Risk and Crisis Communication Training

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Crisis Communication

the exchange of information

before, during, or after

a crisis event

- unexpected
- creates uncertainty, and
- is seen as a threat to important goals.
Risk Communication

- The process of involving potentially affected “audiences” in identifying hazards, quantifying risks, and strategies;
- process of bringing together various stakeholders to come to a common understanding about the risks, their acceptability; and
- actions needed to reduce the risks.
You call it tomato \((\text{tə-mə´tō})\)
I call it tomato \((\text{tə-mā´-tō})\)

or

*Looks* like a duck
*Walks* like a duck
*Sounds* like a duck
Failure to Communicate

- Multiple sources with mixed or different messages
- Being late
- “We know, you don’t, so just do what we say”
- Ignoring myths and rumors
- “No, I’m in charge here!”- power struggles
Crisis Creates Uncertainty

- How are we going to handle this?
- How should we prepare?
- What should we do?
- Who can we trust?
- What should we say?
- How should we say it?
- What should we focus on?
Psychology of a Crisis

- Common human emotions left without mitigating response may lead to negative behaviors that hamper recovery or cause more harm
- The goal of terrorism
“Effective communication to the public through the news media will also be essential to limit terrorists’ ability to induce public panic and disrupt daily life”
Why Plan for Crisis?

- Decrease uncertainty of protocol for response team
- Improves response time of the team
- Decreases severity of the crisis by alleviating confusion
- May prevent crisis by recognizing potential risks before they become a crisis
Successful Communication =

Credibility + Trust

Credibility = Accuracy of information + Speed of response

Trust = Empathy + Openness
Trust and Credibility

- Caring and Empathy
- Expertise and Competence
- Honesty and Openness
- Dedication and Commitment
Crisis Communication

Attempts to provide the public with information

- to make the best possible decision, 
  within
- nearly impossible time constraints, and
- to accept the imperfect nature of choice
Crisis Communication

- Crisis and Emergency Communication can help people cope, make risk/benefit decisions, and begin to return their lives to normal.

- Attempts to provide the public with information to make the best possible decision within nearly impossible time constraints and to accept the imperfect nature of choice.
Crisis Communication

Risk = Hazard + Outrage

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Risk communication planning: summary

 Fear Management

 “Precaution Advocacy”

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Three Paradigms in Risk Communication

Precaution, advocacy and warning

apathetic, passive, in denial and ignoring risks = become aware

Fear Management

being afraid, overreacting and panic = inform and manage fear

Crisis Communication

high concern = what is real, what the "authorities' are doing, and what they can do
Public Risk Perception

- The chance of “the risk” happening to me
  how bad will I be affected?
  when might it happen?

- Subjective- little confidence in statistical probability

- Perception is reality!
Best Practices in Risk Communication

- Strategic Planning ➔ Proactive Strategies ➔ Strategic Response

- Plan Pre-event logistics
- Form Partnerships
- Be accessible to Media

- Coordinate Networks
- Listen to Public Concerns
- Communicate Compassion

- Accept Uncertainty
- Be Open and Honest
- Provide Self Efficacy

Continuously evaluate and update crisis plan

National Center for Food Protection and Defense, UM
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

- Pre crisis
- Initial
- Maintenance
- Resolution
- Evaluation
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Pre crisis

- Be prepared
- Develop relationships and alliances
- Develop agreed upon recommendations
- Test the message
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Initial

- Express empathy
- Simply inform public about risks
- Establish spokesperson/organization credibility
- Provide emergency course of action
- Commit to communicate with the public
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Maintenance

- Help public understand their risk
- Provide background and overview of situation
- Gain support for recovery plans
- Explain and make a case for recommendations
- Get and respond to public feedback
- Requires ongoing assessment of the event
Resolution

- Provide educational opportunities
- Examine problems and mishaps
- Gain support for new policies/decisions
- Promote the organizations capability

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Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Evaluation

- Ongoing during all phases
- Bring findings into pre crisis planning
- Document lessons learned
- Identify training opportunities
What the Media will ask

- What happened?
- Who is affected and how are they affected?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- Who is in charge?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
What the Media will ask

- Why did this happen?
- Did you have any forewarning?
- Why wasn’t this kept from happening (again)‽
- What else can go wrong?
- What does this data/information/results mean?
- What bad things aren’t you telling us
- That’s not what I heard from (another source)
Successful Communication

- Execute a solid Communication Plan
- Be the first source for information
- Express empathy early
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open
Don’t over reassure. The objective is not to placate, but to engage, calm concern.

Acknowledge uncertainty. Offer what you know versus what you don’t know. Show your distress and acknowledge your audience’s distress regarding the uncertainty of the situation. “It must be awful to hear we can’t answer that question right now . . .”

Express that a process is in place to learn more. “We have a system (plan, process) to help us respond (find answers, etc.).”

Give anticipatory guidance. If you are aware of future negative outcomes, let people know what to expect. Example: side effects of antibiotics. If it’s going to be bad, tell them.

Be regretful, not defensive. Say “we are sorry . . .” Or “we feel terrible that . . .” when acknowledging misdeeds or failures from the agency. Don’t use “regret,” which sounds like you’re preparing for a lawsuit.

Acknowledge people’s fears. Don’t tell people they shouldn’t be afraid. They are and they have a right to their fears. Don’t tell them they are idiots for their misplaced fear; acknowledge that it’s normal, human to be frightened. They aren’t experts.

Acknowledge the shared misery. Some people will be less frightened than they are miserable, feeling hopeless and defeated. Acknowledge the misery of a catastrophic event and then help move them toward hope for the future through the actions of your agency and actions they too can take.

Express wishes. “I wish we knew more.” “I wish our answers were more definitive.”

Stop trying to allay panic. Panic is less common than imagined. Panic doesn’t come from bad news, but from mixed messages. If the public is faced with conflicting recommendations and expert advice, they are left with no credible source to turn to for help. That level of abandonment opens the door to charlatans and mass poor judgment. Candor protects your credibility and reduces the possibility of panic, because your messages will ring true.
CERC ASSESSMENT TOOL

CERC Assessment

- Initial assessment of the intensity of a crisis event is vital.
- First, turn to the event assessment checklist on the following page and check the boxes that are applicable to your event.
- Don’t spend a lot of time considering whether or not to check a box—this matrix is meant to be a general guide.
- This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers.
- The checklist is meant to take a only few minutes to complete.
- When you are done, turn back to this page, and compare the boxes you checked to those cited in the “Crisis Criteria” column in the table below to determine the level of crisis that you are dealing with and how you may want to respond.
- Reassessment is expected as more information about the event is gathered.

Complete the following worksheets to generate a quick analysis of the nature of the event and its associated CERC needs.
Summary

Best Practices of Crisis Communication

- **Pre Event**
  - Determine risk and vulnerabilities
  - Understand your capability and limitations
  - Don’t assume someone else will do it

- **Network and Relationships**
  - Work with known credible sources
  - Know who you can count on
  - Build the relationships now, not during a crisis
  - Eliminate Bureaucracy

- **Accepting Uncertainty**
  - Worse case; poor communication, distance media, not listening to the public, no planning for crisis communication, tell media what you think they should hear.
References

- National Center for Food Protection and Defense;
  A Homeland Security Center of Excellence,
  University of Minnesota

- Crisis Response Project; USDA-CSREES, Ready, Set, Plan,
  EDEN, K State Research and Extension,
  National Center for Food Security and Defense

- Iowa Center of Public Health Preparedness,
  Iowa Department of Public Health

- Harvard Center for Risk Analysis
- Center for Risk Communications
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Risk Communication: Evolution & Revolution, Dr. Vincent Covello, Dr. Peter Sandman
- North Dakota State University Risk and Crisis Communication Project
- CDC CERC Online Training
- Media Relations Made Easy- ACE
- Regional Training Course on Disaster Risk Communication, World Health Organization, Kaula Lampur