

CRISIS + EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE.

CERC: Crisis Communication Plans



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

Last Updated: 2014

CERC: Crisis Communication Plans

This chapter will promote understanding in the following areas:

- Crisis phases
- A seat at the table for communication
- Developing the plan
- Applying the plan during the first 24–48 hours
- Applying the crisis plan throughout the response

Planning is probably the most important step that ensures effective actions. While a plan cannot guarantee successful management, it can create a template and process for initial actions and decisions. The process of planning may be more important than the resulting plans themselves, as the relationships and trust built during the process become invaluable in a crisis situation.

Crisis Phases

Understanding the pattern of a crisis can help you, as a communicator, anticipate problems and respond effectively. While every crisis is unique and develops in its own way, these generalized patterns have been shown to be part of most events. By dividing the crisis into phases, communicators can anticipate the information needs of the media, stakeholders, and the general public. Therefore, your communication efforts must evolve. Each of the following phases has its own unique informational requirements.



Progression through each of the phases will vary according to the following:

- The event that triggered or initiated the crisis
- Level of harm
- Adequacy of the response, including the level of community resilience
- The intensity and longevity of the crisis, which will impact required resources and manpower

In the following sections, each of the stages is discussed along with the associated communication requirements.



Pre-crisis phase

The communication objectives during the pre-crisis phase include the following:

- Plan and prepare.
- Foster alliances with stakeholders.
- Develop consensus recommendations.
- Develop systems and redundancies such as hotlines, joint information centers (JICs), and websites.
- Test messages.

The pre-crisis phase is where the most important planning work should be done. While pre-crisis planning and preparation will not ensure successful crisis management, the lack of it puts your organization at an extreme disadvantage.

Crises develop over time. This is especially true if there have been years of poor planning and lack of preparation, which would worsen a crisis when it occurs. For example, a lack of preparation for a severe drought could lead to mass famine when a drought actually happens.

The pre-crisis phase may last for years. If handled properly, this phase involves proactive planning with stakeholders to anticipate and prepare for crises. When a crisis happens, it may involve a naturally developing threat, a manmade catastrophe, or an interaction of the two. For example, the Japanese crisis of 2011 involved an earthquake and a subsequent tsunami interacting with human developments and coastal communities, and severe damage at a nuclear power plant.

The types of crises that your organization is likely to encounter are somewhat predictable based on history, location, and other risk factors. Once an assessment identifies the most likely crises, it's easier to begin planning. You might anticipate crises such as floods, fires, infectious disease outbreaks, and chemical spills. You can then anticipate reasonable questions for various crises and draft preliminary answers.

You can draft initial communication strategies and messages with blanks to be filled in if a crisis occurs:

- Identify spokespersons, resources, and resource mechanisms.
- Develop training and refine plans and messages.



- Foster alliances and partnerships to ensure that officials and experts speak with one voice and that resources are available and shared.
- Consider conducting an emergency public health communication needs assessment to clarify what needs to be done (see Checklist 4–5. Needs Assessment for Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication at the end of this chapter).

Several checklists and worksheets are presented along with a detailed discussion of crisis planning at the end of this chapter. These may be useful in your pre-crisis planning.

Be sure to develop a plan during the pre-crisis phase. This is the biggest step you can take during this phase for improving your crisis communication.



Initial Phase

The initial phase of a crisis can be characterized by confusion, uncertainty, and intense media interest. Information is usually incomplete and the facts scattered. It is important to recognize that information from the public, the media, other organizations, and from within your organization may not be accurate. Situational awareness is at a premium.

Information will come to you from a variety of sources, some credible and some not. New information-sharing technologies deserve special consideration. Today's technology allows people to immediately provide updates and post information on social media sites. Some of this information may be useful for personnel working in an emergency operation center. At the same time, some of this information may be misleading. High volume or overloads of communication systems like phone systems, internal computer servers, and Internet servers can also be problematic.

The federal government helps to provide up-to-date situational awareness for local, state, and federal public health officials via CDC's Health Alert Network, often referred to as CDC HAN.¹ Urgent health-related messages are sent in real time to public health and safety agencies in affected areas. State health departments may then send these messages to local health departments, police and fire departments, clinicians, and other personnel whose job it is to protect the public during emergencies, natural disasters, outbreaks, and other health threats. After they are shared with public health officials, CDC HAN messages are also shared with the public.



A critical part of the communicator's role is to manage the following:

- Collect information about what happened.
- Interpret and separate the factual information from rumors.
- Determine the communication response.
- Coordinate with other response groups and agencies.
- Verify the magnitude of the event as quickly as possible.

Decisions in the initial phase have critical implications. There are few second chances to get communications right during this phase of a crisis. Organizational reputations are at stake. But it's important to recognize that agencies may be forced to communicate even when they do not have all the facts.

Emergency managers use the axiom "all disasters are local" to emphasize that crises happen in a specific place and affect a specific community or group of communities. In most cases, communities will need to manage the crisis during this phase using local resources. This includes community organizations and groups, local businesses, faith-based groups, and neighbors. Typically, a community should expect to be largely on its own for the first 72 hours.

Communication objectives during this phase will require that you as the communicator:

- Acknowledge the event with empathy.
- Explain to and inform the public in simple and clear terms about their risk.
- Establish organization and spokesperson credibility.
- Provide emergency courses of action, including how and where to get more information.
- Coordinate messages with other organizations and agencies.
- Commit to stakeholders and the public to continue communication and remain accessible.

When communicating in the initial phase of an emergency, it is important to present information that is simple, credible, accurate, consistent, and delivered on time.

This is the time to establish your organization as credible. A crisis creates high uncertainty. You can reduce public anxiety by providing useful information about the nature of the problem and what the public can do about it. Even when there is little information to offer, you can share how the organization is investigating the event and when more information will be available. At the very least, messages should demonstrate that the organization is addressing issues head-on. This means that its approach is reasonable, caring, and timely, and that it is responsive to the public's need for information.



At the same time, the pressure to release information prematurely can be intense. In most cases, all information must be cleared by the appropriate leaders or designated clearance personnel before it's offered to the media.

In the initial phase of a crisis or emergency, the public wants information about the situation immediately, including who, what, where, when, and why:

- Provide timely and accurate facts, including where the crisis occurred.
- Say what is being done now.
- Give credible answers regarding the magnitude of the crisis, including possible threats to the public.
- Share the possible duration of the crisis.
- Explain as much as you can about who will fix the problem, and when.

Communicators should be prepared to answer questions like these quickly, accurately, and as fully as possible.

Communicators should avoid overstating what is known or over-reassuring. The public can recognize wildly optimistic statements. Such statements will reduce credibility. It is more appropriate to offer qualifications such as, "Based on what we currently know" or "The situation is still evolving." During the SARS outbreak of 2003, Dr. Julie Gerberding, then CDC Director, noted:²

"There were a lot of times during SARS where we were trying to balance ... being first, being credible, and being right. And we at CDC made the conscious decision that our credibility was the most important thing. And so that honesty of 'we don't know, we're sorry we don't know, we feel terrible we don't know and that we're all in this predicament,' ... is a much better message than trying to pretend that you know something when you don't or try to reassure people when there really is no foundation for the reassurance."

Often the most honest and credible response is to acknowledge that, "This is an evolving emergency, and we simply do not have all the answers. As soon as we have them, we will inform you. This is what we know now."

Crisis is a high uncertainty event and agencies will not be able to quickly verify all the facts. Organizations' reputations are on the line, however, and getting information right is critical.



Maintenance Phase

The maintenance phase generally begins when most or all of the direct harm is contained, and the intensity of the crisis begins to subside. As one crisis communicator commented, “You know you have reached the maintenance phase when you get to go home and take a shower.” Communication objectives during this phase include the following:

- Help the public more accurately understand its own risks.
- Provide background and encompassing information to those who need it. Work to answer questions such as the following:
 - “How could this happen?”
 - “Has this happened before?”
 - “How can we keep this from happening again?”
 - “Will I be all right in the long term—will I recover?”
- Generate understanding and support for response and recovery plans.
- Listen to stakeholder and audience feedback and correct any misinformation.
- Explain emergency recommendations.
- Empower risk/benefit decision making.

As the crisis evolves, anticipate sustained media interest and scrutiny. Unexpected developments, rumors, or misinformation may place further demands on your organization’s communicators. Experts, professionals, and others not associated with the response organization will comment publicly on the issue and sometimes contradict or misinterpret your messages. You are likely to be criticized about your handling of the situation. Resist becoming defensive. Plan to respond with information and explanations.

Staying on top of the information flow and maintaining close coordination with other agencies and spokespersons is essential. Processes for tracking communication activities become increasingly important as the workload increases. Tracking can be done electronically or with paper forms. For example, several crisis-response agencies have been utilizing commercially available collaboration software to track response tasks and agency incident reports. This allows all emergency response personnel to see the larger picture without duplicating services.

The crisis maintenance phase also includes an ongoing assessment of the event and continued allocation of resources for the response.



Resolution Phase

The maintenance phase and the resolution phase often blend into one another as the crisis continues to wind down. It is important to acknowledge the resolution phase may take considerable time as details of the event and especially responsibility and blame are addressed. CERC objectives for this phase include:

- Improve appropriate public response for future similar emergencies through education.
- Honestly examine problems and mishaps, and then reinforce what worked and address what didn't work in the recovery and response efforts.
- Persuade the public to support public policy and resource allocation to the problem.
- Promote the activities and capabilities of the organization. Help reinforce the identity of your organization as capable and responsive.

As the crisis resolves, there is a return to some form of normality. Often, this is a new normal, which includes an increased understanding of risks and new ways to avoid them. While in some cases complete recovery takes years, in the resolution phase, most of the recovery systems are in place. This phase is also characterized by a reduction in public and media interest.

Once the crisis is resolved, you may need to respond to intense media scrutiny about how the event was handled. This may include an opportunity to reinforce public health messages while issues are current. Your organization may need to initiate a public education campaign or make changes to your website. Research shows that a community is responsive to risk avoidance and mitigation education directly after a crisis has occurred.^{3,4}



Evaluation Phase

When the crisis is over, it is important to evaluate the performance of the communication plan, document lessons learned, and determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan. A crisis is a very important learning opportunity. Failure to learn the lessons from it increases the chance of a failed response in the future. It is easy for us to focus on the level of tactics and implementation and not consider our overall communication strategy. When the crisis is over:



- Evaluate responses, including communication effectiveness.
- Document and communicate lessons learned—what worked and where were the challenges?
- Determine specific actions to improve crisis communication and crisis response capability.
- Create linkages to pre-crisis activities.

A Seat at the Table for Communication

A critical element in your communication plan is integration with the overall emergency response plans for your organization. A media and public information plan that seems perfect but can't be executed because of resistance or lack of understanding by leadership is a failed plan. It is very important that the communication perspective be represented when key crisis decisions are made. In some situations, communications may be the only tool an organization may have in the early phases of a crisis.

Treating the communication function as a secondary concern, or worse, just as the way to convey decisions, often leads to blunders. Communication needs a permanent seat at the table where key crisis response decisions are made. There are many important reasons why this is true:

- Communication has been recognized as a core emergency response function by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security.⁵
- Dramatic cases of failed or ineffective communication have made crises much worse. Examples of this include the following:
 - Hurricane Katrina in 2005⁶
 - The attacks of September 11, 2001^{7,8}
- An effective response plan requires communication. Even the best, well-informed, and creative decision will not work if it is not effectively communicated.
- A decision may appear to be effective based on sound science until someone considers how the decision could be perceived by the public and the barriers to effectively communicating the decision.

Helping ensure that communication is a key emergency function involves several activities:

- Make sure that everyone on the communication staff is an ambassador of communication. They should take every opportunity to promote the value of communication efforts to others in the organization. Every department of the organization involved in emergency planning and response should know the communication staff.
- Meet with planners and ask them how they think better communication with the public, partners, and stakeholders would help accomplish their mission.



- Engage leaders with straightforward objectives for communication in a crisis.
- Explain that communications in an emergency is more than public safety radios or television interviews. It involves dynamic two-way exchanges with stakeholders through many channels, including the Web and the media.
- Explain to leadership how the overall response and recovery operation benefits through an investment in public information activities.

An earthquake and a tsunami

In 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami in Japan caused tens of thousands of deaths. Communications surrounding the subsequent nuclear power plant incident have been criticized, but communications and preparedness for the earthquake and tsunami have been regarded positively. Many experts and reporters cited Japan's culture of disaster preparedness as preventing much higher casualties than, for example, the estimated 200,000 killed in the 2010 Haiti earthquake and 230,000 who died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. After the Japanese government was criticized for its slow response to the Kobe earthquake of 1995, Japan spent billions of dollars in strengthening buildings, developing early warning disaster and communication systems, and continually educating and drilling the public on what to do in case of an earthquake or tsunami.

Disaster supplies such as reflector blankets, collapsible water containers, and hand-cranked cell phones are easily found in Japanese convenience and department stores. Neighborhoods are organized with water storage facilities. Parks, shrines, and temples are designated as congregation points in case of disaster. Most schools and offices keep helmets and first-aid kits handy. Disaster training begins early and Disaster Preparation Day is observed every year. This day commemorates those killed in previous quakes and reminds people that another big earthquake is always possible.^{9,10}

When the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami occurred, the world's most sophisticated early warning system for earthquakes was credited with giving most industrial, energy, and transport operators vital time to shut down. It also alerted residents through the media and mobile networks that a quake was imminent. Television channels immediately switched from normal programming to live coverage of the aftermath. The names of the affected areas flashed on the screen, along with details of the quake's intensity in each area. A map of Japan showing coastal areas subject to tsunami warnings was a constant presence in the corner of the screen.¹⁰ Japan's "massive public education program" could, in the end, have saved the most lives, said Rich Eisner, a retired tsunami preparedness expert. Matthew Francis of URS Corporation and a member of the civil engineering society's tsunami subcommittee also said that education may have been the critical factor. "For a trained population, a matter of 5 or 10 minutes is all you may need to get to high ground," Francis said.¹¹



When communication professionals have a seat at the decision-making table, they can provide the following:

■ **Customer and audience focus:**

- Represent the perspective of diverse audiences and stakeholders.
- Empower local decision making.
- Provide feedback to responders.
- Represent fair and responsible resource allocation.
- Advocate for a return to well-being and normality.

■ **Organizational focus:**

- Coordinate and facilitate response and recovery efforts.
- Build consensus and consistency of messages.
- Generate support for crisis management plans and activities.
- Clarify communication obligation and processes.
- Avoid misallocation of limited resources.
- Acquire and present critical information and facts.
- Reduce and respond to rumors.

■ **Process understanding and longer-term thinking:**

- Represent the competing demands and interests in decisions.
- Provide considerations of longer-term implications and needs.
- Avoid statements and decisions that limit future flexibility.
- Understand the need for multiple partners and perspectives in a response.

The role of communication with emergency operations center (EOC) planners and leaders should be explored and discussed in advance. Events such as Hurricane Katrina⁷ and the Red River floods in North Dakota¹² provide powerful examples of how communication can help drive decisions made by policy makers. Participation, education, and credible execution during planning phases can ensure a seat for communication experts at the table during a crisis.



Developing the Plan

Your crisis communication plan should be developed with realistic expectations in mind and take into account the possibility of a worst-case scenario. Crisis researchers often describe fantasy planning assumptions, such as calm seas for several days following an oil spill, or that all members of a community will have access to personal transportation for evacuation.¹³ At the same time, worst-case scenarios can sometimes be so overwhelming that planning seems impossible.

Your communication plan should be fully integrated into the overall emergency-response plan for your organization. It should also be included in your local, state, or national response plan. A true public health emergency will involve a number of agencies and departments, and an effective plan will reflect that coordination. An important benefit is the opportunity to mobilize shared resources, such as a unified website used by all agencies that connects to individual websites and telephone hotlines.

Knowing what to include

At a minimum, the following elements should be part of your communication plan:

- Signed endorsement from senior leadership, such as directors and senior managers
- Designated responsibilities for public information teams
- Internal information verification and expedited clearance procedures
- Agreements on information-release authorities (who releases what, when, and how)
- Regional and local media contact lists, including after-hours news desks
- Procedures to coordinate with public health organization response teams, including procedures for developing a JIC
- Designated spokespersons for public health issues and third-party validators in an emergency
- Emergency response team members' after-hours contact numbers
- Contact lists for emergency response information partners:
 - Governor's public affairs officer
 - Local FBI public information (special agent in charge)
 - Local or regional agricultural department or veterinarian public information officers (PIOs)
 - Red Cross, and other nongovernmental organizations
- Agreements and procedures to join the JIC within the EOC, if activated
- Procedures to secure needed resources such as space, equipment, and personnel, to operate the public information and media operation during a public health emergency 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, if needed



- Information dissemination methods that can be used to communicate to the public, stakeholders, and partners during a crisis include the following:
 - Websites
 - Social media channels, such as Twitter feeds
 - E-mail lists
 - Listservs
 - Broadcast fax
 - Door-to-door leaflets
 - Press releases
- Lists of likely or key stakeholders, ways to reach them, with demographic and background descriptions

Plan Characteristics

Your plan is not a step-by-step or how-to document. It provides a basic, general structure that can be adapted to emergency response situations. It should not be overly long detailed. It should, however, address all of the roles, lines of responsibility, and resources you can reasonably expect to encounter as you provide information to the public, media, and partners during a public health emergency. It should be designed to assist with the immediate decisions, providing you time to assemble facts and plan responses.

More than anything, your crisis communication plan is a focused, accessible resource that provides must-have information. Many communication professionals keep media contacts in their cell phones or on their laptops. Often, this information is disorganized and incomplete. Part of the planning process involves updating and organizing this information.

The single most important communication responsibility that can be assigned to someone in the organization is the duty to keep the plan current. Update the plan regularly, usually annually. Schedule the review; don't just wait for a certain number of changes to occur. When updates are neglected, the plan is outdated as soon as it is pulled off the shelf.

More than anything, your crisis communication plan is a resource of information, the "go to" place for "must have" information.

The single most important communication responsibility that can be assigned to someone in the organization is the duty to keep the plan current.



Longer is not better.

The plan does not have to spell out every required task. It must be the reference that will keep everyone on track and enable staff to complete tasks quickly. Emergencies are chaotic enough without the disorganization of an office that has a poor plan or none at all. A crisis is not the time to build lines of authority and relationships with response partners. Too often, the initial confusion and conflicting messages that can cripple an organization's credibility come from a lack of clear roles and responsibilities, and poorly defined lines of authority.

Don't discount the other important benefits of planning, they may be as important as the actual plan:

- Collecting information
- Working through decisions
- Building relationships and teams
- Assessing risks
- Considering various scenarios and contingencies
- Seeking consensus

Use a committee to write the plan. Choose this committee carefully so that all topics covered in the plan are represented by people who are knowledgeable on those topics. Meet regularly throughout the planning process and after the plan is complete. As new risks emerge or other organizations experience crises, have the team meet to discuss the implications for the plan.

When leadership changes, as this often occurs during a response, bring them into the planning process by asking them to review the plan and make suggestions. Some researchers point out that crisis planning is an ongoing process^{14,15} that is never actually completed because risks, resources, and people are always changing.

Reality Check

- Don't be surprised if agreements made in the sunshine of business-as-usual are suddenly changed during the bleak realities of a crisis.
- Keep the plan simple and remain flexible.
- Get done what's in your control.
- Try to move your important public health messages forward in a way that reaches the public and partners as quickly and accurately as possible.



Nine Steps for Success

Planning ahead does not eliminate risk. Its purpose is to make the most efficient use of time and resources. The value of planning should not be judged by the accuracy of its predictions, but by whether it helps optimize results in a changing environment.¹⁶

The following nine steps will be helpful during your planning phase:

1. Obtain signed endorsements from senior leadership: Senior leadership, such as directors and senior managers, must support the need for the crisis-planning process. Make certain they know the following:

- The process has been thought through
- The response planning is coordinated
- They have an important role in the plan's ownership

A couple of paragraphs endorsing the plan are sufficient. Senior management should sign and date the plan. They should sign and date it again, when it is updated. A sample introduction for a CDC crisis communication plan follows:

“CDC comes together during a crisis to help protect the health and safety of Americans. We also need to calm public fears during a crisis by communicating credible information and by promoting appropriate health actions.

Experts agree that most crises take an organization by surprise.^{17,18} Appropriate and timely communication allows CDC to work effectively with partners, engender public trust in its scientifically based health recommendations, and perform its public health mission.

Crisis communication planning helps CDC deal effectively with those unexpected crises or emergencies. This framework of action incorporates the ethical, professional, and guiding principles needed by CDC during a crisis to communicate to the media and public with confidence and credibility. We cannot predict or always avoid future crises, but we can do our part to be prepared.”

2. Designate responsibilities for the media, public, social media, and partner information teams: Decide who is in charge of the release of information to the public, including the media and partners. This information keeps partners and the public updated on the process, response outcomes, and any public health recommendations. It is also the information needed to respond to the public and partners based on their feedback. Whether individuals or teams of people attend to these tasks, it's important that they understand their responsibilities in advance.

If your organization is incapable of meeting the likely media, social media, partner, and public information needs during a public health emergency internally, ensure that the plan identifies where



this response support will reside. This may include a role as part of a city's or state's EOC. It is your responsibility to ensure that appropriate public health information is reaching the public and partners through the various available channels. Given the diversity of audiences and range of channels, this is critical.

Staff responsibilities can be defined through the National Incident Management System (NIMS).¹⁹ It provides a structure for the coordinated response, including four core functions:

- Information gathering
- Information dissemination
- Operations support
- Liaisons

You should include NIMS staff designations in your crisis communication plan. This will provide a clear means of determining staff responsibilities. Because NIMS is widely used, partner organizations and the media will recognize and understand the staff roles.

For further information on using NIMS as part of your communication plan, please see the NIMS subsection after this list for a discussion of communication activities in NIMS.

3. Information verification and clearance procedures: One core function of crisis communication is information clearance. Does your plan specify who absolutely must review a new piece of information before it's released from the organization or before it's incorporated into an overall release from a higher authority? Crisis communication involves a fundamental tension between two elements:

- The need to ensure that information is confirmed to be accurate through a clearance process
- The need to ensure that information is communicated quickly

Important clearance-related guidelines include the following:

- Release accurate information quickly. If you don't, your organization may publicly fall flat on its face. Use the following approaches:
 - Prioritize information as "need to know" versus "want to know" and get moving on what must be answered first.
 - If an answer to a "need to know" question has not yet been formulated, give the media and the public information about your process or system for getting that answer.

Release accurate information quickly. If you don't, your organization may publicly fall flat on its face.



- Have three people clear a document before it's released from the organization:
 - The communication director responsible for your organization's reputation
 - The policy director who is responsible for ensuring that the information does not counter organization policy
 - A subject matter expert (SME) who is both fast and knowledgeable
- Keep the legal department out of the clearance process unless the subject has specific legal implications.
- If appropriate, you may have others review and comment on the document, but not delay its release.
- Follow your organization's protocol to receive clearance from higher authorities.
- Ensure that response partners know what new information you're planning to release as a courtesy to those partners.
- Have the mechanism in place to give a courtesy check to those response agencies with a stake in your communication.
- Focus on content and information rather than form. Limit excessive tinkering with phrases. While the form of a message matters, form is not the function of the clearance process.
- Clear all information simultaneously and in person, whenever possible. Unless it is possible to get the primary clearance authorities in one room with the door closed and no phones, do the following:
 - Make three copies.
 - Take one copy to each person. Wait while he or she reviews and approves the document.
 - Point out any part of the document that needs careful consideration.
 - Ask if he or she would be comfortable seeing this as a news headline.
 - Reinforce that the information you've compiled and are attempting to get cleared answers important questions from the public, the media, and partners. It may also answer questions in response to troubling trends from your own analysis of where the subject might be headed.

Clear all information simultaneously and in person, whenever possible.

Work with personnel in your organization to keep the clearance process seamless:

- It's difficult to delegate clearance; be prepared to do it yourself.
- Be realistic about the time clearance will take, and build it into your schedule.



- The communication director will be busy and may delegate a surrogate to handle his or her part of the clearance chain. Accept this delegation.
 - Educate everyone involved in the development and release of information about clearance steps. Set an expectation for time from development to release.
 - Help responsible authorities understand that it is worse to release nothing than to release information that is not yet complete.
 - Get “need to know” information out the door fast.
 - Get “want to know” information released as soon as possible without straining relationships with authorities who must clear new information.
- Have as much information on a topic precleared as possible. This is a key aspect of emergency communication:
- Make sure that predeveloped information is sensitive to the conditions of the current crisis before it is released.
 - Choose words carefully from the start. People are far more sensitive in crises.

One key aspect of emergency communication is to have as much information on a topic precleared as possible.

4. Establish agreements on release authorities (who releases what, when, and how):

One ongoing challenge is coordination and determination of who is responsible for what. Inadequate understanding can lead to slow release of information. When drafting agreements, consider the following:

- Use this aspect of preplanning to reduce damaging conflicts.
- Place formal agreements on release authority in writing, but expect changes.
- Know that information is usually not exclusively owned by any one organization or agency. Typically, many levels of a response command could release information. Learn to work together on the release of information. Ask yourself these questions:
 - “Does it really matter who releases this information?”
 - “Isn’t getting information out quickly and accurately what really matters?”
- Once it’s released, it’s possible to incorporate the information into other messages for other public groups, partners, and audiences.



5. Have all media contact lists, including after-hour numbers, in place: At the heart of any crisis communication plan are contact lists. These lists include key leaders and representatives of stakeholder groups, partners, and, especially, members of the media. While many crisis plans maintain this information in database form on thumb drives or secure servers, it is also helpful to have access to hard copies as backup.

Try to have contacts for all major media outlets. These contact lists are the most vital part of the plan. When you create these lists, do the following:

- Include cell and landline phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and fax numbers.
- Include information about how to contact news directors and editors after hours; that's often when you will need them.
- Verify e-mail addresses and fax numbers periodically because they change regularly. This verification can be part of an annual tabletop exercise.

6. Plan procedures to coordinate with public health response teams: In a crisis, no communications team can function in isolation. The communication function should be part of the formal decision system. It should also be integrated into the larger crisis response team. This usually means having a formal, recognized role. Communication and coordination can't be an afterthought.

When you create these procedures, do the following:

- Include an organizational chart in your plan so you can quickly find people who are key resources.
- If you don't operate out of the EOC, find out who is in the EOC and make sure they know to contact you immediately.
- Let others in your organization know that, in some cases, you may be the first person to hear about a public health emergency, often from the media.
- Make sure that telephone numbers and after-hours contact information is included in the first emergency notification list.

Similar procedures should be in place for other response organizations or partners:

- Share contact information for your organization with partner organizations. They should be included as part of their communication plans. Swap names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, after-hours numbers, and expected roles and responsibilities.
- Obtain public health organization emergency response team after-hours contact numbers.



7. Designate spokespersons for public health issues and third-party validators: The crisis communication plan should specify public health emergency spokespersons and designated backup personnel. When you make a list of spokespersons, do the following:

- Do not include people solely based on their position in the organization. Rather, people should be selected according to their ability and availability.
- Prepare and elevate trained speakers to a higher authority, if they are needed.
- Identify all off-hour contacts, as emergencies often happen during nonworking hours.
- Train and refresh speakers frequently, perhaps as part of an annual tabletop exercise or more often. In addition, even if a key spokesperson, such as an elected official, will be speaking at the daily press conference, there are many other opportunities for others to communicate with the media at work or at public meetings.
- Include lists of likely speakers who have been trained.
- Line up experts outside the organization who can perform some of these duties and keep the public informed. Media and civic groups will appreciate the offer of alternative spokespersons.

8. Have agreements and procedures to join the EOC's JIC, if activated: The principle behind EOCs is that one centralized location for decisions facilitates coordination.¹⁸ Multiple EOCs operating within a local region will defeat that purpose. During the planning stage, it is important to connect with your EOC. Make sure your EOC operations chief's plan includes a role for your organization and its communication team. Usually, but not always, the EOC operations chief's plan will specify a JIC to coordinate communication functions and help integrate information systems. When you make these agreements, consider the following:

- Agree ahead of time on personnel staffing for the JIC and make this part of your plan.
- Establish the role key communication personnel will have in the JIC.
- Know that a considerable amount of work must be accomplished outside of the JIC.
- Remember that with smaller agencies you may not be able to operate 24/7 during a large-scale or long-term crisis. A combined EOC/JIC may be a critical resource.

A JIC is usually made up of PIOs of the responding agencies to coordinate and disseminate information to the public, typically via the media. They will also work to control any rumors or misinformation. The JIC typically uses the traditional public relations methods. JIC personnel do the following:

- Distribute press releases
- Post information on websites
- Hold press conferences transmitting information to the public



Increasingly, JICs incorporate social media into their communication practice by doing the following:

- Establishing or updating their own social media pages and feeds to respond to questions and comments
- Monitoring social media sites for rumors or misinformation that can be addressed

9. Develop procedures to secure needed resources: Space, equipment, and personnel to operate 24/7 during a crisis will be needed. At the local level, your JIC can help address resource needs. However, some public health emergencies that can tax an organization may not be large enough to trigger the operation of an EOC and a JIC.

Obtain agreements with other local or nongovernmental organizations for support if a JIC is not activated. During a crisis, supplies, personnel, equipment, and space are still needed. Based on a pre-crisis assessment, do the following:

- Identify needs and procurement mechanisms.
- Connect with the logistics part of the organization.
- Learn the procedures for acquiring resources and put that information into your plan.
- Tell emergency response commanders what your communication team needs before there is an emergency; don't wait until after one starts.
- Make a checklist of resources that should be included in the plan. An example can also be found at the end of this chapter. Office resources may include the following:
 - Space
 - Personnel
 - Equipment (computers, printers, scanners, telephones and lines, cell phones, and fax machines)
 - Basic office supplies, including pens and notebooks
 - Additional supplies such as cell phone chargers, extra batteries, and nonperishable food items like bottled water



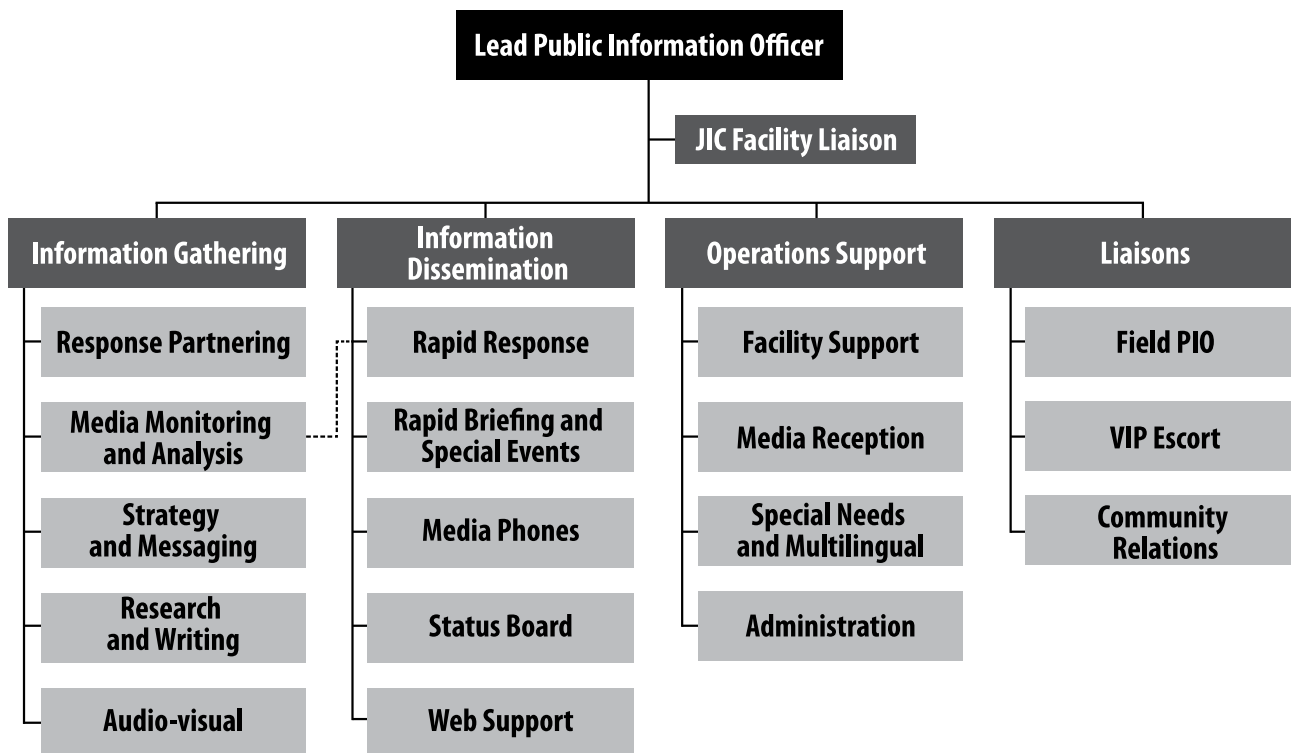
NIMS

In Chapter 1, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) was introduced as a set of federal procedures used by government agencies to organize crisis response. Under the nine steps for success in the Developing the Plan section of this chapter, it was explained that NIMS provides a logical means of designating staff responsibilities that will be understood by partner organizations and the media.

The public information systems described in NIMS were designed to effectively manage the two-way flow of public information in a crisis, regardless of the size and complexity of the situation or the number of agencies involved in the response.

Positions that PIOs and their staff may have to fill under NIMS are located under the JIC. Review the JIC structure and functions for a large-scale incident represented in Table 4–1. One person may do many functions, or one function may be staffed by many people, depending on the scope of the incident.

Table 4–1. NIMS Sample JIC for a Large Incident²⁰





The four core functions of NIMS^{19,20} should be part of the overall crisis communication plan:

1. Information gathering
2. Information dissemination
3. Operations support
4. Liaisons

While these are described as separate components, they must be closely integrated. With smaller incidents, an individual can serve in more than one of these communication functions.

Information gathering: This is critical not only to promote situational awareness but also to receive feedback on messages and how they are received and interpreted. Media monitoring and analysis, including social media, is a central function because the media remains a source of timely information during any crisis. Close coordination with other response agencies and partners, and their PIOs, to gather the most current information is also critical.

Information dissemination: This includes using a variety of channels to reach multiple audiences. These activities include general media relations, working with designated spokespersons, organizing news conferences, and providing briefings and updates. Inquiries and questions from the general public must also be addressed and should be documented through contact logs. In addition, officials and other key leaders must be briefed. These information dissemination activities should extend to Web support and social media.

Operation support: This involves a variety of communication activities, including addressing special needs and multilingual audiences through translation and other services. Facilities' support activities involve ensuring sufficient communications capacity to support operations.

Liaisons: They can provide two-way communication and coordination with key stakeholders and partners. Close coordination is necessary to achieve an effective response and create consistent messages.

The NIMS structure for the public information function is designed to be scalable and flexible. Smaller, regional incidents of shorter durations may require fewer resources and may not involve all activities. The general communication functions described by NIMS should be included in crisis plans. Some of the other general responsibilities that must be planned for as part of the emergency response include the following:

■ **Official responsible for command and control:**

- Activates the plan based on careful assessment of the situation and the expected demands for information by the media, partners, and the public



- Calls the crisis communication team together
- Directs the work related to the release of information to the media, public, and partners
- Coordinates with horizontal communication partners, as outlined in the plan, to ensure that messages are consistent and within the scope of the organization's responsibility
- Provides updates to the organization's director, EOC command, and other headquarters, as determined in the plan
- Advises the director and chain of command regarding information to be released, based on the organization's role in the response
- Ensures that CERC principles are employed in all contacts with media, public, and partner information release efforts
- Knows incident-specific policy, science, and situation
- Reviews and approves materials for release to the media, the public, and partners
- Obtains required clearance of materials for release to the media on policy or sensitive topic-related information
- Determines the operational hours and days, and reassesses these throughout the emergency response
- Ensures that resources are available, including personnel, technical resources, and mechanical supplies

■ **Official who directly interacts with the media:**

- Assesses media needs and organizes mechanisms, such as daily briefings in person, social media and website updates, and RSS feeds, to fulfill those needs during the crisis
- Triage the response to media requests and inquiries
- Ensures that media inquiries are addressed as appropriate
- Supports and briefs spokespersons
- Oversees the maintenance of media contact lists and contact logs
- Produces and distributes media advisories and press releases
- Produces and distributes materials such as fact sheets, Facebook and Twitter feeds, widgets, podcasts, and B-roll video



- Oversees media-monitoring systems and reports, including social media:
 - » Analyzing environment and trends to determine needed messages
 - » Determining what misinformation needs to be corrected
 - » Identifying concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis and the response
- Ensures that risk communication principles designed to build trust and credibility are incorporated into all public messages delivered through the media
- Acts as a member of the JIC or field site team for media relations
- Serves as a liaison between organizations through the JIC

■ **Official who directs public information activities:**

- Manages the mechanisms for responding to public requests for information via social media, telephone, in writing, or by e-mail
- Oversees public information monitoring systems and reports:
 - » Analyzing environment and trends to determine needed messages
 - » Determining what misinformation needs to be corrected
 - » Identifying concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis and the response
- Oversees and activates social media, telephone, and public e-mail correspondence response systems
- Organizes and manages the emergency response websites, Web pages, and social media
- Establishes and maintains links to other emergency response websites

■ **Official who directs partner and stakeholder information activities:**

- Establishes communication and coordination protocols based on prearranged agreements with identified partners and stakeholders
- Arranges regular partner briefings and updates, and establishes liaisons
- Solicits feedback and responds to partner information requests and inquiries
- Oversees partner and stakeholder monitoring systems and reports:
 - » Analyzing environment and trends to determine communication strategy
 - » Determining what misinformation needs to be corrected
 - » Identifying concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis and the response

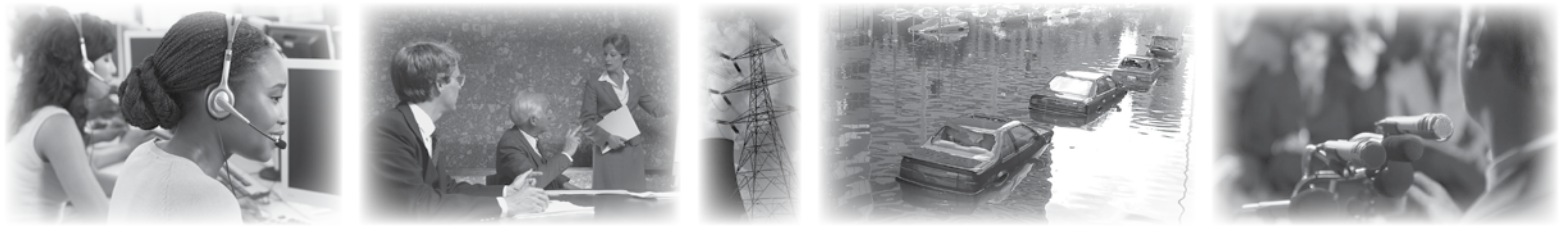


- Helps organize and facilitate official meetings and briefings to provide information and receive input from partners or stakeholders
- Oversees development lists and contact logs of key decision makers such as officials, legislators, and special interest groups
- Responds to special interest groups, and official requests and inquiries

■ **Official who develops content and material for public health emergencies:**

- Develops and establishes mechanisms and protocols to rapidly receive information from the EOC
- Translates EOC situation reports and meeting notes into information appropriate for public and partner needs
- Works with subject matter experts (SMEs) to create situation-specific fact sheets, Q&A documents, and updates
- Compiles information on possible public health emergency topics for release when needed
- Manages the development and testing of messages and materials for cultural and language requirements of special populations
- Coordinates with other communication team members regarding content and message needs
- Adapts messages based on analyses from media, social media, public, and partner monitoring systems and feedback

These systems of communication should also be linked and coordinated so that messages are consistent. For example, CDC evolved a system during the anthrax event that is still used: a press conference that is recorded is transcribed quickly. Both the text and the recording are put on the Web and archived. All groups have simultaneous access to the written record, thus helping to ensure greater accuracy and consistency. Internal staff uses these transcripts to help prepare other materials, such as FAQs.



The Importance of Establishing an Emergency Operations Center

During an emergency, it is imperative that organizations not only manage the crisis but also maintain normal, daily operations. By establishing an EOC in 2001, the individuals who were investigating and managing the anthrax case in Palm Beach, Florida, had the resources that were necessary for maintaining a unified and centralized approach to managing the crisis:

- Broadcast studio
- Computers
- Workstations
- Telephones
- Added equipment (for effectively investigating the situation and reporting information to the media and the public)

Their EOC was instrumental in allowing those involved in the crisis to focus on the situation in an environment that was dedicated to crisis management and resolution.

During a CDC emergency response, the EOC brings together scientists, program experts, and policy experts from across CDC to efficiently exchange information and connect with public health emergency response partners.

For multistate emergencies, or emergencies that affect many people, CDC provides additional public health resources and coordinates response efforts across multiple jurisdictions, both domestically and internationally. The improved 24,000-ft² EOC facility became operational in 2006. When fully staffed, it can accommodate up to 230 personnel per shift, for one to three shifts per day, to handle situations ranging from local interests to worldwide events.

CDC's Division of Emergency Operations (DEO) manages the EOC. To support state and local efforts during an emergency response, EOC staff coordinates deployment of CDC staff and equipment that CDC responders may need.





Planning for JIC Requirements

JICs are a crucial part of any EOC. They will need space, personnel, agreements, supplies, and equipment. Space will be needed not only for staff, but also for the JIC and for any press briefings. Personnel are key to an effective response. In many cases, there will simply not be enough trained communication personnel available in your agency. Agreements with other agencies to loan personnel can build surge capacity for a response. Supplies and equipment are necessary for any response, but you don't want to be hunting for them after the response has started. When you plan for using certain equipment, you will need to bear in mind certain technology considerations. Specific details on these items are listed:

■ **Space:**

- Find space to operate communication teams (and the JIC) outside of the EOC.
- Locate space for bringing media onsite when needed. It should be separate from the EOC and the JIC.
- Find quiet space to train and brief spokespersons.
- You will need conference space for team meetings.
- An office should be dedicated for equipment that is exclusively used by communication personnel. You cannot stand in line for copier use when facing media deadlines.
- You will need space to take breaks when necessary, whether for eating, sensory deprivation, rest, or even a nap.
- Identify offsite space your team can use in case the event damages your original space.

■ **Personnel:**

- Include trained personnel to either operate a 24/7 public and media information center or to support a JIC as part of a local EOC.
- Identify people qualified to take phone inquiries and respond to questions and comments on your social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Consider staff from throughout the health department as well as in partner organizations. Some agencies may contract out these services but a liaison is still required.
- In accordance with the policies and procedures of local jurisdictions, consider recruiting volunteers from the medical community, especially infectious disease specialists, to help with responding to other public health professionals in the area.
- An abundance of trained staff will save you from your worst errors by reducing fatigue and catching mistakes.



- Information technology and social media staff must be onsite and ready to handle technological difficulties, including high volume or overloads of communication systems like phone systems, internal computer servers, and Internet servers.
- To prevent burnout, personnel need scheduled breaks and other qualified people need to be available as replacements if the crisis response is prolonged.

■ **Contracts and memoranda of agreement:**

- Consider a contract with a comprehensive newswire service that will disseminate your information across a wide variety of platforms, such as print and broadcast news, the Internet, and social media sites. Think about using varied tools such as press releases, videos, images, e-mail, and social media tagging.
- Look into contracts with writers or public relations personnel who can augment your staff, especially with social media writing and monitoring expertise, if your organization doesn't have that type of staff.
- Think about contracting for administrative support and technical support.
- Consider using a contractor that can supply phone menus directing the caller to the type of interaction desired. The phone menu may offer the following options:
 - » General information about the threat
 - » Tip line listing particular actions people can take to protect themselves
 - » Reassurance and counseling
 - » Referral information for media requests for data or interviews
 - » Health-care worker referrals
 - » Referral information for epidemiologists or others needing to report cases
 - » Laboratory and treatment protocols
 - » Managers looking for policy statements for employees

■ **Supplies:** Keep a store of typical office supplies “for emergency only” to ensure they are there when you need them:

- Copier toner (what you start with is never enough)
- Printer ink
- Paper, notepads, and notebooks
- Pens, pencils, markers, highlighters, and erasable markers
- Mail supplies and supplies for express delivery services such as DHL, FedEx, UPS, and the U.S. Postal Service



- Sticky notes
- Standard press-kit folders
- Flash drives (thumb drives) and portable hard drives
- Color-coded everything (copy paper, folders, inks, etc.)
- Baskets to contain items that you're not ready to throw away
- Organizers to support your clearance and release system
- Expandable folders, with alphabet or days of the month
- Staplers (lots of them)
- Paper hole punch
- Three-ring binders
- Organization's press kit or its logo on a sticker
- Organization's letterhead
- Paper clips (all sizes)
- Tape

■ **Equipment:** Equipment to support communication to media and partners should be obtained before the crisis. Contracting during a crisis will create what will likely be damaging delays. Determine what you may need to do to provide this equipment if a crisis persists:

- Computers (desktop or laptop) loaded with secure Internet access, software programs, and documents needed for crisis communication and information sharing (e-mail lists, crisis communication plan, collaboration software, etc.)
- Dedicated computer servers with bandwidth to handle increased Internet traffic
- Landline phones with dedicated lines and 800MHz radios in case of a power outage or cell phone network overload
- Cell phone chargers and plenty of extra batteries
- Fax machines with numbers preprogrammed for broadcasting fax releases to media outlets and partners
- Computer printers, including at least one color printer
- A color copier machine and backup
- Extension cords
- Visible calendars, flow charts, bulletin boards, easels, and white boards
- Designated personal message board
- Press conference audio-visual equipment, such as portable microphones, a sound system, a projector and screen, and recording devices
- A podium or lectern and microphone
- TVs with cable or satellite hookup



- A DVD player
- A paper shredder
- An alternative power supply, such as a generator, for the EOC and the JIC
- Portable cots
- **Technology considerations:** Different channels and mechanisms of communication are appropriate at different times and for different audiences. The mechanisms most appropriate to communicate with the media, the public, and partners are listed:
 - Phone, including hotlines and cell phone numbers of direct contacts
 - Fax, including broadcast preprogrammed fax
 - E-mail, including the listservs or distribution lists used
 - Broadcast messaging systems, such as text messages, reverse 9-1-1, and e-mail
 - Web technologies such as social media (Facebook, Google+), blogs (yours, other health-related blogs, WordPress), microblogs (Twitter, Tumblr), and photo and video (for YouTube, Flickr, Skype)
 - Agency and partner websites
 - A partnership with other emergency response groups to use their e-mail and distribution lists
 - Mail and shipping services, such as the U.S. Postal Service, FedEx, and UPS
 - Face-to-face meetings using Web resources, including town hall meetings or press briefings
 - Partner association membership lists
 - Contracted press release wires
 - Media channels, such as radio, print, Web, and TV

As a general rule, it is appropriate to use multiple channels of communication to reach the broadest audience possible while ensuring that the messages are consistent.



Applying the Plan During the First 24 to 48 Hours

Be First, Be Right, Be Credible

The CERC values to “be first, be right, be credible” were presented in Chapter 1. These are critical during the highly chaotic, uncertain, and threatening first 24 to 48 hours of an emergency. Planning for the initial phase is vital because this phase can influence the subsequent development of the crisis. The initial phase will be triggered either by an organization’s identification of an unfolding event as a potential crisis or by intense media inquiry that is expected to be sustained for an indefinite amount of time. This phase is marked by the need for a quick assessment of the following:

- Potential response level required
- Facts to be assembled
- Actions to secure the necessary resources needed to meet the expected buildup of media and public information demand

Crisis communication planning should be designed to help manage the first 24–48 hours of an emergency and its associated intense media and public scrutiny.

Critical tasks during the initial phase of the crisis include:

- Verification
- Notification and coordination
- Assessment
- Initial media response
- Assignments
- Resource allocation

Tell the Media and the Public What You Know

Quickly update the media and the public on the status of research, facts, and investigations when an event arises. When Mount St. Helens erupted, many local residents may have questioned the dangers of the volcanic ash and dust cloud.^{21,22} Although U.S. Geological Survey scientists requested several weeks to have a panel review and evaluate the possible dangers, people needed answers quickly.

In a disaster situation, you have to provide people with the information you currently have and know to be true, and give them regular updates as you obtain additional information.



Verification

Early information about a possible crisis event, either from the media or from health-care professionals, may be unintentionally slanted. Evaluate the information, attempt to verify the magnitude of the event, and seek additional information to put the event into perspective regarding public and media interest. Helpful questions might include the following:

- Where did the information originate?
- Is the source credible?
- From which of the following did the information come?
 - Formal channels of communication, such as a CDC message or an Epi-Aid report
 - Informal channels of communication, such as a call from a county health official
 - Rumor, such as an e-mail chain, or a social media post
- Is the characterization of the event plausible and consistent with other events of this type?
- Is the information consistent with other sources that are reporting on the event?

Notification and Coordination

Once you have verified the event, notify managers in your organization immediately. The more quickly you notify the chain of command, the more rapidly you will be able to coordinate with partner organizations. This translates into more efficient responses with less difficulties. The communication plan should designate all of the people who must be notified.

Make sure the notification message only contains information that has been verified. Rumors are very destructive. Describe the event from a public or media perspective. If you anticipate, based on your risk analysis, that the event will produce intense media and public interest, share that opinion with those being notified. If the event has potential to grow, share that view as well.

Coordination means notifying people who may not be in the formal chain of command for emergency response but who may be partners in the response. You may be coordinating with members of your own organization or with partners outside your organization. For example, the director of health should be notified if the media alerted you to an emergency. Coordinating the emergency response with the communication representative of the local American Red Cross chapter may also be important.

Notification is formal and comes first. Coordination is generally less formal and is based on mutual respect and understanding of the organization's role in the community. Communication plans should identify those core people for notification and coordination who would work with your office during



any public health emergency. The plan should also identify those people or organizations that should be notified or with whom activities should be coordinated, according to the type of emergency that has occurred. For example, if the emergency involved animals, coordination with veterinary health representatives and the local humane society is in order.

Initial Media Response: Is the Media Beating on Your Door?

Assembling the facts is a priority for your team. One of the best ways to satisfy the media's (and, in some cases, the public's) need for information is to control the flow of information while establishing your organization as a credible information source:

- Do not give in to pressure to confirm or release information before it is confirmed by experts or emergency operation centers.
- Take the lead if you have the lead. If another organization is rightfully the lead, defer to them, continue to coordinate, and be as helpful as possible.
- Release some information initially, but be honest that your organization is still gathering information. The following are suggested responses for the media that give the time necessary to collect the facts:
 - “We’ve just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information right now.”
 - “All of our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control. I’m not going to speculate about the cause of the incident at this time.”
 - “I’m not the authority on this subject. Let me have [name of authority] call you right back.”
 - “We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I send it in about two hours?”

“One of the challenges in public health, when talking to the media, is talking to the media before you have all the information. . . . During a crisis, during a new outbreak where it’s all unknown, you’re not going to have all the information you’d like to have, but you still have to talk.”

*Richard Besser, M.D.,
Former Acting Director,
Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention*

For more information on notification, please review Checklist 4–2, “Notification Schedule,” at the end of this chapter.



Get Your Information Out Early

It is important, particularly with regard to disasters, to give the public some idea of the kinds of plans and procedures your organization is formulating to manage the crisis.

When documented cases of anthrax from spores being sent through the U.S. Mail were rampant, laboratories in Denver, Colorado, were unable to rule out the possibility of anthrax exposure in the case of a postal worker who was being treated for a suspicious respiratory illness. In turn, postal workers in Ft. Collins, who were not identified as being in direct threat of anthrax exposure, showed up at a clinic to receive antibiotics that were unnecessary.

In another situation in 2000, before state and local officials had made a formal decision about how the public should respond to a hurricane, many people in Florida and Georgia self-evacuated based on their analysis of what they saw on The Weather Channel.²³

Evaluate Required Response

During the initial phase, do a quick initial evaluation of the situation to help you plan the level of public information and media response that will be required. The following questions should be considered:

- Is the event acute? What if the event has already occurred and your organization is faced with explaining the event and the aftermath? For example, this could happen following a chemical release or a mistake in a Level 4 lab.
- Is the event evolving? The event is uncertain and may become more or less serious (such as identifying a novel influenza virus).
- Is the event a legitimate public health emergency requiring swift and widespread public education to prevent further morbidity and mortality? One example would be a multistate listeriosis outbreak.
- Is this the first, worst, biggest, etc.?
- Is the interest generated because of the event's novelty or is it a legitimate public health concern?
- Is the event occurring in a metropolitan area with many media outlets versus a sparsely populated area with fewer media outlets?
- Is the event regional, national, or international?
- Does the event involve children or special populations?
- Is the human outcome of the disease uncertain, such as long-term health effects?



- Is there a product, service, or industry potentially involved?
- Are there sensitive international trade or political relations involved?
- Is there, or will there be, an ongoing criminal investigation?

The following is a list of assessment questions that will help with the next critical task, assignments:

- Is this event within the scope of responsibility for your organization? Are you, or should you be, involved?
- Is the state or city health department at the epicenter of the event well-equipped and trained to manage a media response of this magnitude?
- Is the situation being managed? If so, how and by whom? What is the science behind the program?

Next Media Response Step

If, based on this evaluation, the public health emergency is wholly or partly within the jurisdiction of your agency, then release as many of the facts as possible to the media and the public. Credibility often relates to the following:

- The speed at which an agency appears to be involved in the recovery and response
- The accuracy of the information you provide
- Your level of openness, empathy, and determination to see it through

Present these elements in the first official statement or appearance with the media. It may take some time to develop a solution to the crisis. You will gain valuable time for your organization by sharing with the media the process your organization is developing to produce a reasonable and caring operation to resolve the crisis. In addition, you build goodwill. Take the opportunity to communicate early, but be careful not to speculate. Stick to the facts and to a commitment to a process to release more information as soon as possible.

As the crisis evolves, and before facing the media again, prepare answers to the following frequently asked questions about safety.

Individuals want your message to answer the following questions:

- Am I safe? How can I protect my family?
- What have you found out that my family and I should know about?
- Who or what caused this problem?
- Can you fix it? When?



The media and communities want your message to answer the following questions:

- Who is in charge?
- How are those who got hurt getting help?
- Is this thing being contained?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen? (Don't speculate. Repeat the facts of the event, describe the data collection effort, and describe treatment from fact sheets.)
- Did you know ahead of time that this might happen? Why wasn't this kept from happening (again)?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this (were notified of this, determined this)?
- What do these data (information, results) mean?
- What bad things aren't you telling us? (Don't forget the good.)

Assignments

Important areas of responsibility in a crisis communication operation include the following:

- Hands-on response to the media (messenger)
- The person or team who is in charge of managing the crisis communication operations (messenger)
- Collection of accurate and timely public health information translated into lay language valid to the media, the public, stakeholders, and partners (message)
- Environmental scanning and analysis to identify rumors, myths, errors, and trends (message)
- Rapid execution of support tasks that keep the information flowing (delivery method)
- Continued operation of tasks not related to the crisis event



Applying the Crisis Plan Throughout the Response

The first few hours of any event are usually very chaotic. This is a time of very high uncertainty where quick response can be critical. It is also a time where community-based organizations may be on their own. In many ways, a crisis communication plan is designed to preset these initial decisions so the organization can respond very quickly. While every event is unique, the following steps are largely universal.

Step 1: Verify the Situation

Situational awareness is the first step in an informed response. Information will be scarce, and many established channels of communication may be disrupted. Consider the following points while verifying the situation:

- Get the facts, and (to the degree possible) verify them with secondary sources.
- Find out where information originated and determine credibility. Was this a formal source, such as a Health Alert Network message; a communication from another agency; a CDC Epi-Aid; or from an informal channel, such as a nongovernmental partner?
- Question possible rumors or hoaxes, which can be found through traditional and social media.
- Determine whether the information is consistent with other reports.
- Determine whether the characterization of the event is plausible.
- Clarify information and understanding through SMEs.
- Assess the scope and scale of the event by answering questions such as, “how much?” “how many?” and “how big an area?”
- Begin to identify staffing and resource needs for the expected media and public interest.
- Consider ways to access additional information.
- Decide who should be notified of this potential crisis.

Step 2: Conduct Notifications

It is essential to carefully identify to following:

- Who should you include in your chain of command?
- Up to what level?
- Where within the scope of organization?



Some notifications may be mandatory while others may be necessary for a coordinated and effective response. Record who you notified, when, how, and if they were reached.

As noted in Table 4–2, notification procedures vary by state and local jurisdictions. Know what procedures govern this particular area of responsibility.

Table 4–2. General Guidelines for Notification

Local agencies	State agencies	Federal agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law enforcement • Public health organization • Emergency Medical Services • Hospitals • Fire departments • Medical examiner • Local Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—Emergency Management Agency • Local general service organizations* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State public health • State • DHS—Emergency Management Agency • Law enforcement • Emergency Medical Services • State fire service • National guard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHS • FEMA • FBI • CDC • U.S. Public Health Service • Department of Defense • U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

* Varies depending on crisis, but could include schools, faith-based organizations, nonprofit disaster relief agencies (e.g., American Red Cross, Salvation Army), and public works (e.g., water, power, sewer).

Step 3: Conduct Crisis Assessment (Activate Crisis Plan)

Throughout the event, it is important to continue to gather information and update situational awareness. Try to determine the severity of the situation, what information should be communicated, the target audience, and the potential harm on communication operations, resources, and staffing.

These updates require ongoing research through media monitoring and through working with other response agencies, public health partners, and the public. The following questions will help focus these efforts:

- What organization, office, or individual is in charge of managing the crisis? Ensure that direct and frequent contact with the office in charge is possible.
- What happened and what responses are occurring? Continue to gather and check the facts.
- What is your organization doing to address this crisis?
- What other agencies are collecting information and how is that being compiled?



- What are other agencies and organizations doing in the response?
- Who is being affected by this crisis? What are their perceptions? What do they want and need to know? How can they be reached?
- What should the public be doing?
- What is being reported on the Web and in the media? Activate formal and informal monitoring systems.
- What is being said about the event? Is the information accurate? Determine the consistency of information across sources.

Step 4: Organize Assignments Quickly

The initial organization around an event involves assigning people responsibilities. Much of this will be predetermined by the crisis plan. Some modifications may be required based on availability of personnel and the nature of the event. Organizational processes can be divided according to the immediate and the ongoing issues.

- **Immediate issues:**

- Determine who is managing the event from an operations, programmatic, and scientific perspective.
- Consider how communication coordinates with the program staff in charge of managing the crisis. What meetings should communication staff attend?
- What are the crisis communication teams (media, Web, public, partner, stakeholder, and support)? Are they operational?
- What are the current, most pressing priorities?
- What resources are needed? Is staffing sufficient?
- Who is the spokesperson for this event and what support might he or she need (i.e., SMEs as additional spokespersons, additional briefing or training, cultural liaisons)?
- At this point, should communication teams operate 10, 12, 20, or 24 hours per day and 5, 6, or 7 days per week?
- Will communication staff be expected to travel?
- Are supplemental funds needed?
- Is contractor support needed?



■ **Ongoing organizational issues:**

- What is the potential for the crisis to get worse?
- Will events result in more intense public or media interest?
- Have rumors or points of conflict emerged?
- How should the organization respond to these issues? Is there a current response and is it adequate?
- Should the organization continue to be a source of information to the media about this crisis? Would some issues be more appropriately addressed by other groups or agencies?
- Are the teams operating with approximately equal effectiveness? How could efficiency be improved?
- Is the clearance process operating efficiently? How can it be improved?
- Are resources sufficient? Should staff resources be reallocated?
- Should the organization reset times for daily updates to the media or cancel the regular updates?
- Are daily or weekly subject matter expert briefings appropriate to reduce the demand for one-on-one interviews with these experts?
- Should personnel who have been temporarily assigned to the crisis be returned to normal duties?
- Should hours of operation be increased or reduced?
- Are supplemental funds needed to meet public and media demand for information?
- What is the organization learning from the public and the media that could be useful to outbreak investigators and policy managers?

In both immediate and long-term issues, partner coordination is critical. Questions about partner involvement might include:

- Who are the partner organizations (traditional and emergent) of this event? Have they been briefed? Are they concerned about their own reputations?
- Which partners are or should be involved in the response? How can coordination occur?
- Can a partnership improve the response? If so, who and how will you engage them?
- Do partners wish to get involved in the response? If so, who and how?



Step 5: Prepare Information and Obtain Approvals

Rapid clearance of information for release comes with inherent tension and challenges. The approval process is unique to each organization. This function includes all message and development activities, the approval process, and the coordination of information within an organization. Several questions are important to the approval process:

- Who are the audiences, both immediate and remote? Who's been affected by this event? Who's upset or concerned? Who needs to be alerted?
- What are the audiences' perceptions, backgrounds, and values?
- What are their immediate and long-term information needs and wants?
- What do media personnel want to know?
- How can your organization demonstrate appropriate empathy?
- What are the facts? What happened?
- What is the organization's stance on the issue? Are there policies or values that are relevant to this issue?
- What is your organization doing? How is your organization solving the problem?
- What can your organization do to keep this from happening again?
- What other agencies or groups are involved and what are they saying?
- What should the public be doing?
- What public information is available and when will more information be available?

Step 6: Release Information Through Prearranged Channels

The crisis and emergency communication function at its core is about releasing information to key audiences. Anticipating likely questions from the media and recognizing their role can improve the effectiveness of communication. Like emergency management professionals, reporters are professionals doing an important job and are likely to be cooperative, particularly during the initial stage of a crisis. When information is effectively delivered to the media, the chances of inaccurate reporting are reduced. It may help you to anticipate likely media questions such as the following:

- Who's in charge?
- What are you doing for the people who are hurt?
- Is the situation under control?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?



- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this (were notified of this, determined this)?
- What do these data or results mean?
- Are there bad things you aren't telling us?
- When can we get more information?

When talking to the media, some basic kinds of information can generally be provided:

- Provide only information that has been approved and cleared by the appropriate channels. Don't speculate and don't over-reassure.
- Repeat the facts about the event.
- Describe the data collection and investigation process.
- Describe what your organization is doing about the crisis.
- Describe what other organizations are doing.
- Explain what the public should be doing.
- Describe how to obtain more information about the situation.

Step 7: Obtain Feedback and Conduct Crisis Evaluation

As soon as practical following a crisis, conduct an evaluation of the organization's response. Get direct feedback from key audiences. Assess what is being reported in the mainstream and new media. This will allow messages to be adjusted to address deficiencies or correct problems. These assessments are also important in the learning process:

- Keep notes or audio record observations made during the initial phase of the crisis.
- Identify the needs of special audiences, including any special-needs populations or stigmatized groups.
- Compile and analyze comments and criticisms from various audiences, partners, agencies, and stakeholders.
- Gather and analyze media coverage and Web activity.
- Conduct a hot wash (an immediate review of what happened, what went right, and what went wrong) to capture lessons learned.
- Develop a "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" report on the crisis communication operation. Report your results to your organization's leadership.



- Share results within your organization.
- Determine the need for any changes to the crisis communication plan.
- Determine if there is a need to improve policies and processes.
- Incorporate changes with appropriate training into your organization.
- Revise crisis plan policies and procedures based on lessons learned.

Step 8: Conduct Public Education

Once the crisis begins to subside, your organization may need to carry out additional public education activities. Because the public is attending to the event, this may be a chance to improve public understanding, support, and preparation. The public may also be more receptive to information and behavioral change. Consider the following activities:

- Assess the need for your organization to educate your audience about related public health issues related to this crisis.
- Determine the public's perceptions and information needs related to this crisis. Are there any misperceptions or misunderstandings that need to be corrected?
- Does the public understand the organization's health messages on this issue? Is the public taking appropriate actions?
- Decide if audiences not involved in the crisis should be targeted for public education.
- Should a public health message related to this crisis event be incorporated into other health communication activities such as Public Health Week or National Infant Immunization Week?
- Should this event be used to highlight any related public health messages?
- Should any websites be updated as a result of this crisis?
- Should any of the crisis materials be institutionalized?
- Would a series of postcrisis, reproduced articles be useful in this situation?

Step 9: Monitor Events

Monitoring should occur at all points. It provides ongoing feedback and determines how messages or the general communication strategy should be changed. Crisis monitoring protocols include the following:

- Media monitoring, including television, radio, mainstream print, and specialized print
- Internet monitoring, including social media and related websites
- Ongoing exchange of information with key partners, such as other organizations and state health departments, SMEs, and partners
- Public opinion monitoring and collection of other relevant information



Conclusion

Planning is the most important step to ensure an effective response using CERC. It takes considerable time and effort to develop and maintain a crisis communication plan. Understanding the features of a plan, as well as the types of information to include and the kinds of questions asked, are vital to the plan's success.

Plans should not try to answer all the questions or determine all the decisions, but they should reveal a process. This is especially true in the first 24 to 48 hours. By doing so, your plan buys the crisis communicator important time and helps ensure that the initial response is effective.



Checklist 4–1: First 48 Hours

Critical First Steps After Verification:

Notification:

- Use your crisis plan's notification list. Make certain that your chain of command has been notified and they know you are involved.
- Ensure that your leadership is aware of the emergency, especially if awareness of the event comes from the media and not the EOC. Let them know you are involved.
- Give leadership your first assessment of the emergency from a communication perspective and inform them of your next steps. Remember: Be first, be right, be credible.

Coordination:

- Contact your local, state, and federal partners now.
- Contact your FBI counterpart, if there is potential for criminal investigation.
- Secure a spokesperson as designated in the plan.
- Initiate alert notification and call in extra communication personnel, per the plan.
- Connect with the EOC and make your presence known.

Media:

- Be first: Provide a statement that your agency is aware of the emergency and is involved in the response.
- Be right: Begin monitoring the media for misinformation that must be corrected.
- Be credible: Tell the media when and where to get updates from your agency.
- Give facts: Don't speculate. Ensure partners are saying the same thing.

The public:

- Trigger your public information toll-free number operation. Do this now if you anticipate that the public will seek reassurance or information directly from your organization. Adjust hours of operation and the number of on-call managers as needed.
- Use your initial media statement as your first message.



- ❑ Ensure that your statement expresses empathy and acknowledges public concern about the uncertainty.
- ❑ Give the precleared facts you have and refer the public to other information sources as appropriate.
- ❑ Remind people that your agency has a process in place to mitigate the crisis.
- ❑ Start call monitoring to catch trends or rumors now.

Partners and Stakeholders:

- ❑ Send a basic statement to partners and stakeholders to let them know you are thinking about them. Get them involved as needed.
- ❑ Use your prearranged notification systems, preferably e-mail lists.



- Engage leadership to make important first phone calls, based on your plan. Have them reach partners and key stakeholders to let them know your agency is responding.

- Use the internal communication system, probably e-mail, to notify employees that their agencies are involved in the response and updates will follow. Ask for their support.

Resources:

- Disseminate contact lists as appropriate.
- Conduct the crisis risk assessment and implement assignments and hours of operation accordingly.
- Stake out your preplanned place in the EOC or adjoining area.

Checklist 4-2. Notification Schedule

Emergency Risk Communication: Immediate Response to Inquiries

By phone to media:

- “We’ve just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?”
- “All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I’m not going to speculate about the cause of the incident. How can I reach you when I have more information?”
- “I’m not the authority on this subject. Let me have XXXX call you right back.”
- “We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about two hours?”
- “You may check our website for background information and I will fax or e-mail you with the time of our next update.”

At the incident site or press availability:

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 (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, e.g., 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, we will provide it. We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.

Source: CDC Public Health Training Network satellite and Web broadcast *CDC Responds: Risk Communication and Bioterrorism*, December 6, 2001, Barbara Reynolds, CDC Crisis Communication Plan, Draft 1999.

Checklist 4–3. Public Information Emergency Response Call Tracking

Time of call: _____ A.M. P.M.

Nature of call:

- Specific information contained in stock materials:
 - Disease or illness-related
 - Treatment-related
 - Prevention-related
 - Clarify recommendations
 - Current status of the incident
 - Hot topic 1 _____
 - Hot topic 2 _____

- Request for referral:

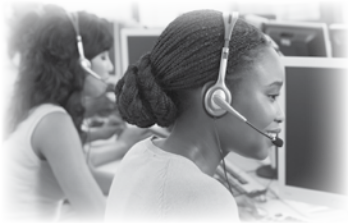


- For more health information
- For medical attention
- Other _____

Feedback to agency:

- Complaint about specific contact with agency
- Complaint about recommended actions
- Concern about ability to carry out recommended action
- Report possible cases or markers (e.g., dead birds for West Nile or increased absences from place of employment)
- Rumor or misinformation verification (briefly describe)

Outcome of call:



- Calmed caller based on scripted information
 - Referred caller to:
 - Health expert outside the department
 - Personal doctor or health care professional
 - Emergency room
 - Red Cross or other non-government organization
 - FEMA or state emergency management agency

Action Needed:

- None
- Return call to:
 - Caller's name: _____
 - Telephone number: _____
 - Gender: M F
- Return Call urgency:
 - Critical (respond immediately)
 - Urgent (respond within 24 hours)
 - Routine Call taken by: _____
 - Date: _____

Checklist 4-4. Incident Media Call Triage Sheet

Deadline: 2 hours Today A.M. Today P.M. ASAP Other

Media outlet:

- Local ____ TV ____ Magazine ____ Blog ____ Other
- Regional ____ Radio ____ Daily/Wire ____ Website
- National

Caller's name (print first and last):

Caller's contact information:

Phone(s):
 Fax:
 E-mail:

Request:

SME*
 questions



Interview (by name request?) _____

Background/B-roll

Fact check

Update

Return call to press officer

Response/Investigation

Health/disease issue/treatment

Hot issue 1 _____

Hot issue 2 _____

Topic:

Numbers

Other

Action needed:

Return call expected from PA** or press officer

Return call expected from SME*

Comments:

PA suggested triage priority:**

Critical(respond immediately)

Urgent (respond within 24 hours)

Routine

PA** answered question

PA referred to Internet

PA referred to CIO

PA referred to outside CDC

PA other

No action needed; call closed by:

Taken by: _____

Time: _____ A.M. _____ P.M.

Date: S M T W T F S _____

* SME = Subject Matter Expert

** PA = Press Assistant

Checklist 4–5. Needs Assessment for Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication



Planning, Research, Training, and Evaluation

- Yes No Does your organization have an crisis and emergency risk communication operational plan for public information and media, partner, and stakeholder relations?
- Yes No Have you coordinated your planning with the community or state emergency operation center?
- Yes No Have you coordinated your planning with other response organizations or competitors?
- Yes No Have designated spokespersons received media training and risk communication training?
- Yes No Do the spokespersons understand crisis and emergency risk communication principles to build trust and credibility?

If Your Organization Has a Plan, Does It Have the Following Elements:

- Yes No Designated responsibilities for public information team?
- Yes No Information verification and clearance procedures?
- Yes No Agreements on information release authorities (who releases what, when, and how)?
- Yes No Regional and local media contact list, including after-hours news desks?
- Yes No Procedures to coordinate with the public health organization response teams?
- Yes No Designated spokespersons for public health issues in an emergency?
- Yes No Public health organization emergency response team after-hours contact numbers?
- Yes No Contact numbers for emergency information partners such as governor's public affairs officer, local FBI public information special agent in charge, local or regional department of agriculture or veterinarian public information officers, Red Cross and other nongovernmental organizations?
- Yes No Agreements and procedures to join the Joint Information Center (JIC) of the emergency operations center, if activated?
- Yes No Procedures to secure needed resources such as space, equipment, and personnel, to operate the public information operation during a public health emergency 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, if needed?



If Your Organization Has a Plan, Does It Have the Following Elements:

- Yes No Identified methods of information dissemination to public, stakeholders, and partners such as websites, Twitter feeds, e-mail lists, broadcast fax, door-to-door leaflets, and press releases, during a crisis?

Message and Audiences

- Yes No The following are types of incidents that could require intense public information, media, and partner communication responses:

- Infectious disease outbreak (e.g., pandemic influenza, cholera, E. coli infection)?
- Bioterrorism (e.g. anthrax, smallpox)
- Chemical emergencies (e.g., nerve agents, oil spill)
- Explosions (e.g., explosions, terrorist bombing)
- Natural disasters and severe weather (e.g. earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes)
- Radiation emergencies (e.g., dirty bomb, nuclear accident)

- Yes No Have you identified special populations, such as the elderly, people who speak a first language other than English, Tribal communities, and border populations? List any specific subpopulations, such as tribal nations, persons with chronic respiratory illnesses, and unvaccinated seniors, that need to be targeted with specific messages during a public health emergency related to your organization.

- Yes No Have you identified your organization’s partners who should receive direct information and updates (not solely through the media) from your organization during a public health emergency?



Message and Audiences

- Yes No Have you identified all stakeholder organizations or populations who should receive direct communication during a public health-related emergency? These are groups or organizations your organization believes have an active interest in monitoring activities, to whom you are most directly accountable, other than official chain of command.
- Yes No Have you planned ways to reach people according to their reactions to the incident (fight or flight)? Are messages, messengers, and methods of delivery sensitive to all types of audiences in your area of responsibility?
- Yes No Are there mechanisms and resources in place to create messages for the media and public under severe time constraints, including methods to clear these messages within the emergency response operations of your organization? Make sure to include cross clearance in this consideration.
- Yes No Have you identified how you will perform media evaluation, content analysis, and public information call analysis in real time during an emergency to ensure adequate audience feedback?
- Yes No Have you developed topic-specific pre-crisis materials for identified public health emergency issues, or identified sources of these materials if needed:
- Yes No Topic fact sheet (e.g., description of the disease, public health threat, treatment?)
 - Yes No Public Questions and Answers?
 - Yes No Partner Questions and Answers?
 - Yes No Resource fact for media, public, or partners to obtain additional information?
 - Yes No Web access and links to information on the topic?
 - Yes No Recommendations for affected populations?
 - Yes No Background B-roll for media use on the topic?
 - Yes No List of subject matter experts outside your organization who would be effective information sources for the public and the media regarding your activities during a public health emergency?



Messenger

- Yes No Have you identified public health spokespersons for media and public appearances during an emergency?

If Yes, Have You...

- Yes No Identified persons by position, such as a media spokesperson or a community meeting speaker, to act as spokespersons for multiple audiences and formats about public health issues during an emergency?
- Yes No Ensured that the spokespersons understand their communication roles and responsibilities and will incorporate them into their expected duties during the crisis?

Methods of Delivery and Resources

- Yes No Does your organization have “go kits” for public information officers who may have to abandon their normal place of operation during a public health emergency or join a JIC?

Do the Kits Include...

- Yes No Computer(s) with access to the Internet and e-mail?
- Yes No CD-ROM, DVD, or flash drives containing the elements of the crisis communication plan, including media contact lists, public health contact lists, organization contact lists, partner contact lists, and information materials?
- Yes No Cell phone or satellite phone, wireless device, etc.?
- Yes No Funding mechanism, such as a credit card, that can be used to purchase operational resources as needed?
- Yes No Manuals and background information necessary to provide needed information to the public and the media?
- Yes No Care and comfort items for the public information operations staff?
- Yes No Have you identified the mechanisms that are or should be in place to ensure multiple channels of communication to multiple audiences during a public health emergency?

Channels of Communication

- Yes No Have you identified the mechanisms that are or should be in place to ensure multiple channels of communication to multiple audiences during a public health emergency?



If Yes, Do Mechanisms Include...

- Yes No Media channels such as print, TV, radio, and Web?
- Yes No Websites, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media?
- Yes No Phone banks?
- Yes No Town hall meetings?
- Yes No Listserv e-mail?
- Yes No Broadcast fax?
- Yes No Letters by mail?
- Yes No Subscription newsletters?
- Yes No Submissions to partner newsletters?
- Yes No Regular or special partner conference calls?
- Yes No Door-to-door canvassing?
- Yes No Are contracts or agreements in place to post information to broadcast fax or e-mail systems?
- Yes No Have locations for press conferences been designated and resourced?

Personnel

- Yes No Have you identified employees, contractors, fellows, and interns currently working for you or available to you in an emergency that have skills in the following areas:
- Yes No Public affairs specialist?
- Yes No Health communication specialist?
- Yes No Communication officer?
- Yes No Health education specialist?
- Yes No Training specialist?
- Yes No Writer/editor?
- Yes No Technical writer/editor?



Personnel

- Yes No Audio/visual specialist?
- Yes No Internet/Web design specialist?
- Yes No Social media specialist?
- Yes No Others who contribute to public and provider information?
- Yes No Have you identified who will provide the following expertise or execute these activities during a public health emergency (including backup):

Command and Control

- Yes No Directs the work related to the release of information to the media, the public, and partners?
- Yes No Activates the plan, based on careful assessment of the situation and the expected demands for information by the media, partners, and the public?
- Yes No Coordinates with horizontal communication partners, as outlined in the plan, to ensure that messages are consistent and within the scope of the organization's responsibility?
- Yes No Provides updates to the organization's director, EOC command, and higher headquarters, as determined in the plan?
- Yes No Advises the director and chain of command regarding information to be released, based on the organization's role in the response?
- Yes No Ensures that risk communication principles are employed in all contact with the media, the public, and partner information release efforts?
- Yes No Advises on incident-specific policy, science, and the current situation?
- Yes No Reviews and approves materials for release to the media, the public, and partners?
- Yes No Obtains required clearance of materials for release to the media on policy or sensitive topic-related information not previously cleared?
- Yes No Determines the operational hours and days, and reassesses throughout the emergency response?
- Yes No Ensures resources are available, such as personnel, technical resources, and mechanical supplies?



Media

- Yes No Assesses media needs and organizes mechanisms to fulfill media needs during the crisis, such as daily briefings in person versus a website update?
- Yes No Triage the response to media requests and inquiries?
- Yes No Ensures that media inquiries are addressed as appropriate?
- Yes No Supports and briefs spokespersons?
- Yes No Develops and maintains media contact lists and call logs?
- Yes No Produces and distributes media advisories and press releases?
- Yes No Produces and distributes materials such as fact sheets and B-roll?
- Yes No Oversees media monitoring systems and reports (e.g., analyzing environment and trends to determine needed messages, determining what misinformation needs to be corrected, identifying concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis and the response)?
- Yes No Ensures that risk communication principles to build trust and credibility are incorporated into all public messages delivered through the media?
- Yes No Acts as member of the JIC of the field site team for media relations?
- Yes No Serves as liaison between organizations through the JIC?

Direct Public Information

- Yes No Manages the mechanisms for responding to public requests for information via social media, telephone, in writing, or by e-mail?
- Yes No Oversees public information monitoring systems and reports (e.g., analyzing environment and trends to determine needed messages; determining what misinformation needs to be corrected; identifying concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis and the response)?
- Yes No Oversees and activates social media, telephone, public e-mail correspondence response systems?
- Yes No Organizes and manages the emergency response Web sites, Web pages, Facebook page and other social media?



Direct Public Information

- Yes No Establishes and maintains links to other emergency response Web sites?

Partner and Stakeholder Information

- Yes No Establishes communication protocols based on prearranged agreements with identified partners and stakeholders?
- Yes No Translates EOC situation reports and meeting notes into information appropriate for public and partner needs?
- Yes No Works with subject matter experts (SMEs) to create situation-specific fact sheets, Q&As, and updates?
- Yes No Manages the development and testing of messages and materials for cultural and language requirements of special populations?
- Yes No Coordinates with other communication team members regarding content and message needs?
- Yes No Adapts messages based on analysis from media, social media, public, and partner monitoring systems, SME clearance, and feedback?
- Yes No Guides documents through formal clearance process before they are released to the media, the public, or partner organizations?

Content and Material for Public Health Emergencies

- Yes No Develops and establishes mechanisms and protocols to rapidly receive information from the EOC
- Yes No Translates EOC situation reports and meeting notes into information appropriate for public and partner needs
- Yes No Works with subject matter experts (SMEs) to create situation-specific fact sheets, Q&As, and updates
- Yes No Manages the development and testing of messages and materials for cultural and language requirements of special populations



Content and Material for Public Health Emergencies

- Yes No Coordinates with other communication team members regarding content and message needs
- Yes No Adapts messages based on analysis from media, social media, public, and partner monitoring systems, SME clearance, and feedback
- Yes No Guides documents through formal clearance process before they are released to the media, the public, or partner organizations

Suggestions to Consider about Resources

Space

- Yes No You have space to operate communication teams or the JIC outside the EOC. A place is also needed to bring media on site that is separate from the EOC and the JIC.
- Yes No You have quiet space to quickly train and brief spokespersons.
- Yes No You have conference space for team meetings.
- Yes No You have office space dedicated for equipment exclusive to your use. You cannot stand in line for the copier when facing media deadlines.
- Yes No You have space where staff can take breaks when necessary, whether for eating, sensory deprivation, rest, or even a nap.
- Yes No An offsite space is identified in case the crisis damages your original space.

Contracts and Memoranda of Agreement(s)

- Yes No Consider a contract with a comprehensive newswire service that will disseminate your information across a wide variety of platforms, such as print and broadcast news, Internet, and social media sites. Also consider using a variety of communication tools, such as press releases, videos, images, e-mail, and social media tagging.
- Yes No Consider contracts with writers or public relations personnel who can augment your staff, especially persons with social media writing and monitoring expertise, if your organization doesn't have those personnel.



Contracts and Memoranda of Agreement(s)

- Yes No Consider a contract for administrative support and technical support.
- Yes No Consider a phone system/contractor that can supply a phone menu that directs the type of caller and level of information desired:
- General information about the threat
 - Tip line listing particular actions people can take to protect themselves
 - Reassurance/counseling
 - Referral information for media requests for information or interviews
 - Referral information for health-care/medical facility workers
 - Referral information for epidemiologists or others needing to report cases
 - Laboratory and treatment protocols
 - Managers looking for policy statements for employees

Equipment

- Yes No Computers (desktop or laptop) loaded with secure Internet access, software programs, and documents needed for crisis communication and information sharing. These items include e-mail lists, the crisis communication plan, and collaboration software.
- Yes No Landline phones with dedicated lines and 800 MHz radios, in case of power outage or cell phone network overload
- Yes No Fax machines with numbers preprogrammed for broadcast fax releases to media outlets and partners
- Yes No Dedicated computer server with additional bandwidth to handle increased Internet traffic
- Yes No Computer printers, including at least one color printer
- Yes No Tables (You will need a large number of tables.)



Equipment

- Yes No Color copier machine and backup
- Yes No Cell phones, pagers, personal data devices, and e-mail readers
- Yes No Extension cords
- Yes No Visible calendars, flow charts, bulletin boards, and easels
- Yes No Designated personal message board
- Yes No Small refrigerator
- Yes No A/V equipment to host press conferences such as portable microphones, sound system, multibox or press box, projector and screen, and recording devices
- Yes No Podium
- Yes No TVs with cable hookup
- Yes No DVD player
- Yes No Paper shredder
- Yes No Alternative power supply, such as a generator, for the EOC and the JIC
- Yes No Portable cots



Equipment

Yes No

Supplies (all labeled “for emergency only use”):

- Copier toner
- Printer ink
- Paper, notepads, and notebooks
- Pens, pencils, markers, highlighters, and erasable markers
- Supplies for mail, FedEx, UPS, and other shipping services
- Sticky notes
- Standard press kit folders
- Flash drives and portable hard drives
- Color-coded everything (copy paper, folders, inks, etc.)
- Baskets to contain items that you’re not ready to throw away
- Organizers to support your clearance and release system
- Expandable folders with alphabet or days of the month
- Staplers (lots of them)
- Paper punch
- Three-ring binders
- Organization’s press kit or its logo on a sticker
- Organization letterhead
- Paper clips (all sizes)
- Tape



References

1. CDC. Health Alert Network (HAN) [online]. 2012 Apr. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/han/>.
2. Reynolds BJ. Crisis emergency risk communication: by leaders for leaders [online]. 2004. [cited 2012 May]. p. 40. Available from URL: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/erc/leaders.pdf>.
3. Cole G, Sokler L. CDCynergy. Emergency risk communication (Beta version). CDC, Office of Communication [online]. 2003. [cited 2012 May]. Available from: <http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/>.
4. Reynolds BJ. CDC. Crisis emergency risk communication. Quick guide [online]. 2008. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/pdf/cerc_guide_basic.pdf.
5. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. National Response Framework [online]. 2008 Jan. [cited 2012 May]. p. 58-59. Available from URL: <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-core.pdf>.
6. Cole TW, Fellows KL. Risk communication failure: a case study of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina. *South Commun J*. 2008 July-Sep;73(3):211-228.
7. Kapucu N. Interagency communication networks during emergencies: boundary spanners in multiagency coordination. *Am Rev Public Adm* 2006;36(2):207-225.
8. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. The 9/11 commission report: Final report of the national commission on terrorist attacks upon the United States. New York (NY): W.W. Norton & Company; 2004.
9. Hall K, Landsberg M. Earthquake in Japan, shock and fury. *Los Angeles Times Home Edition*. [online] 2011 Mar 12. [cited 2012 May].
10. McCurry J, Sample I. Japan's earthquake preparation has spared it from a far worse fate. *The Guardian*. UK and world news. [online]. 2011 Mar 11. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/11/japan-earthquake-preparation>.
11. Glanz J, Onishi N. Japan's strict codes and drills are seen as lifesavers. *The New York Times* [online]. Late ed. 2011 Mar 12. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/12/world/asia/12codes.html?pagewanted=all>.
12. Sellnow TL, Seeger MW, Ulmer RR. Chaos theory, informational needs, and natural disasters. *J Appl Commun Res* 2002;30(4):269-292.
13. Clarke LB. *Mission improbable: using fantasy documents to tame disaster*. Chicago (IL): The University of Chicago Press; 1999.
14. Light PC. Predicting organizational crisis readiness: perspectives and practices toward a pathway to preparedness [online]. 2008. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: http://www.nyu.edu/ccpr/pubs/OrgPreparedness_Report_NYU_Light_8.18.08.pdf.
15. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Practical information on crisis planning: a guide for schools and communities [online]. 2007 Jan. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>.
16. Dyal W. *Program management: a guide for improving program decisions*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta, Georgia. 1990.



17. Sellnow TL, Seeger MW, Ulmer RR. Effective crisis communication: a definition of crisis communication. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications, Inc.; 2011. Chapter 1, p. 5.
18. Telg R. Risk and crisis communication: when things go wrong. University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences [online]. 2010 Jul. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc093>.
19. Federal Emergency Management Agency. National Incident Management System (NIMS).[online]. 2008 Dec. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf.
20. Federal Emergency Management Administration. Basic guidance for public information officers (PIOs). National Incident Management System (NIMS). [online] 2007 Nov. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=3095>.
21. Baxter PJ, Ing,R, Falk H, French J, Stein GF, Bernstein RS, et al. Mount St. Helens eruptions, May 18 to June 12, 1980: An overview of the acute health impact. JAMA 1981;246(22):2585–9.
22. Zais D. May 18, 1980: The day the sky fell, managing the Mt. St. Helens volcanic ashfall on Yakima, Washington, U.S.A. [online transcript]. 2001 Feb 14. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://volcanoes.usgs.gov/ash/dickzais.html>.
23. Lyons S. Time to make your hurricane evacuation plan. 2008 Apr 22. [cited 2012 May]. In: WeatherInsights: The Weather Channel Blog [online]. Atlanta (GA): The Weather Channel, LLC. Available from URL: http://www.weather.com/blog/weather/8_15416.html.

Resources

- Abkowitz M. Lessons learned the hard way: what catastrophes can teach us about planning, communication—and luck. Vanderbilt Magazine [online]. 2008. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/magazines/vanderbilt-magazine/2008/10/lessons-learned-the-hard-way/>.
- CDC. (2011). Emergency Operations Center (EOC) [online]. 2012 [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/eoc.htm>.
- CDC. Emergency preparedness and response: What CDC is doing [online]. 2010. [cited 2012 May]. Available from URL: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cdc/>.
- Reynolds BJ. Principles to enable leaders to navigate the harsh realities of crisis and risk communication. J Bus Contin Emer Plan 2010 Jul;4(3):262–73.
- Reynolds BJ. Response to best practices. J Appl Commun Res 2006;34(3):249–252.
- Seeger MW. Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. J Appl Commun Res 2006;34(3):232–244.

