



# RISK COMMUNICATION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF

Massachusetts Region 2 HMCC

Worcester, MA

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# PRESENTATION AGENDA

- Introduction
- Goals of Risk Communication
- 7 Rules of Risk Communication
- Obstacles of Risk Communication
- PIO stuff



# WHAT IS RISK COMMUNICATION?

- “A science-based approach for communicating effectively in high concern, low trust, sensitive, or controversial situations.”
  - Sensitive Situations
    - Emotions, blame, shame, etc...
  - Controversial Situations
    - Legal, moral, ethical issues

## 3 GOALS OF RISK COMMUNICATION

- Increase the public's knowledge and understanding
  - Government and industry communicators have a responsibility to ensure the public understands what risks exist, so they can make an informed decision. This involves careful crafting of messages.
- Enhance the speaker's trust and credibility
  - Establishing and enhancing the communicator's trust and credibility is the foundation of any risk communication effort.
- Resolve conflict
  - Resolve conflict by being forthright, open, and honest and by promoting constructive dialogue with all stakeholders.

# 7 RULES OF RISK COMMUNICATION

- 1. Accept and involve the public as a legitimate partner
- 2. Listen to the audience
- 3. Be honest, frank and open
- 4. Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources
- 5. Meet the needs of the media
- 6. Speak clearly and with compassion
- 7. Plan carefully and evaluate performance

# OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE RISK COMMUNICATION

- Lack of solid data
- Distrust
  - Sources include disagreements among experts, lack of coordination and inadequate training for spokespersons
- Selective reporting from the news media
  - Media reports on stories that play to the same outrage or dread factors that the public uses to assess risk.
- Psychological – Social factors
  - Biased judgement, Apathy, Unrealistic optimism, unfamiliar information, scientific uncertainty, strong beliefs, outrage factors

# OVERCOMING OUTRAGE FACTORS

- “ People don’t care what you know until they know that you care” (Will Rogers)
- Instant credibility evaluation
  - Empathy 50%
  - Dedication 20%
  - Honesty 20%
  - Expertise 10%

# 10 STEPS FOR COMMUNICATING TRUST

- 1. Don't over-reassure
- 2. Err on the alarming side
- 3. Acknowledge uncertainty
- 4. Don't aim for zero fear
- 5. Don't ridicule the public's emotions
- 6. Establish your own humanity
- 7. Acknowledge errors
- 8. Apologize early and often
- 9. Be careful with risk comparisons
- 10. Don't lie or tell half-truths



# TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING COMPETENCE

- Stress your credentials up front
  - Tell people why they should listen to you
- Establish third-party alliances
  - Link yourself or agency with an already trusted organization
- Use at least 3 x more facts or figures
  - Make sure you have enough information available to answer your stakeholder's questions

# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION DO'S

- Lean in
- Maintain level eye contact
- Square up to your audience
- Open your arms and hands
- Mirror audience behavior and body language
- Remove hats and sunglasses if outside
- Balanced Podium

# TRAPS AND PITFALLS

- Humor – never appropriate even self-deprecating
- Negatives – for every negative provide 3 positives
- Guarantees – never guarantee anything
- Jargon – define any technical terms or jargon
- Personal Beliefs – discuss what you know and not what you believe
- Cost benefit – careful using this as public may not understand
- Defensiveness – don't take attacks personally, stick to issues
- Money – don't talk about financial impacts early on or at all

# RESPONSIBLE SPECULATION

- Acknowledge differing opinions
  - Distinguish consensus speculations from hotly debated ones to off-the-wall ones
- Don't neglect worst case scenarios
  - Answer the question even if the worse case is extremely unlikely and some people wish you wouldn't talk about it
- Acknowledge everyone's discomfort
  - You wish you knew what was going to happen and didn't have to speculate
- Explain what you are doing to find out more
  - Also explain when you expect to know more. If some questions may stay unsettled forever, talk about them too.

# THE SEVEN-PART MODEL

- Developed by Dr. Vincent T. Covello
  - Empathy, care or commitment statement
    - Tell your stakeholders you care about them
  - Three key messages
    - 3 is magic number, only messages that are more important to your stakeholders
  - Key messages(1,2,3) with 2 supporting facts for each
    - Supporting facts provide credibility
  - Repeat 3 key messages
    - Message repetition is key under stressful circumstances for stakeholders
  - Future actions
    - Reiterate commitment to resolving the issue

# FIRST MESSAGE IN A CRISIS

- Expression of empathy
- Confirmed facts and action steps
- What you don't know about the situation
- What's the process
- Statement of commitment
- Where people can get more information

# SELECTING A SPOKESPERSON

- Sincere expressions of empathy
- A willingness to risk saying “I don’t know, we’re working on it”
- Telling the truth
- Confidence without arrogance
- Appropriate emotion
- Modulated voice
- Direct eye contact
- Humility or lack of defensiveness

# CDC STARCC PRINCIPLE

- Simple
- Timely
- Accurate
- Relevant
- Credible
- Consistent





# CONSTRUCTING 7-PART PRESS STATEMENT

- 1. Write statement that expresses empathy, competence or dedication
- 2. Write a bridge to the body of your message that states your 3 key messages
- 3. Write your first key message with supporting facts
- 4. Write your second key message with supporting facts
- 5. Write your third key message with supporting facts
- 6. Write bridge to your conclusion that re-states your 3 key messages
- 7. Write a conclusion that states your future actions

## NEED MORE BREATHING ROOM? *Try this for an initial press statement*

Response to Inquiries (you are authorized to give out the following information)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

This is an evolving emergency and I know that, just like we do, you want as much information as possible right now. While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:

At approximately, \_\_\_\_\_ (time), a (brief description of what happened) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

At this point, we do not know the number of (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.).

We have a system (plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency and we are being assisted by (police, FBI, EOC) as part of that plan.

The situation is (under)(not yet under) control, and we are working with (local, State, Federal) authorities to (e.g., contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again).

We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within (amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided. We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.



## QUESTIONS? - DISCUSSION



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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