise in an area, you will find errors.”
- 73% of adults have become more skeptical about news accuracy.

Media and Crisis Coverage

- A Fox poll found 56% believed news outlets “over-hyped” anthrax.
- 77% said that the coverage frightened them.
- 92% were saddened.
- 42% were tired out.

Media and Crisis Coverage

- Evidence strongly suggests that coverage is more factual when reporters have more information. They become more interpretative when they have less information.
- What should we conclude?
**Adversarial Role**
- Diminished adversarial role in the initial phase of a crisis.
- Media have genuine concern.

**National Dominance**
- Expect the national media to dominate in major crises.
- That means messages meant for local audiences may have to compete with national coverage.
- Plan ahead.

**Inadequate Scientific Expertise**
- Inadequate scientific expertise can be a problem.
- Prepare to “fill in the blanks.”

**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.

**Tools To Reach the Public Through the Media**
- Press conferences
- Satellite media tours
- Telephone news conferences
- E-mail listservs and broadcast fax
- Web sites/video streaming
- Response to media calls

**Press Conferences**
- **Plus:** Consistent messages; save time
- **Minus:** Media may not be able to attend; pack mentality
Satellite Media Tours

- **Plus:** Give local slant to interviews from national level
- **Minus:** Expensive

Telephone News Conferences

- **Plus:** Reach far more media than press conference; great flexibility
- **Minus:** No interesting visuals for TV/Web

E-mail Listservs and Broadcast Fax

- **Plus:** Great for updates that don’t need explanation
- **Minus:** Difficult to keep addresses up-to-date

Web Sites/Video Streaming

- **Plus:** Transparent to public and media at same time
- **Minus:** Require a Webmaster

Response to Media Calls

- **Plus:** Media can give you information too
- **Minus:** Time-consuming

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.
Emergency Press Releases

- One page with attached factsheet (can clear quicker)
- Think of them as press updates, and prime media when to expect them
- Should answer 5Ws and H for the time it covers

Reality check: Requires concessions to your journalistic tastes—so pick your battles
Keep your eye on the prize—fast, accurate releases to the media and public

Press Statements Are Not Press Releases

- They are the official position.
- May be used to counter a contrary view.
- Not used for peer-review debate.
- Offer encouragement to the public and responders.

They carry the facts and history.

Video News Releases and B-roll

- Get your message on tape.
- B-roll is easier than VNRs to produce.
- Don’t raise subjects in b-roll that you do not want to promote during an emergency.

Successful Emergency Press Conferences

- Where to hold it?
- Who to invite?
- How and when to invite the media?
- Handouts?
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.

Working with the Media: Summary

- Media will behave differently in a crisis
- Respect the role of media, and plan to meet their needs
- Media tools are more or less effective at different phases of a crisis
- Conserve your director’s media time for critical points in the crisis response
- Know what you want when you give media feedback about their coverage
Spokesperson

Module Summary
- The role of spokespersons in emergencies
- Necessary spokesperson qualities
- Dealing with high outrage public meetings
- How to hold successful media interviews (press conferences, telephone, radio and TV)

Spokesperson Qualities
- What makes a good spokesperson?
- What doesn’t make a good spokesperson?

Spokespersons
- They give your organization its human form.
- Effective spokespersons connect with their audience.
- Effective spokespersons are made; few are born.
- The spokesperson doesn’t just read a statement; he or she is the statement.

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

Spokesperson Qualities
- Be your organization; then be yourself.
- What’s your organization’s identity?
Spokesperson Qualities

- 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.”

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

These are not the “facts” to be released; these are the tenets by which the spokesperson manifests his or her organization—what we stand for, not just what we know.

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

Spokesperson Recommendations

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

Pitfalls for Spokespersons

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

**“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.

### 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

### Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Don’t repeat reporters’ inflammatory or emotionally laden words.
- If the question contains leading or loaded language, reframe the question.
- Don’t assume the reporter has it right. State, “I have to verify that before I respond.”
- If a reporter leaves a microphone in your face after you’ve answered the question, STOP.
Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- There is no such thing as “off the record.”
- Anticipate questions. Put the answer on paper and then find the bottom line in that question.
- Make your point first. Have prepared message points.
- Don’t fake it. If you don’t know the answer, say so.

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Never speak disparagingly of anyone, not even in jest. Don’t assign blame or “pass the buck.”
- Don’t buy-in to hypothetical questions that are near the nonsensical. Reframe the question in a way that addresses legitimate concerns.

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Break down multiple-part questions
- Don’t raise issues that you do not want to see in print or on the news
- Don’t say “no comment” to a reporter’s question

Assessing Your Communication Skills

Negatives that interfere with communication

- Fear: Fear of being judged, fear of appearing stupid
- Assumptions: A study of the 500 most common English words produced an average of 28 dictionary definitions per word.

Choose To Listen

3 barriers to effective listening:
1. Stress. When our minds may be going in a million different directions, it’s hard to give full attention.
2. “Me syndrome.” The person doesn’t seem to care about others.
3. Brain speed. The speech rate for many people is about 200 words per minute.

Counters to Electronic Media Interview Techniques

- Reporters are not adversaries. They are also not your friends. Some reporters will use well-known techniques to attempt to get a reaction from you.


**Sensational or Unrelated Questions**

“Bridges” back to what you want to say:
- “What I think you are really asking is . . .”
- “The overall issue is . . .”
- “What’s important to remember is . . .”
- “It’s our policy to not discuss [topic], but what I can tell you . . .”

**Watch Out For . . .**

- **Machine gun questioning.** Reporter fires rapid questions at you. You respond, “Please let me answer this question.”
- **Feeding the mike and the pause.** Seldom will dead air make scintillating viewing, unless you’re reacting nonverbally. Relax.
- **Hot mike.** It’s always on—always—including during “testing.”

**Watch Out For . . .**

- **Reporter asks a sensational question and gives you an A or B dilemma.** Use positive words, correct the inaccuracies without repeating the negative, and reject A or B if neither is valid. Explain, “There’s actually another alternative you may not have considered,” and give your message point.

**Watch Out For . . .**

- **Surprise prop.** The reporter attempts to hand you a report or supposedly contaminated item. If you take it, you own it. React by saying, “I’m familiar with that report and what I can say is” or “I’m not familiar with the report, but what is important” and then go to key message.

**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

**Telephone Interview Tips**

- Know who is on the other end of the line
- Ask if you are being recorded
- Ask when and where the information will be used
- Spell out difficult names/technical terms/phrases
- Limit the time available for the interview up front
- Be certain to ask for feedback from reporters to ensure they are understanding your points
Radio Interview Tips

- A live interview is very different than a taped interview.
- Watch out for "Uh," "Um," and "You know."
- Radio will not be as in-depth as print.
- Be careful NOT to repeat the negatives in a reporter’s question.

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.

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

Spokesperson: Summary
- Spokesperson’s role in emergency is vital to success of crisis response
- Spokesperson must be trained and must practice
- Be your organization, then be yourself
- Use emergency risk communication principles
- Leaders model good behavior and empathize with the community
- Never “off the record”