

## **Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication**

Satellite Conference  
Part 3 of 6  
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## **Working With the Media**

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### **Module Summary**

- How response officials should and should not deal with the media
- Ways in which the media are affected by crises
- Pros and cons of different tools you can use to reach the media (e.g., press conferences)
- Writing for the media during a crisis

### **Disasters Are Media Events**

- We need the media to be there.
- Give important protective actions for the public.
- Know how to reach their audiences and what their audiences need.

### **Response Officials Should**

- Understand that their job is not the media's job
- Know that they can't dismiss media when they're inconvenient
- Accept that the media will be involved in the response, and plan accordingly

### **Response Officials Should**

- Attempt to provide all media equal access
- Use technology to fairly distribute information
- Plan to precredential media for access to EOC/JOC or JIC
- Think consistent messages

## Response Officials Should Not

- Hold grudges
- Discount local media
- Tell the media what to do

## How To Work With Reporters

- Reporters want a front seat to the action and all information NOW.
- Preparation will save relationships.
- If you don't have the facts, tell them the process.
- Reality Check: 70,000 media outlets in U.S. Media cover the news 24/7.

## Media, Too, Are Affected by Crises

- Verification
- Adversarial role
- National dominance
- Lack of scientific expertise

## Diminished Information Verification

- Initially, expect errors. "If you have expertise in an area, you will find errors."
- 73% of adults have become more skeptical about news accuracy.

## Media and Crisis Coverage

- A Fox poll found 56% believed news outlets "over-hyped" anthrax.
- 77% said that the coverage frightened them.
- 92% were saddened.
- 42% were tired out.

## Media and Crisis Coverage

- Evidence strongly suggests that coverage is more factual when reporters have more information. They become more interpretative when they have less information.
- What should we conclude?

## Adversarial Role

- Diminished adversarial role in the initial phase of a crisis.
- Media have genuine concern.

## National Dominance

- Expect the national media to dominate in major crises.
- That means messages meant for local audiences may have to compete with national coverage.
- Plan ahead.

## Inadequate Scientific Expertise

- Inadequate scientific expertise can be a problem.
- Prepare to “fill in the blanks.”

## Command Post

- Media will expect a command post. Official channels that work well will discourage reliance on nonofficial channels.
- Be media-friendly at the command post—prepare for them to be on site.

## Tools To Reach the Public Through the Media

- Press conferences
- Satellite media tours
- Telephone news conferences
- E-mail listservs and broadcast fax
- Web sites/video streaming
- Response to media calls

## Press Conferences

- **Plus:** Consistent messages; save time
- **Minus:** Media may not be able to attend; pack mentality

## Satellite Media Tours

- **Plus:** Give local slant to interviews from national level
- **Minus:** Expensive

## Telephone News Conferences

- **Plus:** Reach far more media than press conference; great flexibility
- **Minus:** No interesting visuals for TV/Web

## E-mail Listservs and Broadcast Fax

- **Plus:** Great for updates that don't need explanation
- **Minus:** Difficult to keep addresses up-to-date

## Web Sites/Video Streaming

- **Plus:** Transparent to public and media at same time
- **Minus:** Require a Webmaster

## Response to Media Calls

- **Plus:** Media can give you information too
- **Minus:** Time-consuming

## Writing for the Media During a Crisis

- The pressure will be tremendous from all quarters.
- It must be fast and accurate.
- It's like cooking a turkey when people are starving.
- If information isn't finalized, explain the process.

## Emergency Press Releases

- One page with attached factsheet (can clear quicker)
- Think of them as press updates, and prime media when to expect them
- Should answer 5Ws and H for the time it covers

## Emergency Press Releases

- Reality check: Requires concessions to your journalistic tastes—so pick your battles
- Keep your eye on the prize—fast, accurate releases to the media and public

## Press Statements Are Not Press Releases

- They are the official position.
- May be used to counter a contrary view.
- Not used for peer-review debate.
- Offer encouragement to the public and responders.

## Factsheets and Backgrounders

- They carry the facts and history.

## Video News Releases and B-roll

- Get your message on tape.
- B-roll is easier than VNRs to produce.
- Don't raise subjects in b-roll that you do not want to promote during an emergency.

## Successful Emergency Press Conferences

- Where to hold it?
- Who to invite?
- How and when to invite the media?
- Handouts?

## Media Errors—Now What?

“Declaring war on the press, tempting as it may sound, is a game you can’t win.”

—Stratford Sherman, in *Fortune* magazine

## Analyze the Situation

- What is your relationship with this reporter and the media?
- Did the piece report both sides?
- Was it inaccurate or simply the facts with a negative slant?

## Know What To Ask For

- Decide on your ideal as well as your minimal solution.
- Retraction or correction?
- Another piece that offers your perspective?
- An apology?
- Correction for permanent record?
- Letter to editor printed?

## Know Whom To Contact

- Don’t go to the top first. Contact the reporter.
- If you have doubts about the integrity of the outlet, consider an alternate media outlet.
- Reach the public through channels other than the media.

## Know What You Want To Communicate

- “Speak with one voice.”
- Frame the message in a positive way.
- It may include a call to action.
- Focus on your audience.
- Include no anger in the message.

## Working with the Media: Summary

- Media will behave differently in a crisis
- Respect the role of media, and plan to meet their needs
- Media tools are more or less effective at different phases of a crisis
- Conserve your director’s media time for critical points in the crisis response
- Know what you want when you give media feedback about their coverage



## Module Summary

- The role of spokespersons in emergencies
- Necessary spokesperson qualities
- Dealing with high outrage public meetings
- How to hold successful media interviews (press conferences, telephone, radio and TV)

## Spokesperson Qualities

- What makes a good spokesperson?
- What doesn't make a good spokesperson?

## Spokespersons

- They give your organization its human form.
- Effective spokespersons connect with their audience.
- Effective spokespersons are made; few are born.
- The spokesperson doesn't just read a statement; he or she is the statement.

## Role of a Spokesperson in an Emergency

- Take your organization from an "it" to a "we"
- Build trust and credibility for the organization
- Remove the psychological barriers within the audience
- Gain support for the public health response
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right

## Spokesperson Qualities

- Be your organization; then be yourself.
- What's your organization's identity?

## Spokesperson Qualities

- It's more than "acting natural." Every organization has an identity. Try to embody that identity.
- Example: CDC has a history of going into harm's way to help people. We humbly go where we are asked. We value our partners and won't steal the show. Therefore, a spokesperson would express a desire to help, show courage, and express the value of partners. "Committed but not showy."

## Emergency Risk Communication Principles

These are not the "facts" to be released; these are the tenets by which the spokesperson manifests his or her organization—what we stand for, not just what we know.

## Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Don't overreassure
- Acknowledge that there is a process in place
- Express wishes
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

## Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Consider the "what if" questions.

## Spokesperson Recommendations

- Stay within the scope of your responsibility
- Tell the truth
- Follow up on issues
- Expect criticism

## Pitfalls for Spokespersons

- Use of jargon
- Humor
- Repeating the negative
- Expressing personal opinions
- Showing off your vocabulary



## High-Outrage Public Meetings

### “Do’s”

- The best way to deal with criticism and outrage by an audience is to acknowledge that it exists. (Don’t say, “I know how you feel.”)
- Practice active listening and try to avoid interrupting.
- State the problem and then the recommendation.

## High-Outrage Public Meetings

### “Don’ts”

- Don’t take personal abuse. You represent your agency and you are not alone. Bring along a neutral third party who can step in and diffuse the situation.
- Don’t look for one answer that fits all and don’t promise what you can’t deliver.

## Spokesperson and the Media

- Their job is not your job.
- Communicate with a purpose.
- Media are less critical in an initial crisis response.

## Your Interview Rights

- Know who will do the interview
- Know and limit the interview to agreed subjects
- Set limits on time and format
- Ask who else will be or has been interviewed

## You Do Not Have the Right To:

- Embarrass or argue with a reporter
- Tell the news organization which reporter you prefer
- Demand that your remarks not be edited
- Insist that an adversary not be interviewed
- Lie or cloud the truth
- Demand that an answer you’ve given not be used
- State what you are about to say is “off the record” or not attributable to you

## Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Don’t repeat reporters’ inflammatory or emotionally laden words.
- If the question contains leading or loaded language, reframe the question.
- Don’t assume the reporter has it right. State, “I have to verify that before I respond.”
- If a reporter leaves a microphone in your face after you’ve answered the question, STOP.

## Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- There is no such thing as “off the record.”
- Anticipate questions. Put the answer on paper and then find the bottom line in that question.
- Make your point first. Have prepared message points.
- Don't fake it. If you don't know the answer, say so.

## Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Never speak disparagingly of anyone, not even in jest. Don't assign blame or “pass the buck.”
- Don't buy-in to hypothetical questions that are near the nonsensical. Reframe the question in a way that addresses legitimate concerns.

## Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Break down multiple-part questions
- Don't raise issues that you do not want to see in print or on the news
- Don't say “no comment” to a reporter's question

## Assessing Your Communication Skills

### Negatives that interfere with communication

- **Fear:** Fear of being judged, fear of appearing stupid
- **Assumptions:** A study of the 500 most common English words produced an average of 28 dictionary definitions per word.

## Choose To Listen

### 3 barriers to effective listening:

1. **Stress.** When our minds may be going in a million different directions, it's hard to give full attention.
2. **“Me syndrome.”** The person doesn't seem to care about others.
3. **Brain speed.** The speech rate for many people is about 200 words per minute.

## Counters to Electronic Media Interview Techniques

- Reporters are not adversaries. They are also not your friends. Some reporters will use well-known techniques to attempt to get a reaction from you.

## Sensational or Unrelated Questions

“Bridges” back to what you want to say:

- “What I think you are really asking is . . .”
- “The overall issue is . . .”
- “What’s important to remember is . . .”
- “It’s our policy to not discuss [topic], but what I can tell you . . .”

## Watch Out For . . .

- **Machine gun questioning.** Reporter fires rapid questions at you. You respond, “Please let me answer this question.”
- **Feeding the mike and the pause.** Seldom will dead air make scintillating viewing, unless you’re reacting nonverbally. Relax.
- **Hot mike.** It’s always on—always—including during “testing.”

## Watch Out For . . .

- **Reporter asks a sensational question and gives you an A or B dilemma.** Use positive words, correct the inaccuracies without repeating the negative, and reject A or B if neither is valid. Explain, “There’s actually another alternative you may not have considered,” and give your message point.

## Watch Out For . . .

- **Surprise prop.** The reporter attempts to hand you a report or supposedly contaminated item. If you take it, you own it. React by saying, “I’m familiar with that report and what I can say is” or “I’m not familiar with the report, but what is important” and then go to key message.

## Media Availability or Press Conferences “In Person” Tips

- Determine in advance who will answer questions about specific subject matters
- Keep answers short and focused—nothing longer than 2 minutes
- Assume that every mike is “alive” the entire time

## Telephone Interview Tips

- Know who is on the other end of the line
- Ask if you are being recorded
- Ask when and where the information will be used
- Spell out difficult names/technical terms/phrases
- Limit the time available for the interview up front
- Be certain to ask for feedback from reporters to ensure they are understanding your points

## Radio Interview Tips

- A live interview is very different than a taped interview.
- Watch out for “Uh,” “Um,” and “You know.”
- Radio will not be as in-depth as print.
- Be careful NOT to repeat the negatives in a reporter’s question.

## Television Interview Tips

- Do not make broad unnatural gestures or move around in your chair. Ask for a chair that does not swivel.
- Practice, practice, practice. Reply in 10- to 20-second phrases. With longer answers, pause every 20 seconds. Practice stopping the minute directed or suffer a hard break.
- Slow down. This will make the spokesperson appear in control.

## Television Interview Tips

- Drive out monotone. The more practice, the less fear and the greater the prospect that animation will reappear in the voice.
- Don’t look at yourself on the TV monitor.
- Look at the reporter, not the camera, unless directed otherwise.
- Do an earphone check. Ask what to do if it pops out of your ear.

## What To Wear on Television

### Men

- Avoid patterned suits, stripes, and checks.
- Button double-breasted suits; unbutton single-breasted suits. Sit on your coattails.
- White or light blue shirts are the most conservative, serious shirts.
- Neckties should be somber. Do not “advertise” a product or point of view on your tie—you know what they are.

## What To Wear on Television

### Men

- **Urgent:** Wear knee-length socks darker than your suit. You lose credibility with a “skin shot” of your legs when your pant legs creep up.
- Be clean shaven.

## What To Wear on Television

### Women

- Tailored clothes work best.
- **Urgent:** Short skirts kill credibility as quickly as short socks on men.
- Neutral colors and less pattern work best.
- Wear dark shoes.
- Avoid jangles.
- Wear regular makeup. For women who never wear makeup, consider color on the lips.

## What To Wear on Television

### Men and Women

- Neat, trimmed hair is best.
- If your skin is shiny under the lights, ask for powder. Men, don't forget powder for the top of your head.
- If you can take off the glasses without squinting, take them off. Consider nonglare glasses if you must wear them.

## Effective Nonverbal Communication

- Do maintain eye contact
- Do maintain an open posture
- Do not retreat behind physical barriers such as podiums or tables
- Do not frown or show anger or disbelief through facial expression
- Do not dress in a way that emphasizes the differences between you and your audience

## Spokesperson: Summary

- Spokesperson's role in emergency is vital to success of crisis response
- Spokesperson must be trained and must practice
- Be your organization, then be yourself
- Use emergency risk communication principles
- Leaders model good behavior and empathize with the community
- Never "off the record"