

“Crisis Communications: State Models and Gaps”

Homeland Security S&T Stakeholders West

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Overview

- Definition of “good” crisis communications.
- “Gaps” through case studies.
- Who does it well?
- What we tell governors.
- Challenges.
- Wrap up/take-aways.

What is “good”?

Good Crisis Communications:

- Builds trust.
- Effectively controls rumors/competing information.
- Results in desired behaviors.

When it all goes wrong...

- Anthrax, October 2001
- SARS, November 2002 – August 2003
- Hurricane Katrina, Autumn 2005

ANTHRAX

- Lack of scientific/medical spokespersons.
- Incomplete information.
- Inaccurate information.
- Perception of disparity in response.
- Allegations of racism.
- Lack of trust in government.

SARS

- Initial coverup by foreign governments.
- Misinformation re: outbreak control.
- “Messaging” resulted in stigmatization.
- “Voluntary quarantine” not quite “voluntary.”
- Lack of trust in government.

Hurricane Katrina

- Message not tied to effective action.
- Special populations not considered.
- Perception of abandonment.
- Lack of trust in government.

Those who do it well, do it often.

- California: wildfires, earthquakes.
- Florida: tropical storms, hurricanes.
- Tornado alley.

Measures of “success.”

- Trust.
- Rumor control.
- Desired behavior.

What do we tell governors?

- Ensure adequate planning.
- Own the situation.
- Be accurate.
- Explain actions and strategies.
- Set an update schedule.
- Tell people what they can do.

Gaps and Challenges

- Alternative sources.
- 24-hour news cycle.
- Multiple audiences.
- Multiple messengers.
- Message fatigue.

Strategies

- Use National Incident Management System (NIMS)
- Use Joint Information Centers
- Establish relationships.
- Engage the media.

What should you remember?

- Crisis Communications is part of a sound overall strategy.
- The goal is “desired” behavior: action or restraint.
- Trust *is the key*.
- Accuracy builds trust.
- Empowers the people.

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