



Working With the Media

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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?

