

Thanks to Vincent Covello, Chuck Wolfe, and Pam Avery for use of their materials to supplement this training

1986



# Risk Communication (how to talk to the public after a release)



2018

**So your community has just experienced a major hazardous materials incident...**

**Senior officials, maybe including yourself, are debating such issues as evacuation, shelter-in-place, health effects, etc.**

**Suddenly they all turn to you and decide you will be the spokesperson to get the information to the community**

**WHAT'S YOUR FIRST MOVE ??**



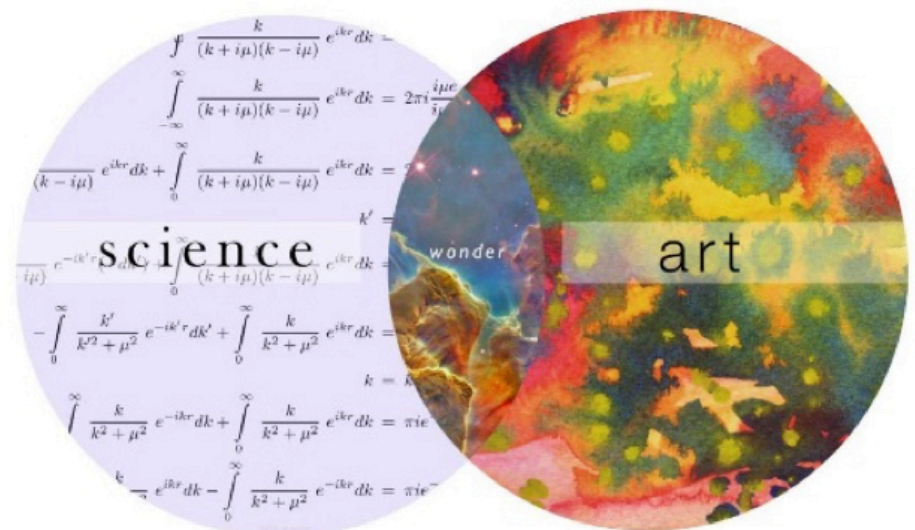


**Nice Thought !!!**

## Things to Remember about Risk

### Communication:

- Risk communication is a science, not necessarily an art
- In the middle of an emergency, the rules of communication change
- To get it right, you must anticipate, prepare, and practice





**For the communication to work, you must provide people a sense of:**

- **Hope**
- **Self- and community efficacy**
- **Safety**
- **Calm**
- **Connectedness**



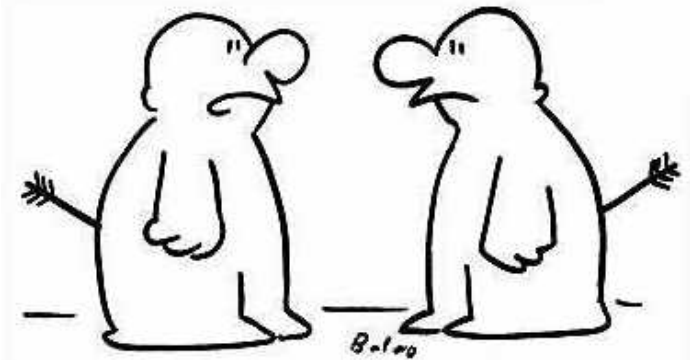
**Key Point: Public information can:**

- **Save lives and reduce injury.**
- **Protect property and the environment.**
- **Facilitate the tactical response by calming fears and managing expectations.**
- **Educate, inform, and change behavior and attitudes.**
- **Seek the public's cooperation.**
- **Instill public confidence.**
- **Provide information to help families reunite.**



**Your most important communications goals will be to do the following:**

- **Share important information.**
- **Provide reassurance and say what has been done. soon as it becomes available.**
- **Tell people what they can do.**
- **Answer questions.**
- **Be empathetic.**
- **Show sympathy when appropriate.**
- **Be prepared ahead of time.**



**"I know exactly how you feel."**

## Five communication failures

- Mixed messages
- Information released late
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Not countering rumors and myths in real time
- Public power struggles





## Five communication successes

- Manage reputational risk
- Express empathy
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open
- Demonstrate accountability and commitment



**Competence**

Competence is  
The ability of a person  
individual to do a job  
combination of personal  
theoretical knowledge  
competent people



**To keep it simple, follow the Rule of 3 Template**

- **Everything in Threes**
  - Three key messages
  - Repeat messages three times
  - Key messages supported by three supporting messages of three credible sources

## For Example

**What is meant by sheltering in place during a HAZMAT emergency?**

- **Key Message 1: Sheltering in place is a protective action which includes going indoors at your current location.**
- **Key Message 2: People may be asked to shelter in place rather than evacuate.**
- **Key Message 3: Staying indoors for a short time can protect people from exposure to materials.**



"Down here the three important times are lunch time, break time, and shelter-in-place time."

## Example of Staying on Message

At the beginning of your discussion/ press conference/ interview, say:	<i>"I want to begin by saying that... there are things people can do to keep the disease from spreading. They can wash their hands frequently; cover their sneeze or cough; if they are sick, wear a mask around others; and avoid public gatherings."</i>
Sometime later say:	<i>"As I said a moment ago... there are precautions people should take to stay healthy. They should wash their hands frequently; cover their sneeze or cough; if they are sick, wear a mask around others; and avoid public gatherings."</i>
When you answer a question say:	<i>"That's an important question, but before I answer it I want to stress again that... people can take a number of specific steps to help in this time of crisis. They can wash their hands frequently; cover their sneeze or cough; if they are sick, wear a mask around others; and avoid public gatherings."</i>
At the end say:	<i>"Before I close, I want to remind everyone... to take the recommended precautions. Wash your hands frequently. Cover your sneeze and cough. If you are sick, wear a mask around others. And remember to avoid public gatherings where the disease can spread easily."</i>
	From the World Health Organization, <b>"FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION DURING CRISES AND EMERGENCIES"</b>



## Choosing the Spokesperson

***Qualification To be effective, a spokesperson must:***

- **Be perceived as highly credible by the public**
- **Be able to be flexible while staying on message**
- **Possess excellent communication skills**
- **Possess relevant technical knowledge about the specific crisis, its dynamics, and how it is being managed**
- **Be someone of sufficient authority to be accepted as speaking for the company**
- **Be able to express technical knowledge in a way that can be understood by the average person**





## Choosing the Spokesperson (cont)

Qualification *To be effective, a spokesperson must:*

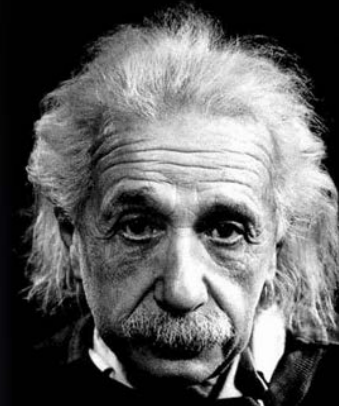
- Be able to respond to sensitive questions
- Be resourceful and a quick learner
- Be able to make decisions regarding on the spot media responses
- Be able to work well under pressure
- Be able to accept constructive feedback
- Be able to recognize limitations of authority to speak and when to defer
- Be able to reflect appropriate tone for audience and crisis needs

## During any crisis, your message should utilize the STARCC Principle:

- Simple—Frightened people don't want to hear big words
- Timely—Frightened people want information NOW
- Accurate—Frightened people won't get nuances, so give it straight
- Relevant—Answer their questions and give action steps
- Credible—Empathy and openness are key to credibility
- Consistent—The slightest change in the message is upsetting and dissected by all

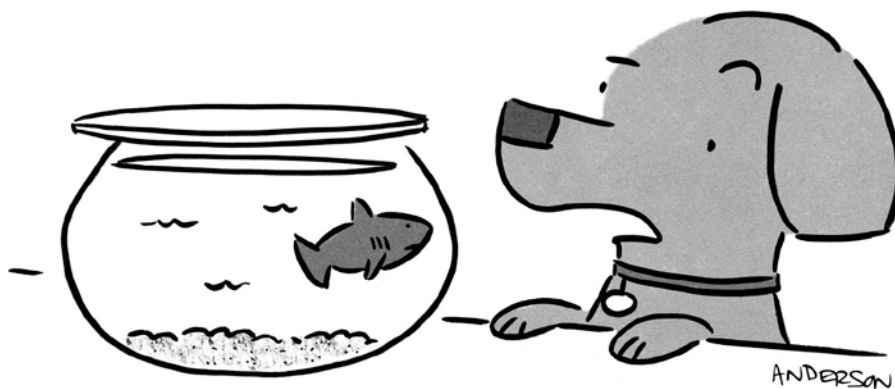
Everything should be made  
as simple as possible,  
but not simpler.

Albert Einstein



## The EPA's Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication

- Rule 1. Accept and involve the public as a legitimate partner.
- Rule 2. Listen to the audience.
- Rule 3. Be honest, frank, and open.
- Rule 4. Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources
- Rule 5. Meet the needs of the media.
- Rule 6. Speak clearly and with compassion.
- Rule 7. Plan carefully and evaluate performance.



"You make a good point; we both hate the cat. I'm just not sure what it is you'd bring to a partnership."

## UNDERSTANDING TARGET AUDIENCES AND THEIR CONCERNS What they will want to know first

Public	News Media	Other Stakeholders (Businesses, NGOs, Religious Organizations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I safe?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What happened?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will my group be affected?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is my family safe?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has it been contained?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What resources will we have to mobilize to ensure the safety of our members?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What have you found that may affect me?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is in charge?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is our role in the overall response and how will it impact our group?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What can I do to protect myself and my family?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are people in need being helped?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who/what caused this?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What can we expect?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you fix it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What should we do?</li> </ul>	

*Risk Communication in Action The Risk Communication Workbook, EPA*

## **77 Questions Commonly Asked by Journalists during a Crisis (Courtesy of Dr. Vince Covello, Center for Risk Communication)**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your name and title?</li> <li>2. What are your job responsibilities?</li> <li>3. What are your qualifications?</li> <li>4. Can you tell us what happened?</li> <li>5. When did it happen?</li> <li>6. Where did it happen?</li> <li>7. Who was harmed?</li> <li>8. How many people were harmed?</li> <li>9. Are those that were harmed getting help?</li> <li>10. How certain are you about this information?</li> <li>11. How are those who were harmed getting help?</li> <li>12. Is the situation under control?</li> <li>13. How certain are you that the situation is under control?</li> <li>14. Is there any immediate danger?</li> <li>15. What is being done in response to what happened?</li> <li>16. Who is in charge?</li> <li>17. What can we expect next?</li> <li>18. What are you advising people to do?</li> <li>19. How long will it be before the situation returns to normal?</li> <li>20. What help has been requested or offered from others?</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. What responses have you received?</li> <li>22. Can you be specific about the types of harm that occurred?</li> <li>23. What are the names of those that were harmed?</li> <li>24. Can we talk to them?</li> <li>25. How much damage occurred?</li> <li>26. What other damage may have occurred?</li> <li>27. How certain are you about damages?</li> <li>28. How much damage do you expect?</li> <li>29. What are you doing now?</li> <li>30. Who else is involved in the response?</li> <li>31. Why did this happen?</li> <li>32. What was the cause?</li> <li>33. Did you have any forewarning that this might happen?</li> <li>34. Why wasn't this prevented from happening?</li> <li>35. What else can go wrong?</li> <li>36. If you are not sure of the cause, what is your best guess?</li> <li>37. Who caused this to happen?</li> <li>38. Who is to blame?</li> <li>39. Could this have been avoided?</li> <li>40. Do you think those involved handled the situation well enough?</li> </ol> |
|---|---|



## 77 Questions Commonly Asked by Journalists during a Crisis (cont) (Courtesy of Dr. Vince Covello, Center for Risk Communication)

41. When did your response to this begin?
42. When were you notified that something had happened?
43. Who is conducting the investigation?
44. What are you going to do after the investigation?
45. What have you found out so far?
46. Why was more not done to prevent this from happening?
47. What is your personal opinion?
48. What are you telling your own family?
49. Are all those involved in agreement?
50. Are people over reacting?
51. Which laws are applicable?
52. Has anyone broken the law?
53. How certain are you about whether laws have been broken?
54. Has anyone made mistakes?
55. How certain are you that mistakes have not been made?
56. Have you told us everything you know?
57. What are you not telling us?
58. What effects will this have on the people involved?
59. What precautionary measures were taken?
60. Do you accept responsibility for what happened?

61. Has this ever happened before?
62. Can this happen elsewhere?
63. What is the worst case scenario?
64. What lessons were learned?
65. Were those lessons implemented? Are they being implemented now?
66. What can be done to prevent this from happening again?
67. What would you like to say to those who have been harmed and to their families?
68. Is there any continuing danger?
69. Are people out of danger? Are people safe? Will there be inconvenience to employees or to the public?
70. How much will all this cost?
71. Are you able and willing to pay the costs?
72. Who else will pay the costs?
73. When will we find out more?
74. What steps need to be taken to avoid a similar event?
75. Have these steps already been taken? If not, why not?
76. Why should we trust you?
77. What does this all mean

<b>Checking Yourself after You talk to the Public (Courtesy of Dr. Vince Covello, Center for Risk Communication)</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you present information in a clear manner?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you present information that can easily be understood by the audience?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were your sentences short (for example, 10-12 words on average)?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid the use of jargon, acronyms, or technical language that would not be understood by your target audience?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you focus on no more than three to five key messages or pieces of information at a time?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you state your three to give key messages briefly (for example, in less than 27 to 30 words)?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you repeat your key messages several times?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you provide the most important messages first and last?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When presented with a question for which you did not know the answer, did you say, “I wish I could answer that” followed by 3-4 messages of what you do know?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you provide first, what you know, second, what you don’t know, and third, what you are doing to fill the knowledge gap?</li> </ul>	

<b>Checking Yourself after You talk to the Public (cont) (Courtesy of Dr. Vince Covello, Center for Risk Communication)</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you engage in active listening?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid attacking anyone perceived to have higher credibility than you with your target audience?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you cite at least three to four credible third parties that support your message?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid going beyond the bounds of your knowledge or responsibilities (for example, by speaking for others)? Did you “stay in lane.”</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you acknowledge uncertainty and the legitimacy of emotions?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid offering inappropriate risk comparisons?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid using inappropriate humor?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid repeating false allegations or strong negative words?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid using unnecessary negatives (for example, no, not, never, nothing, none)?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you avoid saying “no comment” or the equivalent to a question?</li> </ul>	

## Checking Yourself after You talk to the Public (cont) (Courtesy of Dr. Vince Covello, Center for Risk Communication)

Y/N

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • Did you avoid using unqualified or unnecessary absolutes, e.g., words, statements, or promises (“never,” “always,” “all,” “every,” etc.)?                 |  |
| • Did you avoid providing assurances or making promises that go beyond the facts, are untrue, or cannot be supported?                                       |  |
| • Did you provide information that gives people a sense of control, such as things to do?   |  |
| • Were you sensitive to nonverbal communication (e.g., eyes, hands, posture, dress, and voice) and aware of its effect on your messaging?                   |  |
| • Were you calm, composed, and respectful, even if others were not?   |  |
| • Did you provide a reasonable explanation for why you could not provide an answer to a question?   |  |
| • Did you support your message with visual aids such as graphics, analogies, or stories?  |  |
| • Did you offer to follow up and assist the questioner in getting information related to the question you could not answer?                                 |  |
| • Did you provide information about where the questioner can find credible information related to the topic of inquiry?                                     |  |
| • When responding to high concern, perceived loss, or perceived threat, did you express authentic compassion, caring, conviction, commitment, and optimism? |  |

## **So in Summary:**

**You're the  
Spokesperson—  
What You Need to  
Know**

## **Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:**

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

## **Top Tips:**

- **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).**



## **So in Summary:**

**You're the  
Spokesperson—What  
You Need to Know**

## **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?**

## **So in Summary:**

**You're the  
Spokesperson—  
What You Need to  
Know**

## **As a Spokesperson:**

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

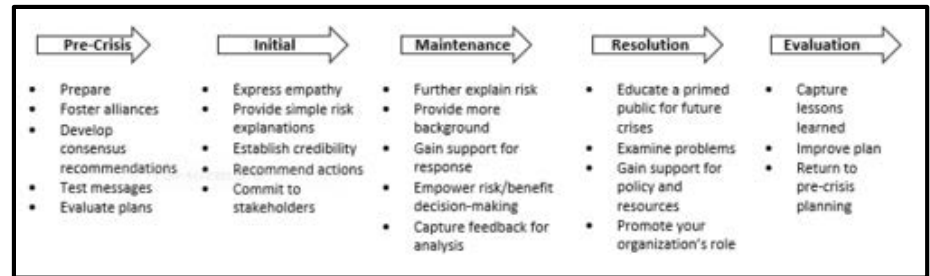
## **Stay on Message:**

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

**CONSISTENT MESSAGES ARE VITAL**

## So in Summary:

## You're the Spokesperson— What You Need to Know



## Always adhere to the six principles of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication:

- Be First.
- Be Right.
- Be Credible.
- Express Empathy.
- Promote Action.
- Show Respect.