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## Risk Communication in Public Health Emergencies

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## Monday Morning Quarterbacking

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- ❑ What communication breakdowns were highlighted by Katrina?
- ❑ What would you have done differently before, during and after the crisis?
- ❑ What role did the media play?

## Risk Perception

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Of evacuees surveyed in the Astrodome,

- 73% said that they had heard that an evacuation order had been given;
- 66% thought the information was clear;
- 29% did not evacuate because they didn't think the storm would be as bad as it was;
- 10% did not evacuate because they didn't want to leave.

*Source: The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health Survey of Katrina Evacuees, September 2005.*

# Introduction to Risk Communication Theory

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## Resources

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- WHO Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies
  - Hyer and Covello
  - July 2005
  - Download handbook at [http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/WHO\\_CDS\\_2005\\_31/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/WHO_CDS_2005_31/en/)



## Resources

- ❑ CDC Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication by Leaders for Leaders



## Who will need to communicate with the public in a crisis?

- ❑ Public Information Officers
- ❑ Official spokespeople
- ❑ Administrators, Directors, Managers
- ❑ AND
- ❑ Everybody else

## Risk Perception

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- ❑ People are more likely to believe information that is consistent with what they already think.
- ❑ Beliefs change SLOWLY and PERSIST in the face of contrary evidence.
- ❑ 1 negative = 3 positives

## Risk Perception

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- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| ❑ Controllable | ❑ Uncontrollable |
| ❑ Known        | ❑ Unknown        |
| ❑ Equitable    | ❑ Inequitable    |
| ❑ Voluntary    | ❑ Involuntary    |
| ❑ Old risk     | ❑ New risk       |

(Slovic P. 1987. Perception of Risk. Science 236:280-285)

## Low Stress vs. High Stress Communication

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### LOW STRESS

- ▣ 7 messages
- ▣ Average grade level
- ▣ First, Second, Third...
- ▣ Trust = knowledge

### HIGH STRESS

- ▣ 3 messages
- ▣ Avg. grade minus 4
- ▣ First, Last
- ▣ Trust = compassion

## Fear and Communication

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- ▣ "Anthrax is not contagious but fear is!"
- ▣ Communication is an intervention
- ▣ Look at fear and distress as a contagious disease and information and communication as an antibiotic

## What should risk communication do?

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- Enhance knowledge and understanding
- Build trust and credibility
- Encourage people to engage in constructive dialogue
- Produce appropriate levels of concern
- Produce behavior and actions

## Tools for Risk Communication

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## The Three Be's

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- ❑ Be first.
- ❑ Be right.
- ❑ Be credible.

This is hard on a good day.

It will be challenging in a crisis.

You MUST prepare BEFORE the crisis to achieve the Three Be's.

## Pre-event Message Development

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- ❑ Allows time to gather thoughts and useful information
- ❑ Able to vet statements beforehand
- ❑ Saves time to ensure that you're first out of the gate in the event of a crisis
- ❑ Thinking much more clearly today than the day a crisis occurs



## The First Message

- ❑ Express empathy
- ❑ Confirmed facts and action steps
  - Who, What, When, Where, Why and How
- ❑ What you don't know
- ❑ What's being done
- ❑ Statement of commitment
- ❑ What people can do
- ❑ Where people can get more information

Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC):  
*Crisis Leader—First Message*

1. Expression of empathy \_\_\_\_\_
2. Clarifying facts (Fill in only VERIFIED facts, skip if not certain):  
Who \_\_\_\_\_  
What (Action) \_\_\_\_\_  
Where \_\_\_\_\_  
When \_\_\_\_\_  
Why \_\_\_\_\_  
How \_\_\_\_\_
3. What we don't know: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Process to get answers: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Statement of commitment: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Referrals  
For more information \_\_\_\_\_  
Next scheduled update \_\_\_\_\_

## More pre-event messages

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- Identify the stakeholders
- Identify their concerns
- Develop 3 key messages that address their concerns
  - 3 seconds or 9 words each
  - 9 seconds or 27 words total
- Gather supporting facts
- Test the messages
- Deliver messages through appropriate channels

*Vincent Covello, Center for Risk Communication, NY*

## 27/9/3

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- ▣ 27 words
- ▣ 9 seconds
- ▣ 3 messages
  
- ▣ We do not normally speak in 27/9/3!
- ▣ Importance of pre-event message development

## Know, Do, Go

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- ❑ Good three message outline
- ❑ KNOW: Tell them something you want them to know
- ❑ DO: Tell them something that they can do
- ❑ GO: Tell them where they can find more information
- ❑ Each message should be about 9 words

## Practice: Know, Do, Go

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Take a moment to write a simple communication with a Know, a Do and a Go component. Make sure you follow the 27/9/3 rule.

Scenario: After a disaster, the drinking water quality in Americaville deteriorates and is no longer potable.

## Message Mapping

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- ▣ 3 key messages
- ▣ 9 words each
- ▣ 3 supporting facts per message

## Practice: Message Mapping

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Use your Message Mapping worksheet to create a message map for your Know, Do, Go statement.

Flesh out the message map for follow-up information with 3 supporting facts for each statement.

# Failures and Successes

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## How to Fail

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**FAILURE**

WHEN YOUR BEST JUST ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH.

<http://mmb.music.umich.edu/sections/trombone/links.html>

## Five Failures

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### ■ MIXED MESSAGES

- Damages credibility
- Cumulative, consistent messages
- Identify unofficial experts in communities and give them early access to information

## Five Failures

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### ■ LATE INFORMATION

- Media and others will fill information gap
- Don't look like you have something to hide
- Pre-event message development can help you avoid this

## Five Failures

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### ❑ PATERNALISM

- Never say "Don't worry"
- Never tell people that there is no reason to be afraid
- Help the public come to the same conclusion by empowering them with information

## Five Failures

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### ❑ IGNORING RUMORS

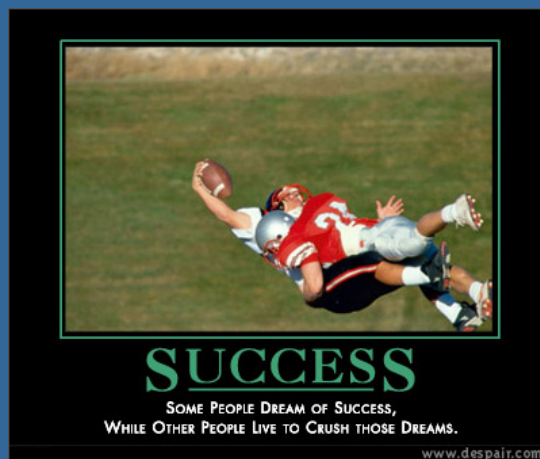
- Fight fire with facts
- No rumor is too silly to gain traction
- In crisis, the improbable seems more possible

## Five Failures

### ■ PUBLIC POWER STRUGGLES

- Get on the same page before you address the public
- Turf wars must end the minute a crisis begins
- Credibility depends on a united front
- You will be asked, "Who's in charge?"
  - Make sure you really know the answer

## How to Succeed





## Five Keys to Success

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- SOLID COMMUNICATION PLAN
  - Develop this BEFORE an event

## Five Keys to Success

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- BE FIRST
  - Speed of information is an indicator of preparedness
  - The first message received carries the most weight and is the basis for all judgments thereafter

## Five Keys to Success

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### ■ EXPRESS EMPATHY EARLY

- The MOST important point
- Within the first 30 seconds of starting your message
- Don't paternalize
- Be human
- People want to know that you care before they care what you know

## Five Keys to Success

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### ■ SHOW COMPETENCE AND EXPERTISE

- But DON'T be an intellectual snob
- When people are nervous, they are likely to fill communication gaps with jargon
- AVOID JARGON
- Your title speaks for you
- Be able to give details and answer predictable questions with facts

## Five Keys to Success

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### ■ BE HONEST AND OPEN

- People already distrust government
- We live in the information age
- The truth will come out
- People can sniff out lies
- Treat people like you would want to be treated
- People understand that you may not be able to divulge all information at once
  - If you have to withhold something, tell them why and when they will be able to know
  - Follow that up with something you can tell them

## Five Keys to Success

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### ■ BE HONEST AND OPEN (con't)

- Do not withhold information if the only reason is because you don't want people to panic
  - Uncertainty, NOT INFORMATION, causes panic
- Bad news does NOT get better over time
  - Do not withhold information just because it's bad news
  - Of course there's bad news – it wouldn't be a crisis if there weren't bad news
  - Delivering bad news will gain trust

# Risk Communication and the Media

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## Media

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- ▣ Friend or foe?
- ▣ Asset or liability?

## The role of media in disaster communications

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- ❑ THE MAIN source of health info for the public in a non-disaster setting
- ❑ THE ONLY source of ANY info in a disaster setting

## 77 Questions

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- ❑ WHO Handbook, Box 1.1, pp. 2-3
- ❑ Who, What, When, Where, Why, How
- ❑ Can you be more specific?
- ❑ How certain are you?
- ❑ What is your personal opinion?
- ❑ Who is in charge?
- ❑ How much will this cost?
- ❑ How many people are dead/harmed?

## Challenge Questions

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- ❑ Sometimes questions will be impossible to answer
- ❑ Attack the problem, not the interviewer
- ❑ Guarantee
- ❑ False allegation
- ❑ What if...

## Guarantee

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- ❑ "Can you guarantee that no one else will be harmed from this disaster?"
  - Indicate that the question is about the future
  - Indicate that the past/present best predict the future
  - Bridge to known facts
  - Do not say "There are no guarantees in life"

## False Allegation

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- ❑ "Are you a crook?"
  - Do not say "I am not a crook"
  - Repeat the question with the opposite value
  - Indicate the importance of the value/issue
  - Indicate what you are doing to uphold this value/issue

## What If...

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- ❑ What will happen if a terrorist attack occurs during a major natural disaster? Is the city prepared to fight a war on two fronts?
  - Acknowledge that this is a What If? Question
  - Bridge to What Is
  - State what you know factually

## I Don't Know

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- ❑ Better to say "I Don't Know" than "No Comment"
- ❑ "I don't know" builds trust
- ❑ ALWAYS tell the truth
- ❑ Cite the source that does know, or describe follow-up action
- ❑ Bridge to what you do know

## Bridging Statements

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- ❑ WHO Handbook, Box 6.1, p.68
- ❑ However, it is more important to look at...
- ❑ The real issue here is...
- ❑ If we look at the big picture...



## Final Thoughts on the Media

- ❑ Never say "No comment"
- ❑ You are never "Off the record"
- ❑ Don't repeat false allegations
- ❑ Sit forward, uncross your arms and make eye contact with interviewer
- ❑ Remember that your audience is the public, not the media

## Resources

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## Resources

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