“Crisis Communications: State Models and Gaps”

Homeland Security S&T Stakeholders West

January 14, 2008
Los Angeles, Calif.

Chris Logan
Program Director
Homeland Security and Technology
National Governors Association
Center for Best Practices
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.
Chris Logan
Program Director, Homeland Security
NGA Center for Best Practices
202/624-5379
clogan@nga.org