Risk Communications

MARY BETH KOZA
DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
Risk Communications

Definition = The exchange of information and opinions and the establishment of an effective dialogue, among those responsible for assessing, minimizing, and regulating risks and those who may be affected by the outcomes of those risks.

Source http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/risk-communication.html#ixzz3pzHCq5c1
Risk Communications

Contain the problem
Resolve as quickly as possible
Perception is stronger than reality
Emotion is stronger than fact
5 Steps to Success

Execute a solid communication plan
First source of information
Express empathy
Demonstrate competency and expertise
Be honest and open
Crisis Communication Lifecycle

- Pre-crisis
- Initial crisis
- Crisis Resolution
- Evaluation of Crisis response
- Crisis Maintenance
Pre-Crisis

Organizations should identify the types of disasters it may face
Reasonable questions and answers should be developed for each disaster
Initial communications shall be drafted blanks to be filled in later
Alliances and partnerships identified and fostered prior to an event
Initial Phase

People want information
Message must be simple, credible, consistent, timely and verifiable
Acknowledge the event with empathy
Explain the risk in simplest terms
Establish the agency and spokesperson credibility
Provide a process of where to get additional information
Commit to continued communication
Establish your organization as a credible source
Addressing the issue head on quick and accurately
Maintenance Phase

Continue to answer the How could this happen, Has this happened before, How can this be prevented from happening again, What is the long term effect and recovery?

Expect to be criticized in this phase

Stay on top of information flow and maintaining tight coordination
Crisis Resolution

Reduction in public and media interest

Ability to reinforce public health messages

Identify ways to support public policy and resource allocation
Evaluation Phase

Evaluate the initial communications plan
Document lessons learned
Identify specific actions to improve crisis response and plans
What is Risk Perception?

Not all risks are perceived equally.

Risk Perception = hazard (technical or scientific measure) + emotions the risk evokes

Public outrage is higher if the situation is manmade targeted and intentional

Make sure the public has the data to put the risk in context but do not minimize the risk
Risk Communication Delivery/Performance

Nonverbal Effectiveness
Language
Delivery
Communication Failure

Mixed messages from various experts
Information released late
Paternalistic attitude
Not countering myths and rumors in real time
Public power struggle and confusion
Risk Communications

Credibility

Preparation

Identified designated spokesperson

Internal communication is important.

Always tell the truth and when in doubt do not make assumptions

Be transparent

Limitation - You cannot respond to all public perceptions
References

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Training  http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerconline/training/index.html

Risk Communication and Public Health 2nd Edition edited by Peter Bennett, Kenneth Calman, Sarah Curtis, Denis Fischbacher-Smith