



Communication: During Emergencies and in the Aftermath

MONTY ELDER

Communication Experts



Dr. Vincent T. Covello

www.centerforriskcommunication.org



Peter M. Sandman

www.psandman.com

Risk Communication is

- ▶ **Risk: A threat of loss, real or perceived, to what we value**
- ▶ **Risk Communication: The exchange of information about risks**

Public Risk Communication Outline

Emergencies

Aftermath of
Emergencies

Planning for
Emergencies

Bibliography

A little bit on risk perception

- ▶ **Risk = Hazard + Outrage**
 - Voluntary or Coerced
 - Natural or Man-made
 - Familiar or Exotic
 - Fair or Unfair
 - Dreaded or not Dreaded
 - Effect on Adults or Children
 - Catastrophic or Chronic
 - Perceived Moral or Immoral
 - Delayed or Immediate Effects




High Concern Situations Change the Rules of Communication

People Pay More Attention to Outrage than Risk

- ▶ High outrage reduces objectivity
 - ▶ Stress reduces the ability to process information by 80%, for everybody
 - ▶ When stressed, people focus more in negative than positive information
 - ▶ When stressed, people want information related to trust, benefits, control
- ▶ High outrage expresses real grievances
 - ▶ Recognize that values and feeling are legitimate
 - ▶ Respond to emotion



When we Explain
Hazard and Ignore
Outrage, We make
the Conflict Bigger



RISK COMMUNICATION DURING EMERGENCIES



Mental Noise Theory

- ▶ Under stress people have difficulty hearing, understanding and remembering information
 - ▶ So, it is your job to make the information as easy to understand as possible
 - ▶ This is not 'dumbing it down'
 - ▶ It is avoiding jargon, acronyms, trying to sound like the expert
 - ▶ People perceive this as covering up
- ▶ Mental Noise can reduce the ability to process information by **80%**

Rule of 3

- ▶ Everything in Threes
- ▶ Three Key Messages
- ▶ Repeat Messages Three Times
- ▶ Key Messages Supported by Three Supporting Messages

27/9/3 Template



27 Words



9 Seconds



3 Messages

Message Map

Question or Concern

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
9 Words on Average	9 Words on Average	9 Words on Average
Supporting Info 1.1	Supporting Info 2.1	Supporting Info 3.1
Supporting Info 1.2	Supporting Info 2.2	Supporting Info 3.2
Supporting Info 1.3	Supporting Info 2.3	Supporting Info 3.3

Message Map

Chemical Release


Shelter in location	Do Not Evacuate	Protected Inside
Indoors	Roads are closed	Air better inside
Shut windows and Doors	Air is monitored	Higher concentration outside
Listen for all Clear	Listen for All Clear	Listen for All Clear

Things to Remember

- ▶ **First to the public is most trusted**
 - ▶ Have a plan for information distribution
 - ▶ Social Media
 - ▶ Press
- ▶ **Be transparent about what you know**
- ▶ **State when follow up will occur**
- ▶ **Remember, people under stress have difficulty processing information – keep it simple**



Communication in the Aftermath of an Emergency

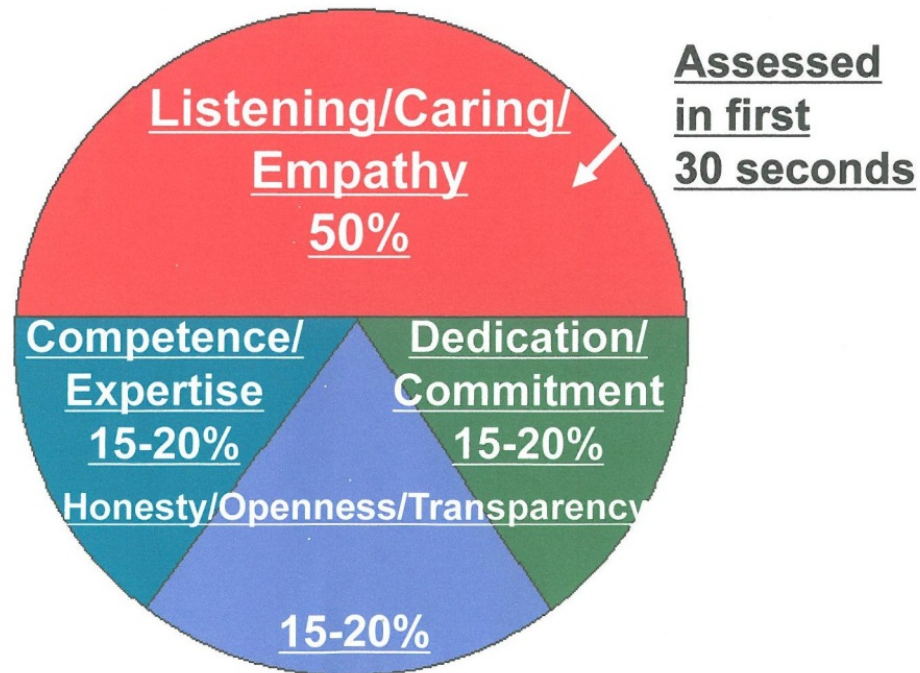


When People are Stressed or Upset,
They Want to Know that You Care
Before They Care What You Know

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS
75% OF THE MESSAGE

The Most Important Thing

Trust Determination Theory: High Concern Situations



Non-Verbal Communication: High Stress/Risk Situations



- ▶ Provide up to 75 percent of the message
- ▶ Override verbal content
- ▶ Are intensely and quickly noticed
- ▶ When people are stressed or upset, they typically assign a negative meaning to virtually all external stimuli (for example facial expressions, posture and hand gestures)

So What are the Non-Verbal Cues

- ▶ Greet people at the door – smile, shake hands
- ▶ Dress respectfully
- ▶ Relax
- ▶ Notice your normal expression – usually a frown
- ▶ Make eye contact
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Pay attention to your posture
- ▶ Remember – you are either a host or a guest!

The Words

- ▶ Do NOT talk more than 15 min!!!!!!!!!!!!
- ▶ Do use visuals
- ▶ Do NOT use jargon
- ▶ Do use examples, stories, analogies
- ▶ Do use positive or neutral terms
- ▶ Do NOT speculate or guess
- ▶ Do NOT promise what you cannot deliver
- ▶ Do NOT compare unrelated risks

More About the Words

- ▶ Repeat questions to make sure you understand
- ▶ Humor is great, IF it is directed at yourself
- ▶ Do NOT expect people to understand risk numbers
- ▶ Do NOT take it personally and don't ever attack an individual personally

Answering Questions

◎ Be Prepared

- Know the subject and audience, anticipate questions, practice

◎ Know your key messages

- Use answers to reemphasize your key messages

◎ Keep answers short and focused

- Answers should be less than 2 min.

◎ Manage yourself and your emotions

- Listen, be confident and factual

◎ Speak and act with integrity

- Tell the truth, if you don't know – say so. Follow up as promised. If you are unsure of the question, repeat or paraphrase



Communication Planning

Community Involvement

- ▶ **Be Prepared**
 - ▶ Identify a Hazard
 - ▶ Prepare Possible Communication Strategies
- ▶ **Invite Community to Planning Meeting**
 - ▶ City/County Officials
 - ▶ School Officials
 - ▶ Hospital Officials
 - ▶ Faith Leaders
 - ▶ Access and Functional Needs Representation
 - ▶ Others
 - ▶ Media???
- ▶ **Meeting Logistics**
 - ▶ Not During Working Hours or too Late in Evening
 - ▶ Not on Day of ballgames or Church
 - ▶ Neutral Building like a Library or Community Center
 - ▶ Don't Keep for Longer than an Hour

What Happens at the Meeting?

- ▶ **Explain Who you are and What you are Doing**
 - ▶ Local Emergency Planning Committee
 - ▶ In Case of an Emergency, Planning for Best Communication to Community
- ▶ **Ask Questions and Listen to Answers**
 - ▶ How Best to Notify the Community
 - ▶ Social Media
 - ▶ Press
 - ▶ Other
- ▶ **Best Messaging**
 - ▶ Present your Draft Message
 - ▶ Ask if It Makes Sense
 - ▶ Ask for Alternatives

Follow Up to Meeting

- ▶ **Prepare Summary and Distribute**
 - ▶ Be Sure to Include Ideas from Community
 - ▶ Ask for Feedback
 - ▶ Set Date for Another Meeting if Necessary
- ▶ **Develop an Exercise which Includes Messaging**
 - ▶ Invite Community Members to Participate in Exercise
- ▶ **Hold an Exercise Review Meeting**
 - ▶ Include Community Members
 - ▶ Incorporate Community Suggestions on Communication
- ▶ **Make Adjustments to Communication Plan as Necessary**

The Keys to Communication Planning

- ◉ **Anticipate**
 - Scenarios
 - Stakeholders
 - Concerns
- ◉ **Prepare**
 - Messages
 - Messenger
 - Means
- ◉ **Practice**
 - Rehearsals
 - Simulations

Monty Elder

▶ montressajo@gmail.com

▶ 405-640-1288

Risk Communication Resources

- ◉ 'Responding to Community Outrage: Strategies for Effective Risk Communication'
 - Peter Sandman
- ◉ 'The Magic Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some limits on our Capacity for Processing Information'
 - George A Miller, The Psychological Review, 1956, vol 63, pp.81-97
- ◉ 'Improving Risk Communication'
 - National Academy of Sciences (1989)
- ◉ 'Thinking Fast and Slow'
 - Daniel Kahneman
- ◉ 'Need to Know: Anticipating the Public's Questions during a Water Emergency' S. Minamyer, et al, EPA (2012)
- ◉ 'Risk as Analysis and Risk as Feelings: Some Thoughts about Affect, Reason, Risk and Rationality'
 - Slovic, Paul et al, Risk Analysis Vo. 24, No.2, 2004, pp. 311-322