



The Risk Communiqué

Fall 2007

Welcome to this edition of *The Risk Communiqué*, a quarterly newsletter devoted to sharing insights about risk communication policies, philosophies, and practices. If you received this issue, you probably bought a copy of *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks* or met the primary author at a conference, training session, or consultation. This newsletter is being provided to help you communicate complex scientific and technical information.

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A Gentler, Kinder National Response Plan?

The Department of Homeland Security recently made available the revised National Response Plan, now called the National Response Framework. The Framework includes an increased emphasis on the role and importance of the community and the individual in planning for, responding to, and recovering from large-scale disasters, whether natural or human-made.

Communication also plays a key role. For example, the Framework's introduction states: "An effective national response relies on disciplined processes, procedures, and systems to communicate timely, accurate, and accessible information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation to the public, responders, and others. Well-developed public information, education strategies, and communication plans help ensure that lifesaving measures, evacuation routes, threat and alert systems, and other public safety information are coordinated and communicated to numerous audiences in a timely and consistent manner."

The Roles and Responsibilities chapter lays out the public's responsibility:

- Reduce hazards in and around homes
- Prepare a disaster supply kit
- Monitor emergency communications carefully
- Volunteer with an established organization
- Enroll in emergency response training courses.

Unfortunately, the Framework has several flaws. For one thing, it is doubtful that many in the public will realize they are supposed to read it. In addition, state and local governments have expressed concerns about their roles, which still appear to overlap with federal roles. While the Framework itself is written in plain language, the annexes, which provide specifics, are acronym laden and riddled with teams that support subteams, partial teams, state-level teams, national teams, local teams . . . you get the picture.

The University of Maryland's Chiehwen "Ed" Hsu, an expert in public health emergency preparedness, had an additional criticism: the Framework fails to

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A Gentler, Kinder National Response Plan?

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advocate resources to support the needs of vulnerable populations, such as those with physical disabilities and language restrictions. He recommends that local agencies do the following:

- Develop a comprehensive and up-to-date list of assets, hazards, volunteer pool, health information kits, health care providers who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care, and risk communication channels for these vulnerable communities.
- Develop a special need registry to serve as an emergency information system. Vulnerable populations could self-register. This system should be able to receive calls/emails, distribute information, and respond to situations in a declared emergency.
- Use maps to disseminate information such as community assets, health providers, community resources, and evacuation plans for residents with limited English ability.

For more information on Hsu's critique, see <http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/532741/>. For the current draft of the Framework, see <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nrf/mainindex.htm>.

Accidental Injuries: Gap in Perception

Nearly a third of Americans agree that nothing can be done to prevent accidental injuries, according to a national survey on safety issues released in August by the National Safety Council. With

the accidental death and injury rates set to reach all-time highs in the next few years, this is daunting news for risk communicators.

The one bright spot in the survey of over 1,600 randomly selected adults was that nearly two-thirds saw accidental injuries as a serious public health concern. But once again, the expert view and the public view differed when it came to specifics. For example, poisoning is no longer the leading cause of death among children. Poisoning of working-age adults, especially from overdoses of prescription and illegal drugs, is now the fastest-rising cause of accidental death. Yet 81% of those surveyed still thought children were at most risk, and the majority pointed to household chemicals as the culprit.

Researchers found that education and advocacy are the key to changing perceptions. Where individuals, organizations, businesses, and communities rallied around an issue, the rate of accidental injuries decreased. Efforts similar to those directed at workplace safety, which has increased dramatically over recent years, could make a difference.

For more information on the survey, see <http://www.reliableplant.com/article.asp?pagetitle=Americans%20have%20pessimistic%20view%20of%20accident%20prevention&articleid=8712>

A Picture Worth a Dozen Words? Canadian Graphic Labels Make a Difference

Graphics are a sure way to get attention, especially in risk communication. But the use of graphics on warning labels is a newer phenomena. They're also a more effective one according to Dan Romer, Director of the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute of the Annenberg Public Policy Center; Paul Slovic, one of the forefathers of risk communication and leader of Decision Research; and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

The United States has been using four interchangeable printed warnings on cigarette packages since the mid-1980s. Cigarette smoking has declined slightly in recent years, though it is increasing slightly among high-school-aged teens. Canada, on the other hand, has been using large, colorful warning labels like the one shown below since 2000. Other graphics show a brain damaged by stroke and a premature baby on life support. The labels also list facts about smoking hazards. Cigarette smoking among Canadian teens and adults has dropped to the lowest levels seen there.



Romer, Slovic, and Hall's research, published earlier this year in the *Journal of Nicotine and Tobacco*

Research, suggests that these graphic warning messages have the power to change smoking behavior. By evaluating the response of U.S. smokers and nonsmokers to the U.S. warnings compared to the Canadian warnings, they found that the colorful, graphic warnings provided an important deterrent to potential smokers and would encourage current smokers to quit. When asked if they would support more graphic warnings on cigarette packages, a majority of current smokers said yes.

For more information on the study, see http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Releases/Release_Tobac20070320/Release_FDAfactsheet_20070320.pdf

Blogging to Communicate

The web log or blog has become the water cooler of American society. Favorites are read religiously, and a recommendation of a product or service on some blogs translates into thousands of dollars in sales. It's no surprise, then, that risk communicators are turning to blogs to get the word out on risks and how to communicate them.

University of Pittsburgh Professor J. James Bono, for example, shares insights on risk communication at his blog at <http://ppw-riskcomm.blogspot.com/>. He also requires his students to blog about risks as part of their course in the Professional and Public Writing program. Sophomore Alissa is

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If you need more assistance in risk communication, public involvement, or science and health communication, or need to train staff in these areas, please contact Regina Lundgren at lundgren@owt.com or 509-582-6995. For more information about risk communication, see <http://www.rlriskcom.com>.

Blogging for Risks

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If you need additional copies of Lundgren and McMakin's *Risk Communication Handbook*, act quickly! We were devastated to hear that Battelle Press, our publisher, is closing its doors. Remaining stock will be gone by the end of November.

To order additional copies, contact Mindy Burke at 614-424-4089, and please leave a message if you reach an answering machine.

We're in the process of locating another publisher and will let you know more details soon.

blogging about global warming. Kerri is blogging about flood risks. Frank Cowan, President of the Media Survival Group, has a blog devoted to media and crisis communication at <http://mediasurvivalgroup.blogspot.com/>. The Director of Health Marketing for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Jay Bernhardt has a blog at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/blog.htm>. Even Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has a blog, sharing insights on recent news and departmental activities at http://www.dhs.gov/journal/leadership/2007_10_01_archive.html.

How can you use the power of the blog to share information?

- Identify existing bloggers who cover your risk and add them to

your media list for distribution of press releases and other media information.

- Post comments on blogs, offering risk information and sharing in the debate. Be careful not to point readers overtly to your organization, which is seen as a breach of etiquette and could derail your efforts.
- Start your own blog. Use informal language, offer fun facts, and make sure you post at least twice a week. Daily is optimal.

For additional tips on using blogs effectively, see (you guessed it) this article at the blog of Nick Wreden, an expert on developing your organization's image or brand: <http://fusionbrand.blogs.com/fusionbrand/2005/02/nbspnbspnbspn.html>.

Websites of Interest

Society for Public Health Education
<http://www.sophe.org>

Both the organization itself and its webpage offer useful information for risk communicators, including news on upcoming events, continuing education, and the society's journals.

Pandemic Influenza Risk Communication
<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/news/rcommunication.html>

This portal site from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lists communication resources for pandemic influenza and avian flu, including web casts, handbooks, and lessons learned.

National Center for Health Marketing
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention host this list of resources including basics, tools, and tips.

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