Emergency Message Components

1. **Expression of empathy**

2. **Call for Action**
Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

3. **What we don't know**

4. **Process to get answers**

5. **Statement of commitment**

6. **Referrals**

For more information

Next scheduled update

Check your message

- √ Positive action steps
- √ Honest/open tone
- √ Apply CERC principles
- √ Clarity
- √ Use of simple, short words
- √ Avoid jargon/humor
- √ Avoid judgmental phrases
- √ Avoid extreme speculation

CRISIS AND EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION (CERC):

Crisis and emergency risk communication encompasses the urgency of disaster communication with the need to communicate risks and benefits to stakeholders and the public. CERC differs from risk communication in that a decision must be made within a narrow time constraint, the decision may be irreversible, the outcome of the decision may be uncertain, and the decision may need to be made with imperfect or incomplete information.

Precrisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation
Be prepared Foster alliances Develop consensus recommendations Test messages	Acknowledge the event with empathy Explain and inform the public in simplest forms about the risk Establish agency spokesperson credibility Provide emergency courses of action (including how/ where to get more information Commit to stake-holders and public to continue communication	Help public accurately understand risks Provide background/ information to those who need it Gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans Listen to stakeholder and audience feedback; correct any misinformation Explain emergency recommendations Empower risk/ benefit decision-making	Improve public response in future; similar events through education Examine problems and mishaps; reinforce what worked Encourage the public to support resource allocation and public policy Promote the activities and capabilities of the agency (reinforce corporate identity externally and internally)	Evaluate communication plan performance Document lessons learned Determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan

CREATING YOUR CERC MESSAGES

Present a short, concise, and focused message (6th-grade level). It's difficult in a heightened state of anxiety or fear to take in copious amounts of information. Get the bottom line out first.

Cut to the chase. *Relevant information only* at this time. Don't begin with a lot of background information.

Give action steps in positives. Avoid the use of negatives.

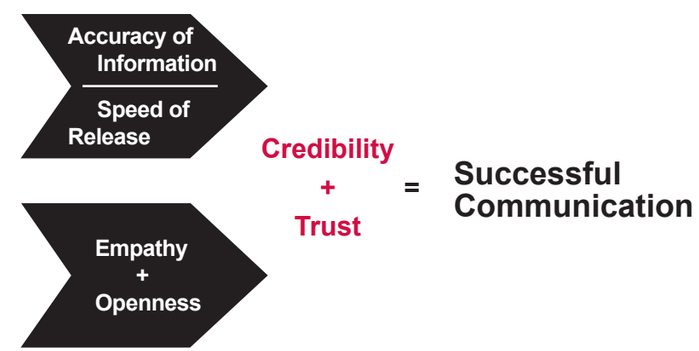
Repeat the message. Repetition reflects credibility and durability.

Create action steps in threes or rhyme, or create an acronym. Three is not a magic number, but in an emergency, you should not expect your audience to absorb more than three simple directions.

Use personal pronouns for the organization. "We are committed to . . ." or "We understand the need for . . ."

CERC NINE-STEP PLAN

1. **Verify** situation.
2. Conduct **notification.**
3. **Activate** crisis plan.
4. **Organize** assignments.
5. **Prepare information,** obtain approvals.
6. **Release information** via pre-arranged channels.
7. **Obtain feedback**, conduct crisis evaluation.
8. Begin additional **public education** activities.
9. **Monitor** events.



The First 48 Hours

BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE.

Notification
Use your crisis plan's notification list to ensure that your leadership is aware (especially if it comes from the media and not the EOC) of the emergency and that they know you are involved. Give leadership your first assessment of the emergency from a communication perspective and inform them of your next steps.

Coordination
Contact local, state, federal partners now. If there is potential for criminal investigation, contact your FBI counterpart now. Secure a spokesperson as designated in the plan. Initiate alert notification and call-in extra communication staff, per the plan. Connect with the EOC— **make your presence known**.

Media
Provide a statement indicating that your agency is aware of the emergency and is involved in the response. Begin monitoring media for misinformation that must be corrected. Tell the media when and where to get updates from your agency. Give facts. Don't speculate. Ensure partners are saying the same thing.

The Public
Prepare your public information toll-free number operation now if you anticipate that the public will seek reassurance or information directly from your organization. (You may adjust hours of operation and number of call managers as needed.) Use your initial media statement as your first message to the public. Remind people that a process is in place to mitigate the crisis. Begin public call monitoring to detect trends or rumors.

Partners/Stakeholders
Send a statement to partners and stakeholders using prearranged notification systems (preferably e-mail listservs). Engage your leadership to make important initial phone calls, based on your plan, to partners and key stakeholders. Use e-mail to notify employees that their agency is involved in the response and that updates will follow. Ask for their support.

Resources
Conduct the crisis risk assessment and implement assignments and hours of operation accordingly. Secure your pre-planned place in the EOC or adjoining area.

CRISIS+EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

Quick Tips

Express empathy and caring.

Display honesty/openess.

Show commitment/dedication.

Know your organization's policies.

Tell the truth.

Stay on message.

Acknowledge uncertainties.

Stay in your lane (scope of responsibilities).

Give people things to do.

Don't over-reassure.

Ask more of people. (share risk)

Avoid jargon; use humor cautiously.

Refute negatives without repeating them.

Use positive terms.

Don't assume you've made your point. Ask whether you've made yourself clear.

Don't lead with messages about money.

Avoid one-liners, cliches, and off-the-cuff comments.

Discuss what you know, not what you think.

Important Reminders About Your CERC Plan

Update the plan at regular intervals.

Longer is not better; your plan is a reference tool not a step-by-step guide.

Keep your plan simple and flexible.

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.

— Unknown

RESOURCES

www.cdc.gov
www.bt.cdc.gov
www.hhs.gov
www.fema.gov
www.redcross.org
www.ndpo.gov
www.nphic.org

For More Information about CERC: CERC_info@cdc.gov

To request CERC training tools: CERC request@cdc.gov

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