Working With the Media
Module Summary

• How response officials should and should not deal with the media
• Ways in which the media are affected by crises
• Pros and cons of different tools you can use to reach the media (e.g., press conferences)
• Writing for the media during a crisis
• Dealing with media errors
Disasters Are Media Events

• We need the media to be there.
• There is no national emergency broadcast system.
• Give important protective actions for the public.
• Know how to reach their audiences and what their audiences need.
Response Officials Should

- Understand that their job is not the media’s job
- Know that they can’t dismiss media when they’re inconvenient
- Acknowledge that the media are an excellent vehicle to get to the public quickly
- Accept that the media will be involved in the response, and plan accordingly
Response Officials Should

• Attempt to provide all media equal access
• Use technology to fairly distribute information
• Plan to precredential media for access to EOC/JOC or JIC
• Think consistent messages
Response Officials Should Not

• Hold grudges
• Discount local media
• Tell the media what to do
How To Work With Reporters

• Reporters want a front seat to the action and all information NOW.
• Preparation will save relationships.
• If you don’t have the facts, tell them the process.
• Reality Check: 70,000 media outlets in U.S. Media cover the news 24/7.
Media, Too, Are Affected by Crises

• Verification
• Adversarial role
• National dominance
• Lack of scientific expertise
Diminished Information Verification

• Initially, expect errors. “If you have expertise in an area, you will find errors.”
• 73% of adults have become more skeptical about news accuracy.
Media and Crisis Coverage

• A Fox poll found 56% believed news outlets “over-hyped” anthrax.
• 77% said that the coverage frightened them.
• 92% were saddened.
• 42% were tired out.
Media and Crisis Coverage

• Evidence strongly suggests that coverage is more factual when reporters have more information. They become more interpretative when they have less information.

• What should we conclude?
Adversarial Role

• Diminished adversarial role in the initial phase of a crisis.
• Media have genuine concern.
National Dominance

• Expect the national media to dominate in major crises.
• That means messages meant for local audiences may have to compete with national coverage.
• Plan ahead.
Inadequate Scientific Expertise

• Inadequate scientific expertise can be a problem.
• Prepare to “fill in the blanks.”
Command Post

• Media will expect a command post. Official channels that work well will discourage reliance on nonofficial channels. Be media-friendly at the command post—prepare for them to be on site.
• Name reasons it may be good for media to be at the command post.
• Name reasons it may be bad.
Tools To Reach the Public Through the Media

- Press conferences
- Satellite media tours
- Telephone news conferences
- E-mail listservs and broadcast fax
- Web sites/video streaming
- Response to media calls
Press Conferences

• Plus: Consistent messages; save time
• Minus: Media may not be able to attend; pack mentality
Satellite Media Tours

• Plus: Give local slant to interviews from national level
• Minus: Expensive
Telephone News Conferences

• Plus: Reach far more media than press conference; great flexibility
• Minus: No interesting visuals for TV/Web
E-mail Listservs and Broadcast Fax

• Plus: Great for updates that don’t need explanation

• Minus: Difficult to keep addresses up-to-date
Web Sites/Video Streaming

• Plus: Transparent to public and media at same time
• Minus: Require a Webmaster
Response to Media Calls

• Plus: Media can give you information too
• Minus: Time-consuming
Writing for the Media During a Crisis

• The pressure will be tremendous from all quarters.
• It must be fast and accurate.
• It’s like cooking a turkey when people are starving.
• If information isn’t finalized, explain the process.
Emergency Press Releases

• One page with attached factsheet (can clear quicker)

• Think of them as press updates, and prime media when to expect them

• Should answer 5Ws and H for the time it covers
Emergency Press Releases

• Reality check: Requires concessions to your journalistic tastes—so pick your battles
• Keep your eye on the prize—fast, accurate releases to the media and public
Press Statements Are Not Press Releases

• They are the official position.
• May be used to counter a contrary view.
• Not used for peer-review debate.
• Offer encouragement to the public and responders.
Factsheets and Backgrounders

- They carry the facts and history.
Video News Releases and B-roll

- Get your message on tape.
- B-roll is easier than VNRs to produce.
- Don’t raise subjects in b-roll that you do not want to promote during an emergency.
Successful Emergency Press Conferences

• Where to hold it?
• Who to invite?
• How and when to invite the media?
• Handouts?
Media Errors—Now What?

“Declaring war on the press, tempting as it may sound, is a game you can’t win.”

—Stratford Sherman, in *Fortune* magazine
Calm Down

Don’t let it be personal—everyone has a job to do.
Analyze the Situation

• What is your relationship with this reporter and the media?
• Did the piece report both sides?
• Was it inaccurate or simply the facts with a negative slant?
Know What To Ask For

- Decide on your ideal as well as your minimal solution.
- Retraction or correction?
- Another piece that offers your perspective?
- An apology?
- Correction for permanent record?
- Letter to editor printed?
Know Whom To Contact

• Don’t go to the top first. Contact the reporter.
• If you have doubts about the integrity of the outlet, consider an alternate media outlet.
• Reach the public through channels other than the media.
Know What You Want To Communicate

• “Speak with one voice.”
• Frame the message in a positive way.
• It may include a call to action.
• Focus on your audience.
• Include no anger in the message.
Before Releasing Information to the Media, Consider

• Ability—Do you have the right information?
• Competency—Are you qualified to discuss the topic?
• Authority—Who has jurisdiction over the issue?
• Security—Is the information classified?
• Accuracy—Have you verified the information?
• Propriety—Does it display sensitivity and dignity?
• Policy—Is it permitted to release this information?