Purpose

CERC principles can help you provide the public with information to make the **best decisions** within incredibly **challenging time constraints** and to accept the **imperfect nature of choice**.

The **right message** at the **right time** from the **right person** can save lives.

Introduction to Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

Public health must be ready 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to protect people from health threats—whether these threats are global or domestic, natural or deliberate.

What is CERC?

CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) manual was first published in 2002 to provide an approach to health communications during emergencies based on experience and psychological and communication sciences.

Six Principles of CERC

Fully integrated CERC helps ensure that limited resources are managed well and can do the most good at every phase of an emergency response.

1 Be First:
Crises are time-sensitive. Communicating information quickly is crucial. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.

2 Be Right:
Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.

3 Be Credible:
Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crises.

4 Express Empathy:
Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.

5 Promote Action:
Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes some sense of control.[3]

6 Show Respect:
Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

The CERC Rhythm

Engage Community • Empower Decision-Making • Evaluate

Preparation
- Draft and test messages
- Develop partnerships
- Create plans
- Determine approval process

Initial
- Express empathy
- Explain risks
- Promote action
- Describe response efforts

Maintenance
- Explain ongoing risks
- Segment audiences
- Provide background information
- Address rumors

Resolution
- Motivate vigilance
- Discuss lessons learned
- Revise plan

Messages and Audiences

Understanding your Audience

The public will judge your message by its

- Content
- Messenger
- Method of delivery

Understanding your Audience

You can better understand the needs of your audience if you understand:

- Their relationship to the incident

- Their psychological differences

- Their demographic differences

Audience Relationship to Emergency

Discussion: Match Audiences with their Concerns

Audiences

- Survivors and their families
- Governments
- First responders
- Trade and industry
- Community far outside disaster
- Media

Concerns

- Opportunity to express concern
- Personal safety
- Resources for response
- Loss of revenue/liability
- Speed of information flow
- Anticipatory guidance
- Family's safety

What the Public Will Ask First

- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?

Initial Message

**Initial messages should**

- Be short
- Be relevant
- Give positive action steps
- Be repeated

Making Facts Work in Your Message

- Be concise and focused
- Include only relevant information
- Give action steps in positives
- Repeat the message
- Use personal pronouns when discussing the organization
- Promise only what can be delivered
- Use plain language
- Avoid speculation
- Avoid humor

Five Communication Mistakes to Avoid

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
5. Public power struggles and confusion
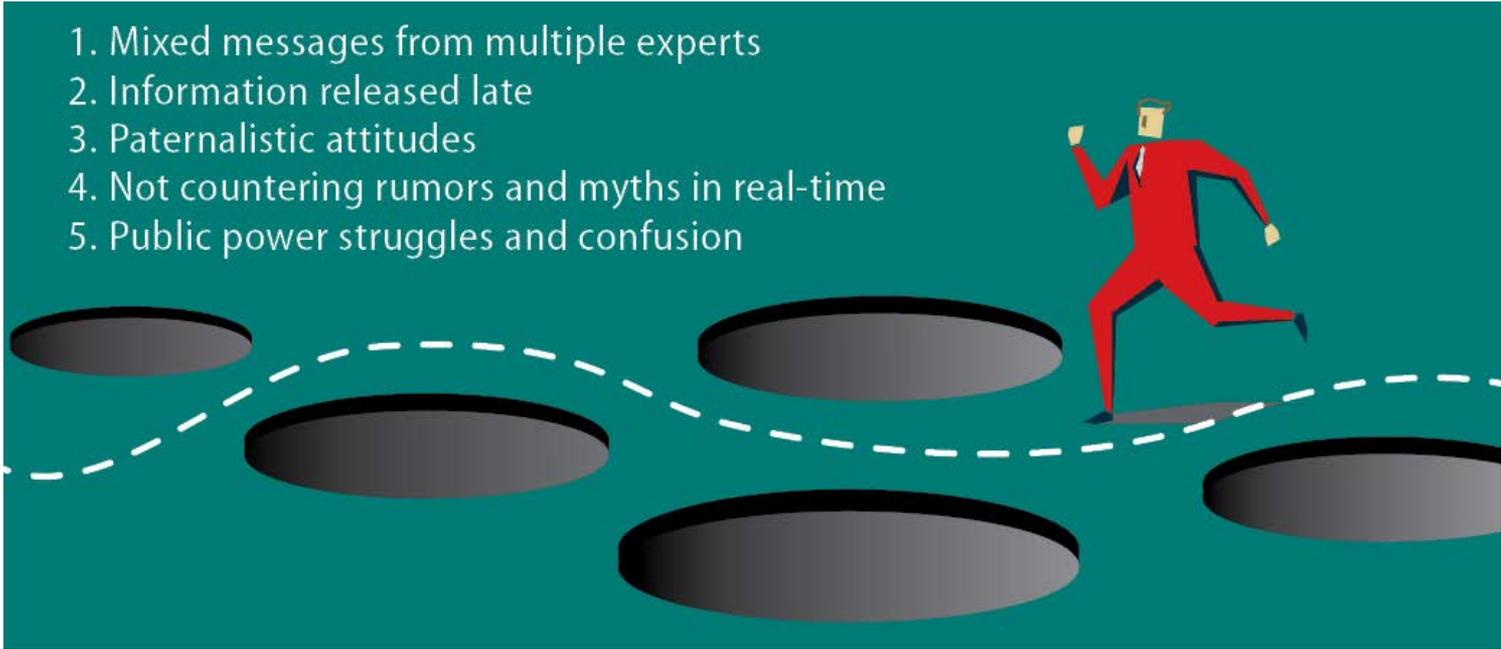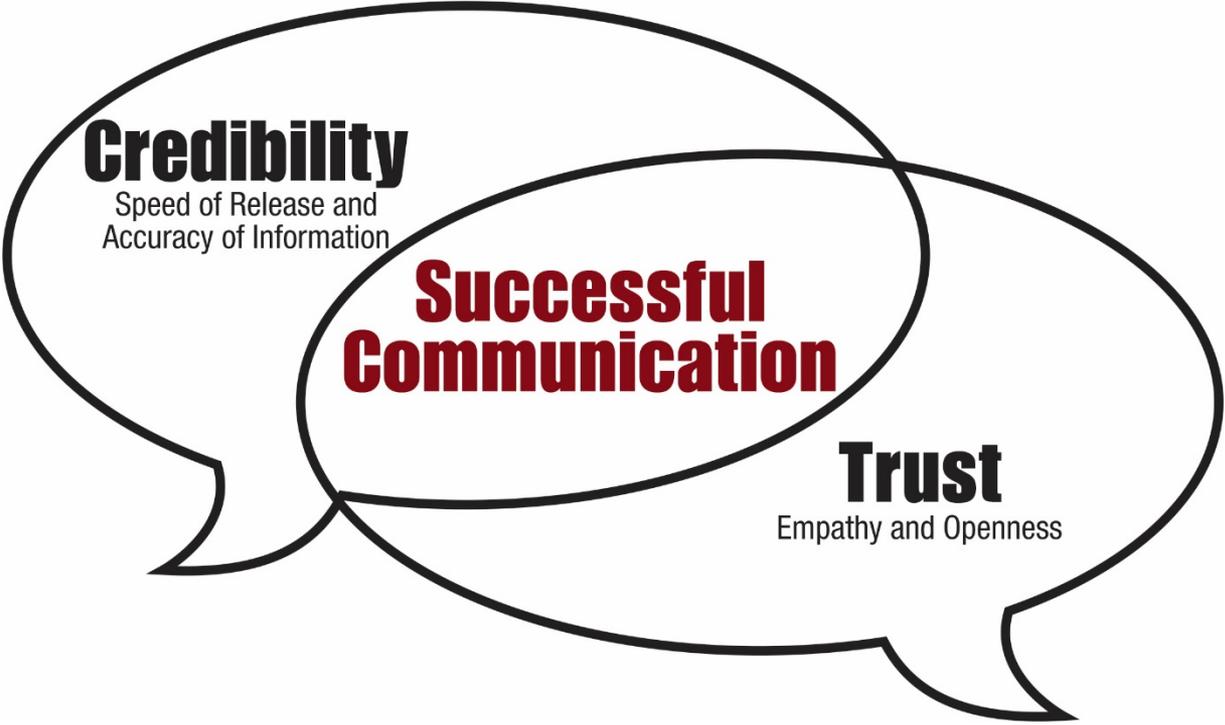
Trust and Mistrust

- Stakeholders judge an emergency response based on trust.

- Trust happens when promises are fulfilled.

- Mistrust is an outgrowth of the perception that promises were broken and values violated.

Consequences of Mistrust

- Health recommendations ignored and disease and death go up
- Demands for misallocation of resources
- Public health policies circumvented
- Opportunists prey on those who are looking for someone to trust
- Fiscal and medical resources are wasted

We can't accomplish our mission!

Acting Trustworthy

- Share information early.
- Acknowledge the concerns of others.
- Under promise and over deliver.
- Select a spokesperson who is never condescending.
- Engage third-party validators and advocates.

Conclusion

Resources

- CERC Website
  - http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/
- Additional Inquiries
  - cercrequest@cdc.gov

Questions?