

# CRISIS AND EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

**Celia A. Toles, B.S**

**Health Communication Specialist**

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The **right** message at the **right** time from the **right** person  
can save lives...

# Safeguarding America from Health Threats

## CDC Public Health Responses

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Marburg Virus;  Hurricanes: <b>Katrina</b> , Rita, and Wilma	Mumps;  Tropical Storm Ernesto;  E. Coli Spinach/ Botulism Carrot Juice;  E. coli;  Rhode Island Mycoplasma	XDR/MDR TB;  Hurricane Dean	Satellite Intercept;  Salmonella and E.Coli Outbreaks;  Hurricanes: Dolly, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike, Tropical Storm Edouard	Salmonella typhimurium Outbreak;  <b>H1N1 Influenza</b> ;  Biowatch;  Operation Earthquake;  Presidential Inauguration	NH Anthrax;  Haiti Earthquake;  Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill;  Haiti Cholera Outbreak	Japan Earthquake and Tsunami;  Hurricane Irene;  Polio Eradication Response (Polio)	Polio;  Multistate Meningitis Outbreak;	Avian Influenza H7N9 Response;  Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV);  Multistate Cyclospora Outbreak;  Polio	MERS-CoV;  Un-Accompanied Minors;  <b>Ebola Response</b> ;  Polio	DoD Sample Investigation;  <b>Ebola Response</b> ;  Polio	<b>Ebola Response</b> ;  <b>Zika Virus Response</b>  Flint, Michigan Water Contamination Response;  Polio	<b>Zika Virus Response</b> ;  Polio;  Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

# Communicating in a crisis is different

- **In a serious crisis, affected people . . .**
  - Take in information differently
  - Process information differently
  - Act on information differently
- **In a catastrophic event: communication is different**



# Purpose

1. **Crisis and Emergency-Risk Communication (CERC)** can help people cope, make risk/benefit decisions, and begin to return their lives to normal
2. Attempt to provide the public with information to make the best possible decisions within nearly impossible time constraints and to accept the imperfect nature of choice
3. Support organizational credibility

# Six Principles of CERC

**Be First:** If the information is yours to provide by organizational authority, do so as soon as possible. If you can't, explain how you are working to get it.

**Be Right:** Give facts in increments. Tell people what you know when you know it, tell them what you don't know, and tell them *if* you will know relevant information later.

**Be Credible:** Tell the truth. Do not withhold to avoid embarrassment or the possible “panic” that seldom happens. Uncertainty is worse than not knowing—rumors are more damaging than hard truths.

**Express Empathy:** Acknowledge in words what people are feeling—it builds trust.

**Promote Action:** Give people things to do. It calms anxiety and helps restore order.

**Show Respect:** Treat people the way you want to be treated: the way you want your loved ones treated, always... even when hard decisions must be communicated.



# Crisis Communication Lifecycle



- |  |   |  |   |   |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Prepare</li><li>▪ Foster alliances</li><li>▪ Develop consensus recommendations</li><li>▪ Test message</li><li>▪ Evaluate plans</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Express empathy</li><li>▪ Provide simple risk explanations</li><li>▪ Establish credibility</li><li>▪ Recommend actions</li><li>▪ Commit to stakeholders</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Further explain risk by population groups</li><li>▪ Provide more background</li><li>▪ Gain support for response</li><li>▪ Empower risk/benefit decision making</li><li>▪ Capture feedback for analysis</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Educate a primed public for future crises</li><li>▪ Examine problems</li><li>▪ Gain support for policy and resources</li><li>▪ Promote your organization's role</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Capture lessons learned</li><li>▪ Develop an event SWOT</li><li>▪ Improve plan</li><li>▪ Return to precrisis planning</li></ul> |
|--|---|--|---|---|

# What the public seeks from your communication

## Five public concerns. . .

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



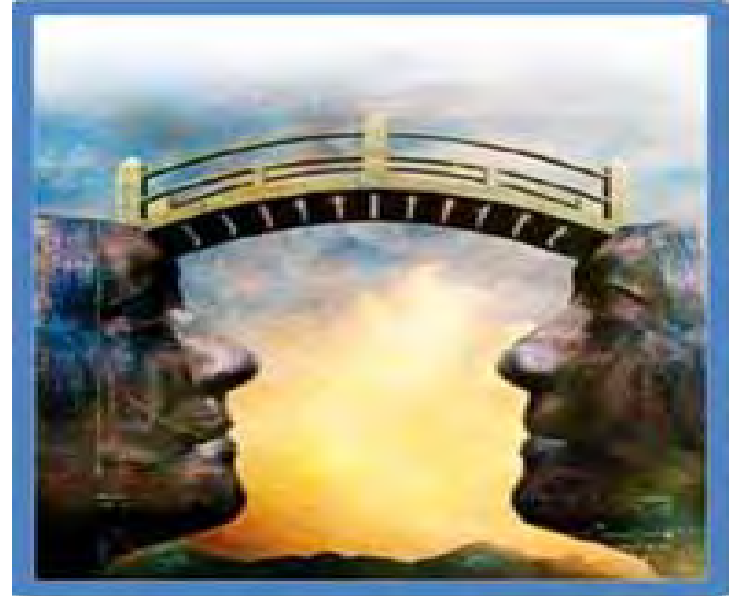
# Five communication failures that kill operational success

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
5. Public power struggles and confusion



# Five communication steps that boost operational success

1. Execute a solid communication plan
2. Be the first source for information
3. Express empathy early
4. Show competence and expertise
5. Remain honest and open



# Psychology of a Crisis



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



## Psychological barriers:

- Denial
- Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
- Hopelessness or helplessness

# Won't we scare them? Fear & Anxiety

Both anxiety and fear are alert signals that warn of danger

FEAR	ANXIETY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• realistic, adaptive, and time-limited response</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• less realistic, less adaptive, not time-specific;</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• usually not anticipated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• anticipated</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• triggers freeze, fight or flight</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• primes freeze, fight or flight, but doesn't engage it</li></ul>



# What's Different During a Crisis?



# Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Mental preparation reduces anxiety
- Taking action reduces anxiety
- Uncertainty is the greatest concern for most – must be addressed

# Decision Making 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)



# How do we measure the magnitude of a crisis or emergency?

- Harm to people (dead, injured, sickened)
- Harm to property (monetary and geographic spread)



# Another Approach to Measure Risk in an Emergency

## All risks are not accepted equally

- Voluntary vs. involuntary
- Controlled personally vs. controlled by others
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Natural vs. manmade
- Reversible vs. permanent
- Statistical vs. anecdotal
- Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Affecting adults vs. affecting children

# Messages and Audiences



# The STARCC Rule

Your public messages in a crisis must be:

**S**imple

**T**imely

**A**ccurate

**R**elevant

**C**redible

**C**onsistent



# What the Public Will Ask First

- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?

# What the Media Will Ask Next

- What happened?
- Who is in charge?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning?

# Leader Decisions: Public Information Release

- What to release
- When to release
- How to release
- Where to release
- Who to release
- Why release



# Initial Message

## Must

- Be short
- Be relevant
- Give positive action steps
- Be repeated



**YOUR  
ATTENTION  
PLEASE!  
WE HAVE  
A CRISIS  
SITUATION**



## Must Not...

- Use jargon
- Be judgmental
- Make promises that can't be kept
- Include humor

# Thank You!

For more information, contact CDC  
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)  
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

