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.

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.

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.

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication

www.cdc.gov
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.

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.
— Unknown

Quick Tips
Express empathy and caring. Avoid jargon; use humor cautiously.
Display honesty/openness. Refute negatives without repeating them.
Show commitment/dedication. Use positive terms.
Know your organization’s policies. Don’t assume you’ve made your point. Ask whether you’ve made yourself clear.
Tell the truth. Don’t lead with messages about money.
Stay on message. Avoid one-liners, cliches, and off-the-cuff comments.
Acknowledgment uncertainties. Discuss what you know, not what you think.
Stay in your lane (scope of responsibilities). Give people things to do.
Give people things to do. Don’t over-reassure.
Don’t over-reassure. Ask more of people.
Ask more of people. (share risk)

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.

For More Information about CERC: CERC_info@cdc.gov
To request CERC training tools: CERC_request@cdc.gov

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