

# ***Message Mapping: Anticipating the Issue***

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# Outline of Presentation

- Communications during emergencies
- Crisis communication plans
- Message mapping
- Brief exercise



# Potential Consequences of Attack on Water System

- Adverse impact on public health
- Disruption of system operations and supply of safe water
- Physical damage to system infrastructure
- Reduced public confidence in the water supply
- Long-term denial of water and high cost of remediation and replacement



# Nature of Emergencies



- Unexpected
- Usually much initially unknown
- Events unfold, often unpredictably
- Lack of information breeds uncertainty and fear
  - Everyone becomes a source of information
  - Conflicting information destroys trust and credibility

# Nature of Emergencies Continued

- Decisions are necessary during emergencies that can affect large numbers of people
  - Often “on the fly” and incremental
- General fear factors and uncertainties make communications difficult, but essential
- Individual behaviors different from “normal” situation



# Informing Media and Public

- The public, news media, policy-makers, and other stakeholders will expect timely and quality information about the situation
- Effective communication is a key responsibility of water utilities, regulatory agencies, public health officials, and other authorities in times of crisis



# Effective Communication Matters

- Poor crisis communication can fan emotions and undermine public trust
- Good crisis communication can:
  - Rally support
  - Calm a nervous public
  - Provide needed information
  - Encourage cooperative behaviors



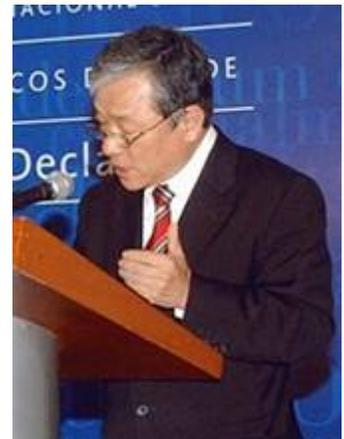
# Crisis Communication Plan

- Water sector organizations should prepare for communicating with the media and public during crisis events by developing a comprehensive, written Crisis Communication Plan *in advance*
- Techniques for developing and delivering effective crisis messages should be considered *within the context* of this plan



# Benefits of Crisis Communication Plan

- Many of the necessary communication decisions and activities will have already been decided upon--before the incident occurs
- A plan allows for proactive, quick, and effective responses during an emergency
- Enables leaders and spokespersons to focus on particulars of the emergency at hand and the quality, accuracy, and speed of their responses



# Among Other Things, Plan Should Identify

- Target audiences for given scenarios
- Preferred channels to communicate with the public, key stakeholders, and partners
  - Telephone hotlines, radio announcements, news conferences, web site updates, faxes, etc.
- Subject-matter experts willing to collaborate during an emergency



## Plan Should Also Include

- Prepared statements, messages, and answers to frequently asked questions
- Fact sheets, question-and-answer sheets, talking points, and other supplementary materials for potential scenarios



# Why Crisis Communication Matters During an Emergency: Mental Noise



- Mental noise theory indicates that when people are highly upset, they often have difficulty hearing, understanding, and remembering information
- Research shows that mental noise can reduce a person's ability to process information by more than **80 percent**
- Mostly due to trauma and a heightened emotional state during a crisis



# Solutions to Mental Noise

- Develop a limited number of key messages
- Keep individual key messages brief (**sound bites**)
- Develop messages that are clearly understandable



# Develop Key Messages

- Based on an analysis of 10 years of print and media coverage of emergencies and crises in the United States:
  - The average length of a sound bite in the print media is **27 words**
  - The average duration of a sound bite in the broadcast media is **nine seconds**
  - The average number of messages reported within sound bites, in both the print and broadcast media, is **three**



# Key Messages

- With this in mind, key messages should be organized into sound bites with a total of three bullets containing a maximum of 27 words (combined) that can be spoken in nine seconds



# Know What is Coming

- Research indicates that **95%** of all questions and concerns that will be raised during any crisis can be **predicted in advance** when accumulated using a systematic approach called **message mapping**



# What is Message Mapping?

- Developing detailed information ahead of time that can be used to respond to anticipated questions that arise during crisis situations



# Seven Step Process

- Identify stakeholders
- Identify stakeholder questions
- Analyze the questions to identify underlying concerns
- Develop key messages
- Develop supporting facts
- Test and practice messages
- Deliver maps through appropriate information channels



# Examples of Those Using Message Mapping

- Former Mayor Giuliani (9-11)
- Former PM Tony Blair
- Gen Norman Schwarzkopf
- World Health Organization
- CDC
- DOE
- EPA



# Sample Message Map

- **Question:** What is the waterworks doing now about the contaminated water system following the attack?
  - *Effective immediately, we advise people in the (affected) area not to use the water*
  - *We are testing water quality throughout the system*
  - *We have begun recovery operations*



# Message with Supporting Information

- ***Effective immediately, we advise people in the (affected) area not to use the water.***
  - People in the affected area should not drink the water
  - People should not use the water to bathe, shower, or wash
  - Alternative sources of drinking water will be made available at the following locations [insert locations]
- ***We are testing water quality throughout the system***
  - We are taking samples at various locations
  - [Insert laboratory name] is testing those samples
  - The results of these tests will determine our next steps
- ***We have begun recovery operations***
  - Our recovery operations are being coordinated with local, state, and federal agencies
  - The CDC and other public health experts are advising us on potential health effects
  - The US Environmental Protection Agency and other experts are advising us on how to clean the system



# Multiple Uses of Key Messages

- Press conferences
- Media interviews
- Information exchanges
- Public meetings
- Web sites
- Telephone hot line scripts
- Facts sheets



# Key Message Development Exercise

- Remember: Key messages should be organized into sound bites with a total of three bullets containing a maximum of about 27 words (combined) that can be spoken in about nine seconds



# Natural Disaster Scenario

## Attachment A

- A large sustained storm has caused significant damage to a large section of your area; including numerous downed trees, widespread power outages, and flooding
- The electric utility estimates that it will be at least three days before power can be restored to the water utility's treatment plant and pump stations
- De-pressurization of the distribution system is causing broken pipes. Mitigation and repair of the broken pipes is hindered by the flooding

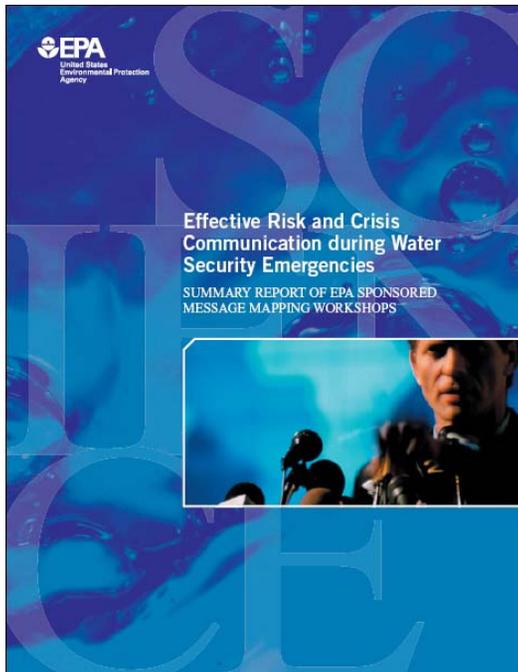


# Group Exercise

- The local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) is preparing a recorded message for “reverse 911” calls they will be sending to areas that still have phone service
- EMA has requested a statement regarding drinking water use restrictions for inclusion in their emergency message
- Work in teams to develop a sound bite for EMA



# Available Resources



- Report and DVD developed with Dr. Vincent Covello, internationally known risk communications expert
- Both explain how to develop messages now as part of a communication strategy for responding to terrorist threats and other disasters in the future

# References

- **Peter Sandman**, internationally recognized risk communication consultant [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com)
- **Vincent Covello**, Director, Center for Risk Communication [www.centerforriskcommunication.org](http://www.centerforriskcommunication.org)
- **Hyer RN, Covello VT.** *Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies: A WHO Handbook*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2005  
([www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/WHO\\_CDS\\_2005\\_31/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/WHO_CDS_2005_31/en/))



# Questions?

- NHSRC web site:

**[www.epa.gov/nhsrc](http://www.epa.gov/nhsrc)**

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