Public Information and Risk Communication in Emergency Management
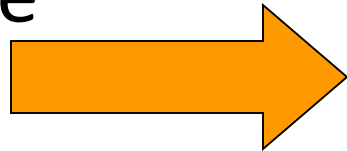
An Overview…..

Risk Environment

Increasing Risk / Visibility of Disasters

- Increase of natural disaster impacts

- Increased population density

- Increased global travel and coverage

- Increased threat of terrorism or man made violence

 Increased Role for EM/Partners

Risk Communication in Uncertainty

- Key Risk Communication Approaches
  - Responsible speculation
  - Acknowledges uncertainty
  - Shares dilemmas
  - Does not aim for zero fear
    ....Sandman and Lanard (2005)

  ....Give people things to do!

3 kinds of Risk Communication

According to Sandman and Lanard (2005)....

- Precaution advocacy (Watch out)

- Outrage Management (Calm down)

- Crisis Communication (We'll get through it together)

Trust Determination Theory

- Trust Determination Theory
  - When people are upset they often distrust that others are listening, caring, empathetic, honest, open, competent, expert, dedicated, or committed.

- Factors that build trust are:
  - Caring and empathy
  - Competence and expertise
  - Honesty and openness
  - Dedication and commitment

Communication Myth vs. Reality

- **Myth:** Telling the public about a risk is more likely to unduly alarm people than keeping quiet.
  Reality: Decrease potential for alarm by giving people a chance to express their concerns.

- **Myth:** Communication is less important than education. If people knew the true risks, they would accept them.
  Reality: Pay as much attention to your process for dealing with people as you do to explaining the data.

- **Myth:** We shouldn't go to the public until we have solutions to threats.
  Reality: Release and discuss information about risk management options and involve communities in strategies in which they have a stake.

Communication Myth vs. Reality

- **Myth:** These issues are too difficult for the public to understand.
  Reality: Separate public disagreement with your policies from misunderstanding of technical issues.

- **Myth:** Technical decisions should be left in the hands of technical people.
  Reality: Provide the public with information. Listen to community concerns. Involve staff with diverse backgrounds in developing policy.

- **Myth:** Risk communication is not my job.
  Reality: As a public servant, you have a responsibility to the public. Learn to integrate communication into your job and help others do the same.

Communication Myth vs.Reality

- **Myth:** If we give them an inch, they'll take a mile.
  Reality: If you listen to people when they are asking for inches, they are less likely to demand miles. Avoid the battleground. Involve people early and often.

- **Myth:** If we listen to the public, we will devote scarce resources to issues that are not a great threat to the public.

- **Reality:** Listen early to avoid controversy and the potential for disproportionate attention to lesser issues.

Implications for PIOs

- PIOs must be able to:
  - Effectively inform the public
  - Combat "armchair experts"

- Research indicates that, often, the first message to reach the listener may be the accepted message, even though more accurate information may follow.

Communication and Public Information

Overarching Goal in Communication

- Be able to provide a clear, concise message to the right audience at the right time

"The best cure for fear is information."

-Dr. Julie Gerberding, Former Director of CDC

The STARCC Principle

- Message in a Crisis must be:
    - **S**imple
    - **T**imely
    - **A**ccurate
    - **R**elevant
    - **C**redible
    - **C**onsistent

- People respond to clear instructions in a disaster situation. They want to be given guidance by government authorities.

What is Risk Communications?

- <u>Risk Communication</u> is the timely and effective sharing or dissemination of information about a high stress topic or event so that an individual can make an informed decision to take appropriate action

Effective Public Information in an emergency:
- Invites participation
- Develops trust
- Conveys risk appropriately
- Empowers individuals to make an informed decision.

Risk Communication

Risk Communication in Emergency Management

- Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication combines the urgency of disaster communication with the need to communicate risks to the public. Time pressure is usually urgent.

High Exposure Events

CNN Syndrome

- The CNN Syndrome is the tendency for local disasters to get sustained national television news coverage, compelling national and state leaders to respond even in situations where their help is not requested by the local authorities

- If not controlled by an effective public information strategy, increased national coverage can also impact local policy decisions

The Public Information Officer

The PIO

- Collects, verifies and disseminates emergency information to the public that can help them make protection/recovery decisions

- A PIO is
  - Central contact
  - Planner (pro-active and crisis)
  - Writer
  - Coordinator
  - Agency/Community representative

- They are also responsible for planning how to be most effective in disseminating information

The Public Information Officer

- As a PIO dealing with an emergency or disaster event, you should be prepared to answer these questions from the public:

   1. Are my family and I safe?
   2. What can I do to protect myself and my family?
   3. Who is in charge here?
   4. What can I expect?
   5. What should we do?

Skill Sets needed by the PIO

- Community Relations

- Media Relations

- Writing Skills

- Public Speaking Skills

- Audio/Visual Presentation Skills

- Organization Specific Risk Communication Skills (planning, operations, managerial)

PIO Communication Skill Sets

Communication skill sets, according to Dr. Kristine Gebbie, include the following:

- Communicates effectively, in writing, orally, and in other ways
- Solicits input from individuals and organizations
- Advocates for organization/jurisdiction programs and resources
- Leads and participates in groups to address specific issues
- Uses the media, advanced technologies, and community networks to communicate information
- Effectively presents accurate demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information

The Public Information Officer

- PIO Responsibilities – PIOs are responsible for providing public information to two primary groups:
  - The Public
  - The Media

- Others that PIOs may coordinate with include other individuals in your organization, external response agency partners, and other stakeholders in the event

PIO Duties – Normal Operations

Types of Non-Emergency Risk Information Duties

- Emergency Ed Campaigns
- Publications/Websites
- Group Presentations
- Issues Forum
- Town Hall Meetings
- Daily Media Inquiry

- Disaster Readiness
- Disaster Awareness Weeks
- Event Planning
- News Conferences
- Media Outreach
- Disaster Expos

The public shouldn't see you for the first time when you want them to take disaster action.

PIO Duties in an Emergency

- Collect, verify, and disseminate information
- Understand and accommodate the needs of the media
- Keep lines of communication open in your agency
- Assume responsibilities in the EOC, Command Post, City Hall, JIC, etc.
- Highlight "behind-the-scene" players in follow-up and in-depth stories

PIO Duties in an Emergency

- Job duties and responsibilities associated with a PIO during an emergency or disaster event include:

  - News Releases
  - News Conferences
  - Talking Points
  - Credentialing
  - On-Site Media Inquiry
  - ESF-14 Coordination
  - Tours of Impacted Area
  - Phone Inquiries
  - Media Pool Coverage
  - Citizen Hotline
  - Satellite Up Links
  - Satellite Bookings
  - JIC Operations

Spokesperson

A spokesperson is an individual representing the organization who has…

- Knowledge

- Authority

- Community Trust

  …with the media and the public

More later…..

Proactive vs. Reactive

- Think ahead
- Be timely and accurate
- Reach out to the media to establish good relationships
- Anticipate expectations of public information
- Know the community's hazards
- Plan accordingly

Reactive = unprepared, insensitive, unable to win trust, hiding something

Mental Noise Theory

- **Mental Noise Theory**
  - When people are upset they have difficulty hearing, understanding, and remembering.

- **Strategies**
  - Send a limited number of clear messages: 3 key messages
  - Keep messages brief: 10 seconds or 30 words
  - Repeat messages: Tell them what your going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them.
  - Use visual aids: graphics, slides
  - Be aware that it takes three positive messages to balance one negative statement
  - Avoid unnecessary use of the words: No, Not, Never, Nothing, None

Public Information During A Disaster

- News Releases
- News Conferences
- Talking Points
- Credentialing
- On-Site Media Inquiry
- Manage Info Flow
- Phone Inquiries
- Liaison to other Agencies

- Media Pool Coverage
- Citizen Hotline
- Satellite Up Links
- Satellite Bookings
- The Emergency Channel
- Tours of Impacted Area
- Overnight Radio Interviews

Joint Information System

Joint Information System (JIS)

Joint Information Center (JIC)

- A JIC is a joint location for all disaster response agencies and their PIOs with mutually agreed -upon plan for information dissemination
  - "One stop shop"
    - One location, one message
  - Coordination of PIO resources
    - Multiple levels of government
  - Management of misinformation
- Joint Information Centers (JIC) bring incident communicators together in real time during an incident to develop, coordinate, and deliver a unified message in order that federal, state, and local levels of government are releasing uniform information during an incident.

Communication vehicles

- Emergency Alert System
- NOAA Weather Radio
- Ham radio operators
- Cable companies
- Weather channel
- Government access channels

- PA systems on emergency vehicles
- Internet/E-mail
- Direct Satellite Uplinks
- Local broadcasting stations
- Social Media
  - Facebook
  - Twitter

All of the bulleted items above represent ways you can get information to your public. These are usually resources that can be accessed by your local emergency management organization. Don't wait until during or after an emergency to familiarize yourself with these systems.

The PIO's role in emerging threats

- <u>The PIO's role in emerging threats:</u>
- ☆ To be prepared and develop local knowledge, and talk to others in the community
- ☆ To read newspapers
- ☆ Know what's going on in the news – nationally, in the state, and in the region
- ☆ Be able to anticipate issues that may come up as a result of news coverage
- ☆ Know what's going on in your organization and what coverage you are getting locally
- ☆ Use slow news days to your advantage