

Crisis Communications Leadership

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Disclosures

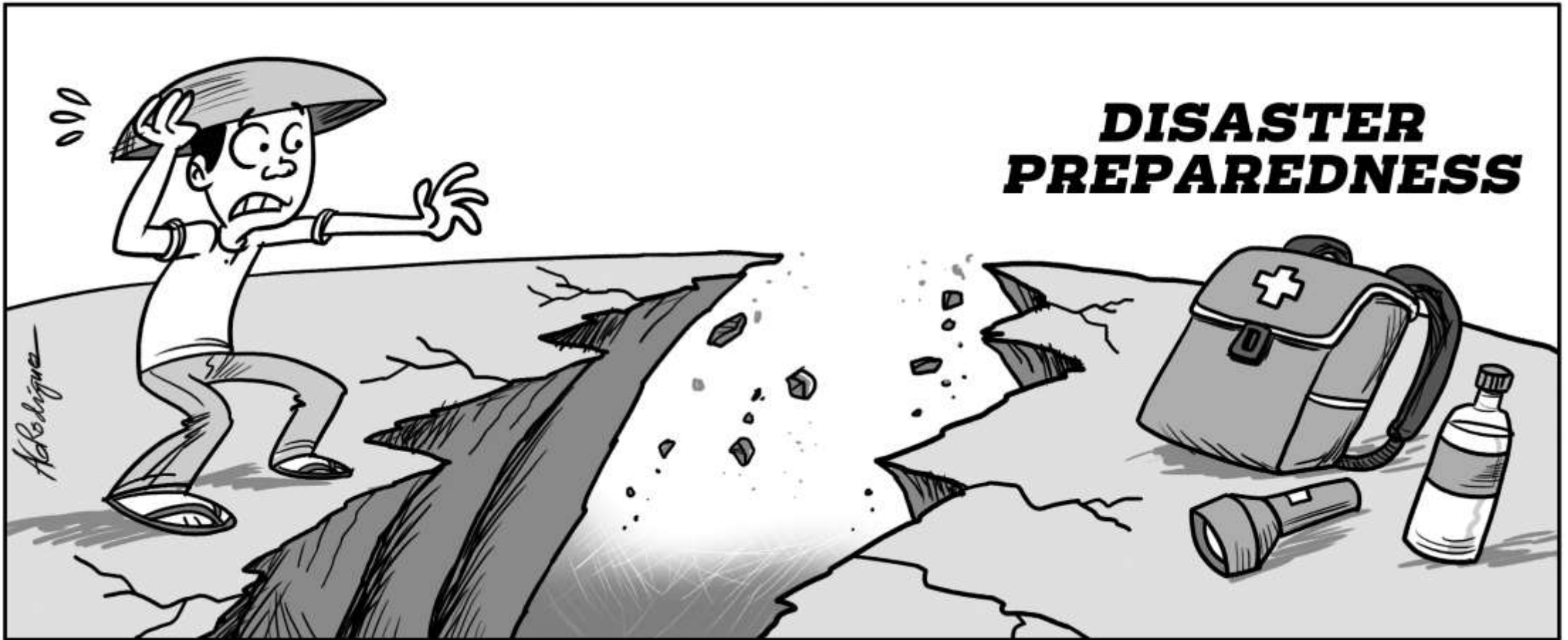
- I have no financial disclosures.
- I am an intermittent employee of the federal government.
- All opinions are my own. Nothing should be construed as official US policy.



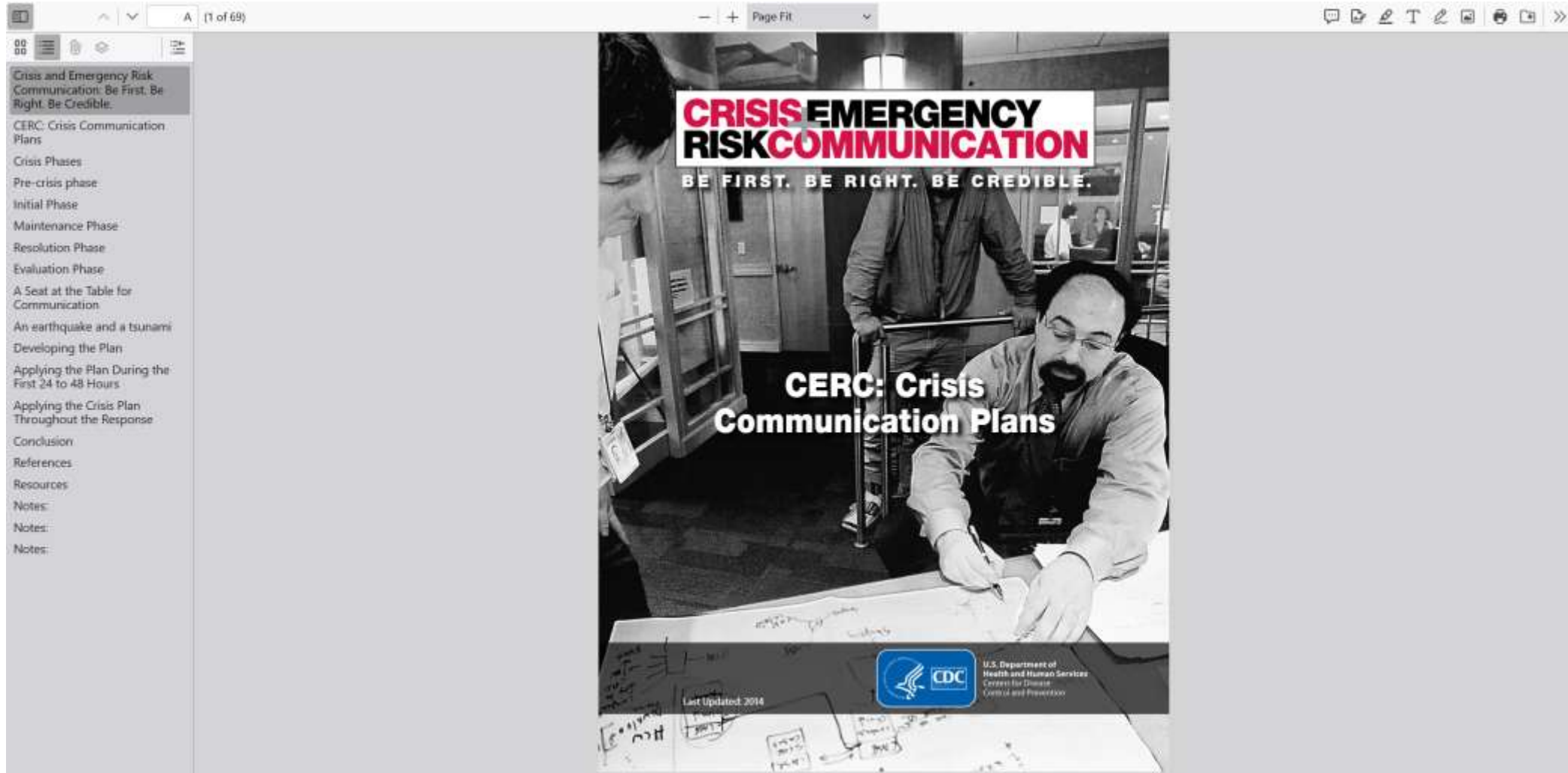
BOTTOM LINE

UP FRONT

Failing to Prepare is Preparing to Fail

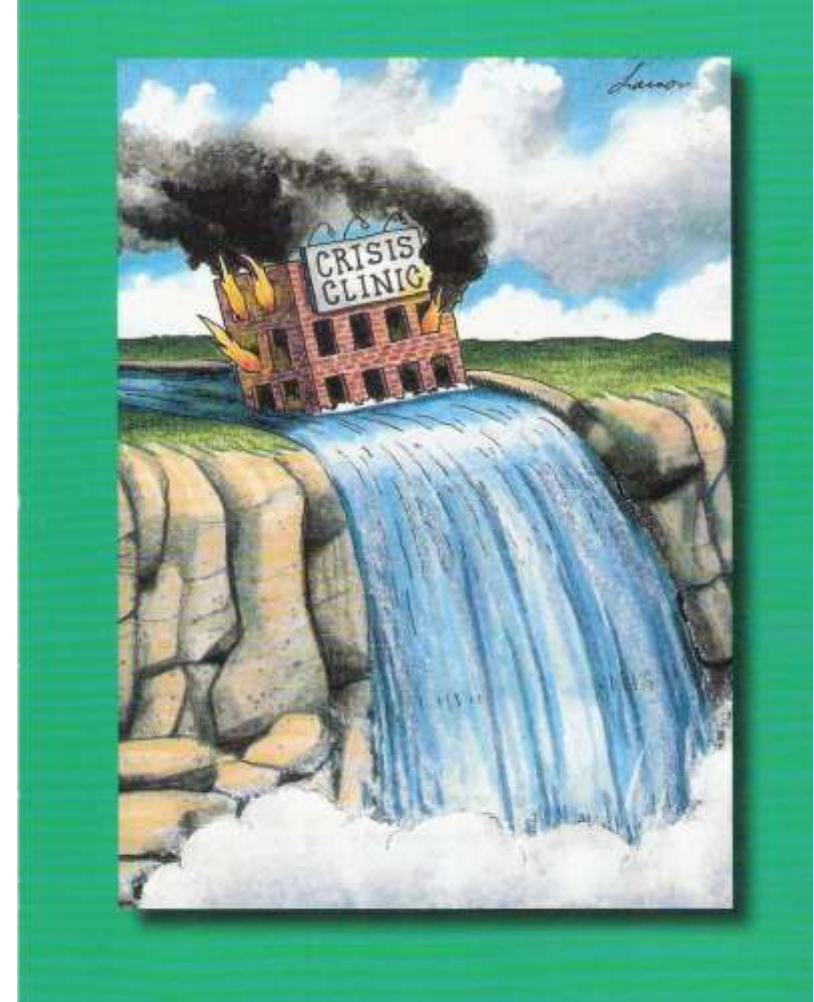


Crisis Communication Plans



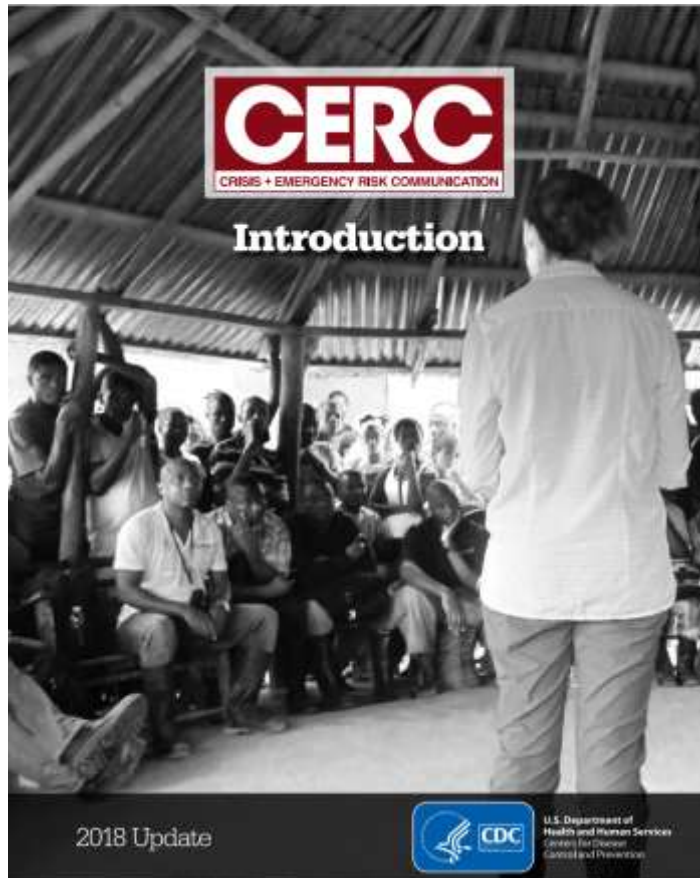
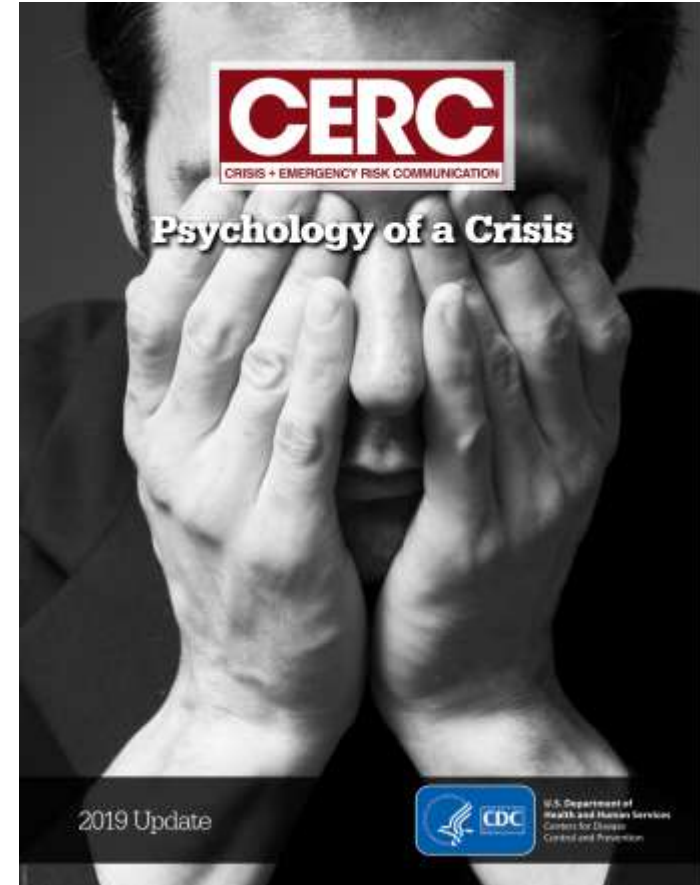
Crises

- Reputational
 - Illegal or immoral behavior
 - Patient accident or bad outcome
- Cyber attack or HIPPA violation
- Supply chain: shortage of drugs, etc.
- Infrastructure failure
 - No power or water
- Other events affecting operations
 - Lack of staff
 - Weather



CDC Crisis Manual

- [CERC Manual | Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication \(CERC\) \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/cerc/)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DV9huwBFz8>



CDC Wallet Card



Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:

- Empathy and caring.
- Competence and expertise.
- Honesty and openness.
- Commitment and dedication.

Top Tips:

- Consistent messages are vital.
- Don't over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Express wishes. ("I wish I had answers.")
- Explain the process in place to find answers.
- Acknowledge people's fear.
- Give people things to do.
- Ask more of people (share risk).

As a Spokesperson:

- Know your organization's policies.
- Stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- Embody your agency's identity.

Prepare to Answer These Questions:

- Are my family and I safe?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who is in charge here?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?
- Were you forewarned?
- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What does this information mean?

Stay on Message:

- "What's important is to remember..."
- "I can't answer that question, but I can tell you..."
- "Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers..."
- "Let me put that in perspective..."

Be First. Be Right. Be Credible.



1578912-01

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550208>



The CERC Rhythm graphic below shows the four phases of a crisis. Accessible explanation of figure in [Appendix, page 12](#).

The CERC Rhythm

Engage Community • Empower Decision-Making • Evaluate

Preparation

- Draft and test messages
- Develop partnerships
- Create plans
- Determine approval process

Initial

- Express empathy
- Explain risks
- Promote action
- Describe response efforts

Maintenance

- Explain ongoing risks
- Segment audiences
- Provide background information
- Address rumors

Resolution

- Motivate vigilance
- Discuss lessons learned
- Revise plan

The **Six Principles** *of CERC*

Throughout these chapters, six principles of effective emergency and risk communications are emphasized:

1



Be First:

Crises are time-sensitive. Communicating information quickly is crucial. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.

2



Be Right:

Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.

3



Be Credible:

Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crises.

4



Express Empathy:

Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.

5



Promote Action:

Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes some sense of control.³

6



Show Respect:

Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

Fully integrating CERC helps ensure that limited resources are managed well and can do the most good at every phase of an emergency response.



Stakeholders

Type of stakeholder	Characteristics	Communication Objective
Advocates	Loyal to and supportive of your organization; trust your guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Maintain and enhance loyalty and support.■ Engage advocates to spread your organization's prevention messages and take action, when appropriate.
Ambivalents	Do not strongly support or oppose your organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Identify specific needs and interests of ambivalents to engage them and encourage positive actions.■ Work with spokespersons or organizations that ambivalents trust to convey key messages.
Adversaries	Do not support your organization; distrust or compete with your goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Determine whether potential adversarial activities could cause harm or prevent the successful adoption of your health messages to a wider population.■ Address any predictable challenges by acknowledging and addressing adversaries' concerns.■ When possible, work with spokespersons or other organizations that adversaries trust to convey key messages.

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.

Message Development for Communication

First, consider the following:

Audience:	Purpose of Message:	Method of delivery:
☐ Relationship to event ☐ Demographics (age, language, education, culture) ☐ Level of outrage (based on risk principles)	☐ Give facts/update ☐ Rally to action ☐ Clarify event status ☐ Address rumors ☐ Satisfy media requests	☐ Print media release ☐ Web release ☐ Through spokesperson (TV or in-person appearance) ☐ Radio ☐ Other (e.g., recorded phone message)

Six Basic Emergency Message Components:

1. Expression of empathy: _____

2. Clarifying facts/Call for Action:

Who _____

What _____

Where _____

When _____

Why _____

How _____

3. What we do not know: _____

4. Process to get answers: _____

5. Statement of commitment: _____

6. Referrals: _____

For more information _____

Next scheduled update _____

Finally, check your message for the following:

Positive action steps Honest/open tone Applied risk communication principles Test for clarity Use simple words, short sentences	Avoid jargon Avoid judgmental phrases Avoid humor Avoid extreme speculation
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The following questions are ones that are commonly asked by the media, stakeholders, partners, and the public during crisis events. Use them to help you prepare answers for questions you might face.

Additional tips:

- ✓ Keep your answers short (2 minutes or less).
- ✓ Use Q&A sessions as opportunities to get your key messages out.
- ✓ Use personal pronouns (“I” or “We”) rather than institutional nouns (“the Department of Public Health” or “this agency”).

Why did it happen?

What was the cause?

When and where did it happen?

Who is to blame?



Do you accept responsibility?

Has this ever happened before?

Is the public safe?

What are you doing to protect people?

Is anyone hurt, sick, or dead? What are their names?

What do you have to say to the victims?

Is there danger now?

Will there be inconvenience to the public?

What are you going to do about it?





ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS WORKSHEET

Page 3 of 3

Who is in charge?

Are victims being helped?

Did you see this coming?

What can we expect, right now and later?

When will we find out more?



Understand Anger in the Context of an Emergency

Communication experts and psychologists point out that anger is a defensive response to pain or the threat of pain.^{4,5} Three basic circumstances can give rise to anger:

1. When people have been hurt.
2. When people feel threatened by risks not of their own making.
3. When people sense their fundamental beliefs are being challenged.

Avoid Common Mistakes

When communicating with communities, try to avoid these common mistakes:

- 1. Inadequate accessibility:** There is a tendency during a crisis to engage in internal decision-making. This may make your organization seem inaccessible. Provide information openly and maintain avenues for communities to ask questions.
- 2. Lack of plain language:** Officials often use jargon in high-stress situations. Unfortunately, this may make messages more difficult to understand and cause frustration.
- 3. Lack of empathy in the response:** Communities need to know that response officials understand at a very human level what they are experiencing.

Common Mistakes (cont)

- 4. Problems with timeliness:** Time is always critical in a response, and you won't always be able to wait to get all the facts before releasing information.
- 5. Paternalistic attitudes:** Acting paternalistic means behaving as if you and your organization know what is best for others. This attitude may seem arrogant to stakeholders who already feel powerless.
- 6. Lack of opportunity for input in decisions:** Those who have been most affected by a crisis want to participate in key decisions. The opportunity to provide input can help offset feelings of being powerless. Make communities part of the response process and decision-making.

A Bad Example:

- "Listen up, folks! We've got a tremendous disaster on our hands, folks, believe me. Nobody knows disasters better than me. It's big, it's huge, and it's a disaster like you've never seen before. But don't worry, I alone can fix it. I have all the answers, the best answers, and I'll be making tremendous decisions. Trust me, nobody knows better than me. We're going to be winning against this disaster, folks, and it's going to be fantastic!"
- By ChatGPT 05-17-2023

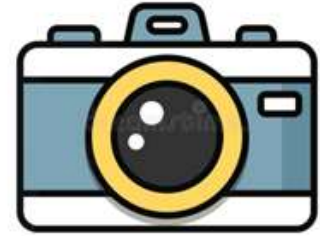


Message Tips

- **Determine Your key points**
 - 3 (4 max)
 - Repeat them often
- **Don't wing it. Practice!**
 - Get coaching
- **Be concise**
- **Stay on message**
- **Evaluate the media interview post-message**
 - How was it perceived?
 - How to improve?



Media Training



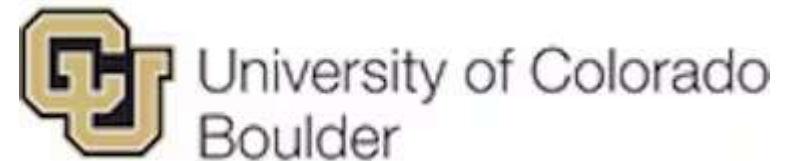
- Large institutions have PIOs who can serve as coaches for executives
- Many professional organizations have programs for media interview preparation
 - \$14.95 online (6 sections • 18 lectures • 53m total length)
 - **Spokesperson training**

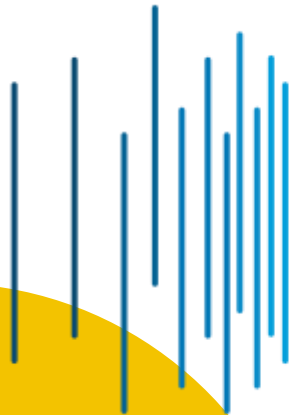
Communicating During Global Emergencies (free courses)

- <https://www.coursera.org/learn/communicating-during-global-emergencies>



coursera





TRAUMA
ANESTHESIOLOGY
SOCIETY

Contact Info



- jaymcisaac@comcast.net
- **World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine**
- ASA Committee on Trauma and Emergency Preparedness
- Trauma Anesthesiology Society (TASHQ.org)
- American Association for Physician Leadership (physicianleaders.org)