Agent Specific Creative Brief: VX

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
SOUTHWEST CENTER FOR PRE-EVENT MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

Chemical Creative Brief – 11/23/04

1. Target Audience(s)

- The population living in a threatened or affected area in which a chemical agent might be used or has been used.
- Special attention should be given to vulnerable populations: elders, minorities, non-English speakers, and persons living in rural areas.

2. Objective(s)

In Year 2 of the research, Focus Group and Cognitive Response testing was implemented on developed radio, television, and print materials.

Information needs and information seeking are organized into three temporal conditions: pre-event, intra-event, and post-event.

Information needs also varied according to actions required for protection of self, family, and community.

Individual Level

Pre-Event, individuals needed:

- Preparatory conceptual information regarding chemical agents.
- Knowledge of actions steps necessary for protection.
- Knowledge of where to obtain needed information and materials.

During an event:

- Knowledge of the importance of avoiding contact with the agent and contaminated areas.
- Knowledge of actions steps relevant to decontamination, sheltering in place, symptoms of exposure and antidote availability.

After an event:

- Knowledge of the importance of maintaining avoidance of agent.
- Knowledge of where and how to seek further information regarding emergency status and actions.
- Knowledge relevant to the observation of self and others regarding possible exposure.
- Knowledge of treatment avenues.

Family and Community

Pre-Event, people needed:

- Community education venues regarding preparation/prevention/treatment.
- Where to get educational materials for preparation/prevention/treatment of others.

- How to develop a plan of effective action to implement which is inclusive of others.

During an event:

- Information regarding assisting with decontamination, treatment, and sheltering of community members.
- Instructions on how to obtain information regarding emergency status and actions.

After an event:

- Education regarding the observation of community members for symptom development.
- Information regarding safety of environment post-event.

3. Obstacles

Immediate ability to effectively respond to a chemical threat or attack is impeded by several factors which are generally related to lack of adequate information, information not provided in preferred language or media, and fear of the unknown. However, other mundane but significant issues are present including language issues, distrust of government as a source of full and complete information, and a sense of futility regardless of protective action.

- Existing knowledge of VX/Chemical agents and effective response to chemical attack/exposure are largely absent among all public groups.

- Lack of current, available information for individuals and family creates a learning curve that remains to be completed. While radio, video, and print materials tested provided answers to some questions, others remain, and a sense of efficacy and safety **is not provided** by radio, television and print materials tested in this past year.

- Fear, panic, and anxiety were nearly universally mentioned as initial reactions to news of an event. It could be noteworthy to consider each of the above items discrete reactions, each with their own behavioral outcomes. For example, refusal to stay away from a contaminated area if family was there.

- Confusion regarding action steps such as decontamination and sheltering in place. For example, decontamination was thought to be impractical when at work and other non-residential environments since clothing removal and showering is a first step.

- Doubt that the action steps recommended would ensure safety.

- Distrust of government regarding receipt of full information based on past experiences that seem to convey a pattern of purposeful withholding of information or the dissemination of incomplete

information.

- Distrust of government regarding rural areas receiving full support due to a perception of more resources in high population density areas and a predilection to sacrifice a relative few to preserve the many.

- Concern that the antidote will not be available to all.

- Concern that language will be only English and overly difficult to understand with the result that there will not be a standard probability of survival of an event.

- Concern that detailed, technical, complex language will be used in safety communications and limit the ability to comply due to simple miscommunications stemming from readability factors. Print materials were thought to be the most informative during the present research, but were thought by some to be confusing.

4. Key Promise

In general, messages should convey the following key facts:

- Protection is possible.
- Survivability is possible.
- Avoidance or reduction of exposure is possible.
- Decontamination is possible.
- Antidote medication exists.

5. Support Statements / Reasons Why

VX can kill. The serious nature of contamination should be conveyed directly and fully, in language and format that can be easily understood. This will also be motivation for seeking and adopting protective information.

VX can be survived. To counteract a pervasive perception that chemical agents will always result in death, its survivability should be emphasized and connected to the use of easily understood and implemented protective action steps.

VX can be avoided. Application of sheltering information and other protective strategies can result in avoidance or reduction of exposure.

VX decontamination is effective. Timely decontamination can be an effective way to reduce the effects of exposure.

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VX treatment is available. Antidote medication exists that can treat the symptoms of VX exposure.

6. Delivery of Information: Results of Media Testing

There is a strong need for information to be available **pre-event**, in addition to that provided intra- and post-event.

Dissemination:

- TV
- Radio
- Print Materials: Supermarket checkout areas, schools, Laundromats, libraries
- Emergency Broadcast System
- Local authorities and agencies: hospitals, emergency response personnel
- Internet
- Use of all communication means

Radio

- Tone: Calm, factual, authoritative, without sensationalism.
- Complete and full without withholding any information.
- Superior to TV while driving a car, in rural areas, or at work.
- Radio clips did not provide enough information for listeners, and this contributed to overall anxiety.
- Messages should be translated into various languages as necessary.

Television

- Tone: Calm, factual, authoritative, without sensationalism.
- Complete and full without withholding any information.
- TV clip left viewers with confusion about action steps and symptoms of exposure.
- TV thought to be better than radio messaging.
- Messages should be translated into various languages as necessary.

Print Materials

- Print materials presented were thought to contain much more usable information than the radio and TV clips.
- Improvements to print materials included use of bullets, color, larger font, and simplified language.
- Messages should consider reading level and provide definitions.
- Messages should be translated into various languages as necessary.

8. Creative Considerations

The following items offered some unique and creative information usable in message development:

Use weather broadcasters as spokespersons. Typical news anchors were perceived as the sources of

sensationalism about news. There was a sense that weather broadcasters were less subject to political whims of media outlets and their commercial interests. Information would be provided that was relevant to local concerns, rather than national concerns. Also, they used objective information that is fact and science-based. Consequently, a sense of heightened trust was attached to them due to their insulation from politics and their scientific approach to information.

Identify a team of spokespersons. There was a strong concern about the credibility of information from the media. Independently across groups, there was an approach that was stated in which a duo of spokespersons was used. The duo would be composed of 1) a well-recognized and respected public figure, coupled with 2) an expert in the topic area. People wanted expertise, but considered the need to have confidence that the specific expert being used was "the definitive" one. The recognized and respected public figure served to convey an endorsement of the technical expert. The public figure also would serve as a connection to the human need part of the information needed to cope with an event.

Use existing venues. Use tornado or other existing warning sirens as an initial alert system. Since most communities have existing alert systems, it was common to hear ideas about developing a unique audible siren blast code that would be specific to bioterror alerts. This code would be a signal to immediately seek more information from the media.

Concern with pets. Regarding pets, there was a strong desire to have information providing assurance that their safety could be maintained.

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10. Population-Specific Findings

Rural Issues

- Distrust of government regarding rural areas receiving full support due to a perception of more resources in high population density areas and a predilection to sacrifice a relative few to preserve the many.
- Trust of local authorities and local sources of information (such as that received from local emergency and hospital personnel) over federal authorities.
- Access to national news broadcasts, but not local broadcasts, as many rural communities do not have local television or radio facilities.
- Reliance upon ham radios and police scanners.
- Protection of pets and livestock. Personal and commercial interests in animals were strong concerns to participants. Additionally, there was concern about exposed animals transferring contamination to humans.

American Indian

- Use of wild or domestic outdoor animals as sentinels of active agent presence. Some people considered their local animal populations to be potential sentinels regarding the impact and presence of a chemical agent.
- Retreating to higher, remote areas.

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- Lack of trust in federal government.
- Trust in tribal government and authorities.
- TV and radio media presented were thought to be poor.
- Print materials were preferred.
- Symptoms delineated also apply to other illnesses, such as diabetes.

Hispanic

- Trust in federal government.
- Trust in local community individuals, such as the parish priests.
- Would prefer media to be delivered in Spanish, but without the sensationalism/emotionalism.
- Would also access English language media due to the perception that Spanish media is more emotional and sensationalist.
- Symptoms delineated also apply to other illnesses.

African American

- Lack of trust in federal government.
- Trust in community leaders and church.
- Difficulty in understanding print materials.
- Television was preferred over radio.

Asian

- Trust in federal government.
- Preferred television dissemination.
- Trust in local community leaders.