

# **Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication**

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# 3 KEY MESSAGES...

- TEAMWORK
- PROACTIVITY
- PREPARATION
  - Preparation
  - Preparation
  - Preparation

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**Why Crisis  
Emergency Risk  
Communication is  
Different**

# 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. . .

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

# Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication impacts

5 organizational concerns -- you need to. . .

- Execute response and recovery efforts
- Decrease illness, injury, and deaths
- Avoid misallocation of limited resources
- Reduce rumors surrounding recovery
- Avoid wasting resources

# 5 communication failures that kill operational success

- Mixed messages from multiple experts
- Information released late
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
- Public power struggles and confusion



# 5 communication steps that boost operational success

- Execute a solid communication plan
- Be the first source for information
- Express empathy early
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open

# The STARCC Principle

Your public messages in a crisis must be:

Simple

Timely

Accurate

Relevant

Credible

Consistent

# Psychology of a Crisis

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

## Psychological barriers:

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

# 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

# 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)

# **Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies**

# Risk Communication Principles for Emergencies

## Don't overreassure

- 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

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

**Accuracy of  
Information**

**Speed of  
Release**

**CREDIBILITY**

**Empathy  
+  
Openness**

**TRUST**

**+**

**=**

**Successful  
Communication**