

Crisis Communication Tips

(Taken from CDC's Crisis Emergency Risk Communication Guide and Peter Sandman)

- When possible, get crisis and/or risk communication training or coaching to help you prepare. Risk communication resources are available (within DOD, and available through private firms) to assist.
- Don't over-reassure. Although you want people to be vigilant and concerned, if you have to modify the estimation of damage/ victims, it's better to modify it down, not up. ("It's too soon to say we're out of the woods yet, even though we haven't seen a new case of.... in X days.")
- Tell people what to expect. "We'll learn things in the coming days that we'll wish we'd known early on." "The number of losses will probably go up."
- Acknowledge uncertainty, as well as the audience's and your own distress about the uncertainty. "How I wish I could give you a definite answer on that..." "Be assured I will keep you posted on new information."
- Acknowledge fears. People will be afraid, and have a right to be.
- Acknowledge the shared misery. Doing so can help some people move toward hope for the future and help them focus on actions they can take.
- Be a role model. Your determination to see it through can help some who are looking for role models to face the risk.
- Adopt a policy of full disclosure about what is and is not known. Avoid being overly confident in the initial phases of a risk assessment and an investigation. It is better to admit that something is unknown than to make firm but unfounded declarations in an attempt to provide reassurance.
- Give a detailed accounting of what is being done to address and counter the threat.
- Give value and purpose by directing people things to do that will enhance working through this crisis. Recommend specific steps that people can or should take to protect themselves.
- Avoid speculation.
- Avoid issuing statements or information that conflict with that being provided by other government agencies.
- Deliver information in a non-patronizing manner.
- Understand and be sensitive to the culture of the audience. You don't want to make matters worse.
- Promise ONLY what you know you can make happen