



*Tools and Techniques for
Effective Health Risk Communication*

Tools and Techniques for Effective Health Risk Communication
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR),
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001

This handbook accompanies the ATSDR workshop, Tools and Techniques for Effective Health Risk Communication

For more information about the handbook, trainer's guide, workshop, or if you would like assistance in developing your own training program based on these materials, contact:

Yolanda Freeman

Health Communications Specialist
Division of Health Education and Promotion
Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry
Phone: 404-498-0317
Fax: 404-498-0061
Yvf0@cdc.gov

Special thanks to the many individuals who provided information and review of this handbook and the accompanying training session. They include ATSDR's:

Risk Communications Coordinating Committee
Office of Regional Operations
Community/Tribal Subcommittee Workgroup

And Prospect Center of the American Institutes for Research

For additional information about ATSDR, please call 1-888-42-ATSDR.



Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
A. Effective Health Risk Communication.....	2
B. How to Use This Handbook.....	2
Chapter II: Understanding Health Risk Communication.....	3
A. Definition of Health Risk Communication.....	4
B. Role of Risk Perception.....	4
C. Differences in Approach to Risk.....	4
Chapter III: Planning Health Risk Communication.....	7
A. Conducting Background Research.....	8
B. Building a Communication Team.....	8
C. Developing a Health Risk Communication Plan.....	9
D. Defining the Community and Target Audience Segments.....	10
E. Identifying Community Concerns.....	11
F. Evaluating Health Risk Communication.....	13
Chapter IV: Defining Health Risk Communication Objectives and Messages.....	15
A. Developing Health Risk Communication Objectives.....	16
B. Creating Effective Health Risk Communication Messages.....	17
C. Testing Health Risk Communication Messages.....	17
D. Evaluating Health Risk Communication Messages.....	18
E. Using the Health Risk Communication Quick Planning Guide.....	20
Chapter V: Selecting and Using Communication Channels for Messages.....	26
A. Choosing Communication Channels.....	27
B. Identifying Specific Communication Tools.....	27
4. Fact Sheets.....	29
5. Newsletters.....	30
6. News Releases.....	31
7. Open Houses/Availability Sessions/Poster Sessions.....	31
8. Presentations.....	32
9. Public Meetings.....	32
10. Small Group (or Focus Group) Meetings.....	33
11. Telephone Contacts.....	34
C. Public Speaking.....	34
Chapter VI: Working With the Community.....	36
A. Developing Trust.....	37
B. Working With Community Leadership and Other Partners.....	38
C. Working With Special Audience Groups.....	39
1. Developing Translations for Minority Audiences.....	39
2. Targeting Low-Literacy Populations.....	40
Chapter VII: Interacting Effectively With the News Media.....	42
A. Working With the News Media.....	43
B. ATSDR Procedures for Media Relations.....	44

C. Selecting a Spokesperson.....	45
D. Preparing for Media Interviews.....	45
E. Handling Difficult Media Questions.....	46
Chapter VIII: Dealing With a Communication Crisis.....	48
A. Managing Conflict.....	50
B. Handling Difficult Situations.....	50
C. Negotiating With Community Representatives.....	51
Chapter IX: Tip Sheets and Evaluation Planner.....	53
A. Tips for Successful Evaluation.....	54
B. Interview Tips for Television, Radio, and Telephone.....	55
C. Evaluation Planner and Checklist.....	57
Appendix.....	58
Health Risk Communication Plan Sheets (Long Version).....	59
Media List Planning Tool.....	69
Message Design Planning Tool.....	70
Community Interaction Planning Tool.....	72
Health Risk Communication Strategies and Techniques Planning Tool.....	75
Health Risk Communication Evaluation Planning Tool.....	79

Chapter I: Introduction

Effective health risk communication depends on clear, consistent communications between Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) staff and a broad array of community members, state and local officials, and media.

This resource delivers tools and information that can help you to

- Develop a Communication Strategy**
- Conduct Community Outreach and Evaluation**
- Develop Communication Messages**
- Interact Effectively With the News Media**

Chapter I: Introduction

No matter what the situation is at a site, the minute you walk in to do any health-related activity you can heighten the community's concern and trigger an emotional reaction. Your mere presence as an environmental or public health professional signals a potential or actual problem.

Explaining complex information in this context is a challenge for you and ATSDR partners at the state and local levels. As a public servant, you have a responsibility to communicate with the public about health risks in a caring, concerned, and well-planned manner.

A. Effective Health Risk Communication

Health risk communication involves more than explaining a health risk to the public. At its core lies a solid understanding of community concerns and a well-planned, multicomponent communication plan to help

- ◆ Gain feedback
- ◆ Address concerns
- ◆ Establish trust
- ◆ Alleviate fear or anger
- ◆ Address changing or crisis situations
- ◆ Explain information in an effective, yet sympathetic manner

Effective health risk communication can

- ◆ Determine and respond to community concerns
- ◆ Involve the community in the risk management process
- ◆ Reduce tension between concerned communities and agency staff
- ◆ Calm concerned communities by providing reliable information
- ◆ Motivate communities to take precautions to protect their health

This handbook delivers practical strategies and resources that can be put to use quickly. Health risk communication is a vital skill for all public health professionals working with communities, including health scientists, epidemiologists, health educators, health communicators, managers, and regional and local representatives.

B. How to Use This Handbook

This handbook aims to improve understanding of and responsiveness to community concerns about health risk. You may choose to have one team member who acts as the lead communicator, but all ATSDR staff should know how to listen to and communicate with a wide range of audiences.

Refer to this handbook for reminders and resources to use to develop and implement a health risk communication plan.

- ◆ The first step in using this handbook, and in preparing to work at a site, is to draft a health risk communication plan.
- ◆ Once you have completed your plan, refer to the handbook when you need help implementing strategies and tactics in the plan.
- ◆ Refer to the handbook for tips when conducting and evaluating the success of your health risk communication activities.
- ◆ The **WHY** in each chapter provides a rationale for each step in the health risk communication process.
- ◆ Look in the Appendix for useful forms and tools to use in planning and conducting health risk communication activities.

***Note:** Take time to think out your health risk communication plan. The Appendix includes Health Risk Communication Plan Sheets to help you create a framework for developing your communication activities.*

Chapter II: Understanding Health Risk Communication

This chapter provides information on the role risk perception plays in health risk communication. When communicating health risk information, it is necessary to understand that the community decides which risks are acceptable.

Chapter Checklist

- Definition of Health Risk Communication**
- Role of Risk Perception**
- Differences in Approach to Risk**

Chapter II: Understanding Health Risk Communication

ATSDR is the principal federal public health agency involved with hazardous waste issues. ATSDR can help communities in a variety of ways, including working with them to resolve their health concerns, determining whether they are actually being exposed to hazardous substances, educating their residents about health hazards, and training health care providers.

WHY:

ATSDR's mission is to prevent adverse human health effects and diminished quality of life associated with exposure to hazardous substances from waste sites, unplanned releases, and other sources of pollution present in the environment. Effective health risk communication can help ATSDR:

- ◆ Understand the community's risk perception and more easily predict community response to agency actions
- ◆ Improve dialogue and reduce unwarranted decisions by involving concerned communities
- ◆ Explain health risk information more effectively to communities

Merely disseminating information without regard for communicating the complexities and uncertainties of risk does not guarantee effective risk communication. A well-managed effort will help ensure that your messages are constructively formulated, transmitted, and received, and that they result in meaningful actions.

A. Definition of Health Risk Communication

A simple definition of health risk communication is the way in which you communicate with various interested parties about the nature and level of risk and the controls you're going to take to change that level.

Knowing community concerns is essential to establishing ATSDR in the community as a credible, reliable source of health risk information. By understanding the basic principles of risk communication, ATSDR staff will be better able to provide and receive from the community needed information about environmental health risks and disease.

B. Role of Risk Perception

Agency staff can be confused by public reaction to environmental risk. Tempers may flare at community meetings concerning a risk that the agency estimates as a relatively low-level risk. Communities are made up of individuals, each with their own needs, personal opinions, and ideas about what is an acceptable risk.

When communicating health risk information, it is necessary to understand that individuals coalesce and decide as a community which risks are acceptable. Risk perception is affected by many factors that make the risk communication process a significant challenge for ATSDR staff.

- ◆ Individuals do not estimate risks in the same manner as experts. For example, objective estimates of risk may occur at acceptable levels for risk managers (1 out of 1 million), but the general public can still perceive this as too risky.
- ◆ What community members do in their private lives, such as wearing seat belts, and how they interact with others will strongly influence how they are likely to use risk information.
- ◆ Individual bias and personal experience may also explain why people perceive risk differently.

C. Differences in Approach to Risk

From a theoretical perspective, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory explains risk perception by demonstrating how individual human needs are organized. These needs inform the individual's risk perception as language, education, and culture combine and influence an individual's viewpoint.

Maslow’s hierarchy recognizes that some needs must be taken care of before others:

- Level 1 **Physiological**—oxygen, water, protein, salt, sugar, calcium, other minerals and vitamins
- Level 2 **Safety and security**—safety, stability, protection, shelter, structure, order
- Level 3 **Love and belonging**—friends, love, children, affection
- Level 4 **Esteem**—respect, status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity, confidence, competence, achievement

According to Maslow, safety and security needs come into play after basic physiological needs are accounted for. As a result, if the community can’t meet basic physiological needs for food and water, it will be less concerned about safety and security needs. In general, ATSDR’s work affects members of the community in different ways on all these need levels, but it is particularly concentrated in the first

two: physiological needs and safety and security needs.

Effective health risk communication speaks to community members’ needs to feel safe and protected because it informs them about actions they can take or that have been taken to protect their health.

HOT TIPS

- * *Accept and involve the public as your partner*
- * *Listen to your audience*
- * *Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources*
- * *Be honest, frank, and open*
- * *Speak clearly and with compassion*

Differences Between Scientists’ and the Public’s Approach to Risk	
Scientists’ Approach to Risk	Public’s Approach to Risk
Trust is in scientific methods and evidence	Trust is in political culture and democratic process
Appeal of authority and expertise	Appeal of folk wisdom, peer groups, and traditions
Boundaries of analysis are narrow and reductionist	Boundaries of analysis are broad and include the use of analogy and historical precedent
Risks are depersonalized	Risks are personalized
Emphasis is on statistical variation and probability	Emphasis is on the effects of risk on the family and community
Appeal to consistency and universality	Focus is on particularity; less concerned about consistency of approach
Where there is controversy in science, the status quo is maintained	The public’s response to scientific differences is “We will choose which one to believe”
Those impacts that cannot be measured are less relevant	Unanticipated or unarticulated risks are relevant

From Krinsky and Plough (1988).

Resources

1. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. 1998. Improving dialogue with communities. Trenton (NJ): Division of Science and Research.
2. Kishchuk NA. 1987. Causes and correlates of risk perceptions: a comment. *Risk Analysis*.
3. Maslow AH, Frager R, Fadiman J. 1987. Motivation and personality. 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row.
4. Slovic P, Fishhoff B, Lichtenstein S. 1980. Facts and fears: understanding perceived risk. In: Schwing JR, Albers WA, editors. *Societal risk assessment: how safe is safe enough?* New York: Plenum. pp. 181–216.
5. Krimsky S, Plough A. 1988. Environmental hazards: communicating risks as a social process. Dover (MA): Auburn House.
6. Lum MR, Tinker TL. 1994. *A Primer on Health Risk Communication Principles and Practices*. Atlanta (GA): Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Available at: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HEC/prmr.html>.
7. Tinker TL, Silberberg PG. 1997. *An Evaluation Primer on Health Risk Communication Programs and Outcomes*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HEC/evalprmr.html>.

Chapter III: Planning Health Risk Communication

This chapter provides information about creating a health risk communication plan, forming a team, identifying key community members, segmenting target audiences, and understanding community concerns. Mapping out a health risk communication plan will help clarify the issues involved, keep messages consistent, and save valuable time. When planning communication activities, it is also important to plan how you want to evaluate your activities.

Chapter Checklist

- Conducting Background Research**
- Building a Communication Team**
- Developing a Health Risk Communication Plan**
- Defining the Community and Target Audience Segments**
- Identifying Community Concerns**
- Evaluating Health Risk Communication**

Chapter III: Planning Health Risk Communication

Before going to a site, you should have a basic knowledge of the community's concerns and issues. It is not your credentials with ATSDR that establish you in a community; rather, it is the knowledge and level of understanding you bring to the community. Although background research needs to be conducted, it's likely that most of the information that you will need has already been compiled by someone else.

WHY:

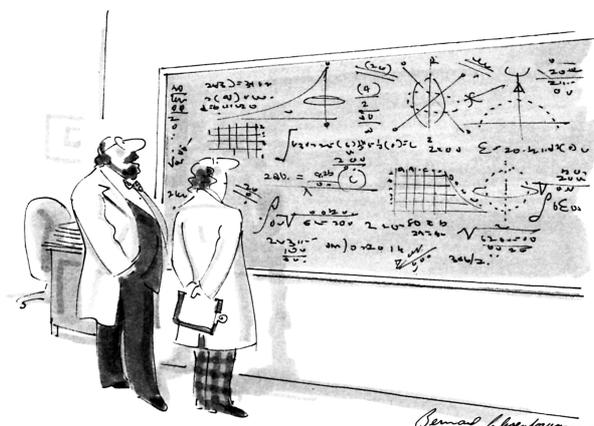
The planning stage provides the foundation for the health risk communication process. Lack of planning can lead to the development of a health risk communication program that is "off the mark" and create more difficult issues for you with the community. By carefully assessing the problem in the beginning, you can reduce the need for costly corrections later.

To systematically assess the problem and develop a health risk communication plan, you should start your process by determining the answers to these questions as they relate to the community.

As you move from planning to implementation stages in the health risk communication process, it is equally important to plan and use evaluation processes to provide information on whether or not the program is successful and to make adjustments.

A. Conducting Background Research

As you begin gathering background information about the health risk and the community, you may find that an ATSDR regional representative will already be familiar with the regional U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) files and will be able to provide information to you.



"Oh, if only it were so simple."

© The New Yorker Collection 1987 Bernard Schoenbaum from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

Information Sources

- ◆ **EPA documents—**
 - Administrative record file (for National Priorities List [NPL] or Superfund sites)
 - Community relations information repository
 - Community relations plan (CRP)
 - Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERCLIS) site file (for CERCLIS sites)
- ◆ **Other sources—**
 - State health department
 - County health department
 - State environmental department
 - Local hospital/medical community
 - Local media and its past news coverage

Be mindful of ATSDR's goals for the project throughout this background phase so you gather information that will help you achieve your goals.

B. Building a Communication Team

Effective health risk communication demands a unified approach and support from members of the site team. Work with team members to develop a

health risk communication plan that supports ATSDR's overall site objectives. This plan should be based on what has been learned through background research and an understanding of community concerns.

Depending on which activities are required at a given site, teams are either formally or informally organized with personnel from certain environmental/health specialties.

Team Composition

In most cases the intra-agency teams can be made up of

- ◆ Regional Representatives (ORO)
- ◆ Health Assessors (DHAC)
- ◆ Health Educators (DHEP)
- ◆ Epidemiologists (DHS)
- ◆ Environmental Health Scientists (DHS, DT)
- ◆ Office of Policy and External Affairs (OPEA)
- ◆ Community Involvement Branch (CIB)
- ◆ State Health Departments

When necessary, work with communication staff in other agencies, such as EPA. Try to establish regular meetings to ensure the consistency of messages and opportunities to share information.

Steps for Building a Communication Team

- ◆ Draw on diverse expertise to make certain communication topics can be effectively addressed.
- ◆ Determine who needs to be "standing" team members and who can be brought in "ad hoc" as relevant issues emerge.
- ◆ Assign communication responsibilities to all team members, whether they are creating talking points, talking to other Government agencies, helping prepare public fact sheets, or participating in public meetings.
- ◆ Emphasize the importance of good health risk communication with all team members.

- ◆ Clearly define roles to avoid confusion, crossed wires, and missed opportunities.
- ◆ Outline together the health risk communication plan as well as assign specific communication responsibilities.
- ◆ Maintain a central repository of information so all team members can find information when they need it and to ensure that work can continue seamlessly if team members leave the site and/or new team members join.
- ◆ Institute tactics for effective internal communications, including weekly conference calls, weekly in-person meetings, and regular e-mail updates.
- ◆ Implement communication training/practice for new spokespeople.

C. Developing a Health Risk Communication Plan

Mapping out your health risk communication plan will help you clarify your approach, avoid missing steps, keep your message consistent, and save valuable time. Even if you are working in an emergency response situation and do not have time to write a full plan, take a moment to sketch an outline of your health risk communication strategy.

Your health risk communication plan should

- ◆ Be based on a working knowledge of the local community
- ◆ Provide a framework for addressing community concerns
- ◆ Focus on specific health risk communication techniques and approaches rather than generic program goals

Steps for Developing Your Health Risk Communication Plan

- ◆ Work on creating your plan before you arrive at a site.
- ◆ Develop your plan so it is flexible and allows for unexpected issues and situations to arise.

- ◆ Revise and update the plan as changes occur to keep your approach strategic and relevant.
- ◆ Think through and write out the plan so you are ready to hit the ground running.
- ◆ Continue to develop the plan as you work on the site and learn more about the community.

Before visiting a site, you should have a basic understanding of community concerns. Assuming you know what needs to be done can cause animosity, mistrust, and resentment.

D. Defining the Community and Target Audience Segments

The community can be broken into distinct audience segments, each with different concerns and needs. This includes not only the vocal community members but also those who are silent. Be sure you do not categorize a community based on its most vocal group or individual.

Identifying Your Target Audiences

Consider groups that

- ◆ Have useful ideas and can facilitate action
- ◆ Have previously been involved in the issue
- ◆ Are likely to be affected or are likely to perceive themselves as affected
- ◆ Are likely to be angry if not asked

Questions to Ask

- ◆ Do community members have any shared characteristics, such as age, language, or location?
- ◆ What is known about the community's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors?
- ◆ Are there cultural and/or social practices that need to be taken into account?
- ◆ Are there communication channels that can be used to reach specific audience groups, such as low-literacy populations, minorities, or non-native English speakers?

Potential Target Audiences

- ◆ State agency staff, such as officials from health, environmental, or natural resources departments
- ◆ Local agency staff and elected officials (county health department officials; county commissioners; mayor or township administrator; and officials serving on environmental commissions, local advisory committees, and planning boards)
- ◆ Representatives of citizen groups organized to address site issues
- ◆ Area residents and individuals not affiliated with any group, both those living near and those more distant from the site
- ◆ Local health professionals (doctors and nurses)
- ◆ Local business representatives (Chamber of Commerce or the Council of Governments)
- ◆ Local civic groups or neighborhood associations
- ◆ Local chapters of public interest groups (e.g., the Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and League of Women Voters)
- ◆ Local school principals
- ◆ Potentially responsible parties
- ◆ News media, as an audience in themselves and as a conduit to the other audiences
- ◆ Other federal agency staff (EPA)
- ◆ Other ATSDR staff (need to know the importance of health risk communication)
- ◆ Attorneys representing citizens, individually or as a class action
- ◆ Members of professional organizations (e.g., chemical association and builders association)
- ◆ University staff/faculty

Once you know who you want to reach, you can subsegment your audience into primary and secondary target groups to address. The **primary target audiences** are those you want to affect in some way. **Secondary target audiences** are those who may have influence on the primary target audience.

Setting Audience Priorities

By identifying and defining audiences by group, you can also set audience priorities by deciding

- ◆ Which audience segment(s) are most important
- ◆ Which audience segments are important but less critical because of their influence, effect on the site, or link to the primary target audience
- ◆ Which will not be a target audience for your health risk communication program.

This is important because it helps you make decisions about messages and channels for dissemination and helps ensure that program resources are spent productively.

E. Identifying Community Concerns

Once you have determined your target audience groups, it is important to identify the characteristics and issues unique to each group. Most likely, you will need to develop different messages and communication tools to reach different groups in the community.

Learning Community Hot Buttons

A community will respond positively or negatively to issues based on its perception of the situation and its relevance to the everyday lives of people in the community. Some concerns that can be expected at nearly every site include:

- ◆ **Health:** When health issues arise, the community coalesces around individuals who might be able to provide information. When children's health is concerned, the community reacts strongly to any person or organization that seems to be endangering the welfare of the children.
- ◆ **Safety:** When the safety of a community is challenged, such as when very hazardous chemicals are found in a populous area, the community will unify to fight this potential hazard.
- ◆ **Economics:** Communities may support a facility that doesn't meet environmental standards but provides job security and supports the local

economy. Business owners may be concerned that the site situation will cause them economic loss.

- ◆ **Environment:** Almost everyone supports a clean environment. This support weakens when protecting the environment will negatively affect an individual or the community.

Other community concerns include

- ◆ Aesthetics
- ◆ Commercial development
- ◆ Green space or recreational development
- ◆ Liability issues
- ◆ Politics
- ◆ Tourism
- ◆ Home Values

Responding to the Community's Specific Concerns

The best way to understand a community's concerns is to ask the residents directly. First, check with the ATSDR staff at the site (Regional Representative, Community Involvement Specialist, Health Assessor, etc.) to see if this information already exists or if interviews are planned. If community interviews will be conducted, include health risk communication questions.

Questions to Ask

- ◆ What are your main concerns about the site?
- ◆ What kinds of information do you need?
- ◆ How frequently do you want updates?
- ◆ Where do you get most of your information?
- ◆ How do you want to receive information?
- ◆ How do you want to communicate with ATSDR?
- ◆ Are there groups that have special communication needs?
- ◆ What languages are spoken in the community?

After gathering this information, you should factor it into the health risk communication plan and design

of messages. Do your best to meet community needs, but you may need to explain that you may not be able to accommodate all their requests.

Scheduling Interviews With Target Audience Representatives

Interviews are best held in informal settings. When conducting community interviews, remember to:

- ◆ Become familiar with the site issues most relevant to the local community.
- ◆ Develop questions that will help understand community concerns.
- ◆ Develop an invitation list for your interview(s) and include representatives from your various target audience groups to explore issues affecting each group.
- ◆ If possible, schedule individual interviews to help build relationships and encourage candor among participants.
- ◆ For a group interview, clearly explain the purpose of the interview so participants know what is involved.
- ◆ If possible, provide a technical expert to answer questions while interviews are being conducted.
- ◆ Do not guess at answers you do not know, and do not make promises that you cannot keep or that are inappropriate for ATSDR.
- ◆ Write up your findings and use them to develop your health risk communication plan.

To obtain information you can also:

- ◆ Discuss community concerns with colleagues who have dealt with similar situations
- ◆ Meet informally with community members interested in the issue to get a firsthand idea of community concerns
- ◆ Develop a survey about questions and concerns and distribute it to community members at meetings or in mailings
- ◆ Ask meeting attendees to write their questions and concerns on index cards at the beginning of meetings.

Involving the Community

Involving the community early and often in your activities is one of the defining elements of the health risk communication process. Not only will it help you win the community's trust and support but it also can provide valuable information and insight regarding audience concerns.

Your involvement with the community begins the moment you enter a site, either physically or by phone. Contact community representatives and ask for information about how they want to interact with you and your agency before you make any communication decisions.

Steps for Effectively Interacting With Community Members

- ◆ Establish contact with key elected officials and community leaders. Provide them with your name, agency address, and phone and fax numbers.
- ◆ Establish dates and times for meetings. Hold some meetings in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate schedules.
- ◆ Publicize planned meetings well in advance using appropriate communication channels.
- ◆ Contact other agencies involved in the site and provide them with your itinerary.
- ◆ Hold public availability sessions. Distribute agency fact sheets, site-specific fact sheets, and business cards. After meetings, develop a summary report and share it with key contacts and other community representatives.

Tracking Changes in Community Concerns

The community may change its position as the situation changes and new information becomes available. For example, if a business on the site closes, workers who may have been supportive of the company can become angry at the business for eliminating jobs. They may be quite willing to tell stories of how they were asked to dump chemicals down a sewer or turn off pollution control equipment. This shift represents a change in their personal situations that realigned their priorities, and it can influence others in the community.

To track changes in community concerns:

- ◆ Make telephone calls to your local contacts and key community leaders.
- ◆ Review local newspapers and newscasts.
- ◆ Maintain informal contact with community residents.

F. Evaluating Health Risk Communication

Without a systematic plan for evaluating risk communication activities, you won't know whether you have reached your intended audience, communicated effectively, or inspired behavior change or other actions. Evaluation can be used in planning effects (formative) and determining the immediate (process) effects, medium-term effects (outcome), and long-term (impact) effects of risk communication activities.

- ◆ **Formative evaluation:** Carried out typically before or in the early stages of a program and allows for revision based on audience feedback. Tools include focus groups to test message comprehension and use of computer programs to test reading level of materials. Formative evaluation also can be done at various times as messages, issues, and/or target audiences change.
- ◆ **Process evaluation:** Involves a review or audit of activities conducted and helps to document that activities were conducted as planned. Simply documenting that a certain number of brochures were distributed does not mean that

communication has occurred. Further levels of evaluation should also be conducted (such as reader surveys, meeting evaluations, and requests for feedback).

- ◆ **Outcome evaluation:** Involves determining whether short-term objectives were met. Outcome evaluations often assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Outcome evaluation can involve surveys, focus groups, or monitoring for behavior change. Tools include phone surveys, focus groups, one-on-one meetings, and door-to-door interviews.
- ◆ **Impact evaluation:** Involves the assessment of long-term effects of interventions. Because work at sites can be relatively short-term, it may be difficult to expect long-term changes in health status or policies because of risk communication activities alone. Risk communication activities, however, can result in long-term changes that can be measured. Impact evaluation measures things such as changes in morbidity or mortality rates, sustained behavior changes, or policy changes. Tools include review of secondary data and policy analyses.

Note: Develop an evaluation strategy as you are planning your health risk communication activities so that you can determine what you've accomplished in light of your original objectives. Chapter IX includes Tips for Successful Evaluation and examples of different types of evaluation activities. In the Appendix you will find a Health Risk Communication Evaluation Planning Tool and a Health Risk Communication Strategies and Techniques Planning Tool for use in planning your communication activities.

Resources

1. Chess C, Hance BJ, Sandman PM. 1989. Planning dialogue with communities: a risk communication workbook. Trenton (NJ): New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Energy.
2. Collins C, Hoover D. 1998. Assessing health communication effectiveness: a case example of a response to illegal indoor methyl parathion spraying in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Atlanta: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.
3. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1992. Community relations in Superfund: a handbook. Washington (DC): United States Environmental Protection Agency.
4. National Association of County and City Health Officials. 1995. Don't hazard a guess: addressing community health concerns at hazardous waste sites. Washington (DC): National Association of County and City Health Officials.
5. Collins C, Hoover D. 1998. Partnerships for environmental health education: performing a community needs assessment at hazardous waste sites. Washington (DC): National Association of County and City Health Officials.

Chapter IV: Defining Health Risk Communication Objectives and Messages

This chapter illustrates communication objectives and how to craft messages for use in health risk communication activities. Communication objectives should be based on an understanding of the community and target audience groups, and messages should reflect this understanding as well as help address community concerns.

Chapter Checklist

- Developing Health Risk Communication Objectives**
- Creating Effective Health Risk Communication Messages**
- Testing Health Risk Communication Messages**
- Evaluating Health Risk Communication Messages**
- Using the Health Risk Communication Quick Planning Guide**

Chapter IV: Defining Health Risk Communication Objectives and Messages

Once you have an understanding of the community and its diverse audience groups, you should develop your health risk communication objectives and messages. Collaborate with community members to ensure that your objectives meet their needs as well as ATSDR's needs.

WHY:

The objectives are the foundation for the program and evaluation. They are written to articulate what your program is intended to do. Therefore, health risk communication objectives should be

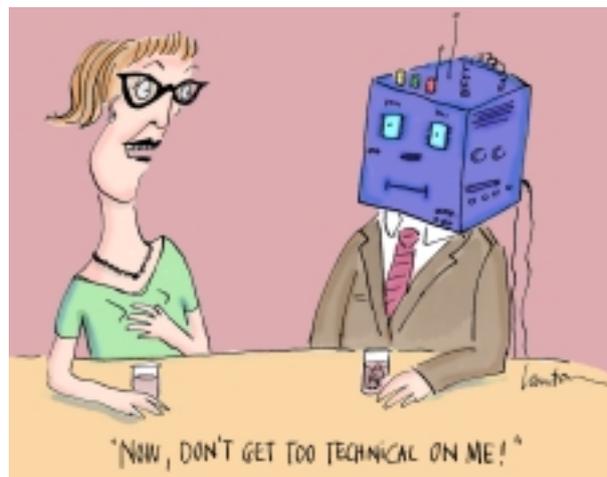
- ◆ Specific
- ◆ Attainable
- ◆ Prioritized to direct the allocation of resources
- ◆ Measurable to assess progress toward the goal
- ◆ Time specific

Objectives are the “whats”—what you want to accomplish with communication. They are not the “hows”—these come later as strategies and tools. Message development takes into consideration your understanding of community concerns.

A. Developing Health Risk Communication Objectives

Objectives should be realistic. They should also be clear and measurable so that you can evaluate whether you have met them.

Specific communication objectives will be based on the findings and goals of ATSDR's work on the site. For example, an objective may be to teach people how to keep children away from dangerous areas, to treat their water for safe drinking, or to train health professionals to treat conditions caused by the site.



© 2001 Mary Lawton from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

Questions to Ask

- ◆ What do you want people at the site to do?
- ◆ Are your objectives to educate, stimulate behavior change, solve a problem together, or resolve conflicts?
- ◆ Are there specific points you know you will want to educate community members about?
- ◆ Are there specific actions you know you will be advocating?
- ◆ Will you be able to determine whether these objectives are being met?

Examples of clear, measurable objectives for a health risk communication plan include:

- ◆ “Increase resident attendance at monthly meetings by 20 percent in 6 months.”
- ◆ “Increase media coverage or media awareness about site activities by holding media briefings every 3 months for 1 year.”
- ◆ “Develop a health log for residents within the next 2 months.”
- ◆ “Enroll a group of 50 community members to use the health log in 6 months.”
- ◆ “Decrease the number of home gardens to avoid use of contaminated soil by 50 percent within 3 months.”

- ◆ Increase compliance in the community by 10 (out of a group of 20 regular rule-breakers) regarding a “No Fishing” rule to prevent exposure to toxicants.

B. Creating Effective Health Risk Communication Messages

Messages intended for the general public should be nontechnical yet convey the necessary information. Although government documents are written with great detail and precise scientific terms, public messages and documents should focus on how the information will be understood by and affect the community.

Rules of Thumb for Popularizing Technical Content

- ◆ Tell people the answers to the questions they are asking and the instructions for coping with the crisis.
- ◆ Convey what people must know in order to feel that they understand the information.
- ◆ Tell people that you will continue to gather information and will pass it along as soon as you are able.

Your audience deserves honest, clear, and compassionate discussion.

The public wants your messages to answer:

- ◆ Am I (Are we) safe?
- ◆ What have you found that will affect me (my family)?
- ◆ Who (what) caused this problem(s)?
- ◆ Can you fix it? If not you, who?
- ◆ How can I protect myself (my family) in the future?

The public is not concerned with

- ◆ Technical jargon, except to name specific chemicals.
- ◆ Internal issues that you had to work out before you could proceed.

- ◆ Your educational and work pedigree. They only want to know that you are qualified and that you know what you are doing.

Developing Your Messages

- ◆ Define who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- ◆ Be clear and concise.
- ◆ Avoid jargon.
- ◆ Show relevance to the audience.
- ◆ Have no more than three main points.
- ◆ Use figures, anecdotes, and other illustrations when possible. Use your knowledge of the target audience to make these relevant.
- ◆ Tell what data are lacking, conflicting, or minuscule.
- ◆ Be sure your messages are consistent with your actions. For example, do not tell a community that their homes are safe, then wear protective clothing when you enter their homes.

C. Testing Health Risk Communication Messages

Always test messages with a small group to ensure the meaning is clear before you convey them to the public.

To test messages:

- ◆ Think carefully about who will make up your test group. Because you do not want to “leak” information, work with people you can trust. Schedule the test as close as possible to the official event to reduce the possibility of a leak.
- ◆ Possible test groups include
 - Local elected and health officials with whom you will meet prior to making an announcement
 - Members of the community with whom you have had ongoing interactions
 - Subgroups of the community, including the most affected residents, a citizen group, or some other small group of people who are representative of the entire community

- Friends and neighbors you trust to honestly critique your messages
- Teenagers (who communicate at about the same level as the general population).
- ◆ Explain that you are looking for feedback and that you want group members to help you deliver a message that accurately communicates the information.
- ◆ Distribute your materials and/or make your presentation, then ask them to repeat the key messages they heard. Also ask them what they did not understand or what was not clear to them about the materials or in the presentation. Take note of emotional reactions and think about how you will respond.
- ◆ Refine your messages based on the feedback you receive. Anticipate that you will receive similar questions from the general public and be sure you are prepared to answer them.

There will be times when different agencies and/or staff will give different or inconsistent messages to the public. Inconsistent messages can result from

- ◆ Different sampling techniques or data gathering. When this occurs, meet with the other agency and determine where and how the differences occurred. Develop a strategy to explain the differences to the public. Generally, a fact sheet or newsletter provides a better explanation than a verbal answer.
- ◆ Genuine differences of opinion between experts. Differences of opinion may be caused by varying beliefs, recommendations, or information obtained at different times and/or from different agencies involved in the site. Agencies that normally work together should resolve these differences before going public with information.
- ◆ Not knowing what the other party is planning to say. Meet with your agency counterparts, establish a working relationship, and inform each other when someone is announcing health-related information to the community. The community will place its trust with the agency or person who has been most involved in the health risk communication process.

- ◆ Little or constantly changing data on a particular issue. If a report based on early information is issued, be prepared to explain how and why it may change. Once a report is public, it is very time consuming and sometimes impossible to change the conclusions. Preliminary reports should be given to the public with the appropriate caveats.

D. Evaluating Health Risk Communication Messages

Messages should be acceptable to the target audience. Testing should be able to answer whether messages address community concerns and whether they are

- ◆ Understandable
- ◆ Relevant
- ◆ Credible

In general, try to have three main messages. You may start out with messages that

- ◆ Tell people why you are here, what you understand about their concerns, and what you will be doing. Give them any instructions for coping with the crisis.
- ◆ Tell people what they must know in order to feel that they understand the situation and the information you have.
- ◆ Tell people that you will continue to gather information and will pass it along as soon as you can.

As your interaction with the community increases, you will hear and need to respond to a variety of audience questions and concerns. Continue to build your responses from your main messages and repeat/reinforce those messages.

Possible Community Questions and Concerns to Be Prepared for

Health and Lifestyle Concerns

- ◆ What is the effect of these chemicals on my health?
- ◆ What levels of this chemical are safe?
- ◆ Are my children at any special risk?
- ◆ We've lived here for 20 years. Are we more likely to get cancer than people who have been here for only 5 years?
- ◆ What studies have you done to support the health claims you are making?
- ◆ We are already at risk because of X. Will Y increase our risk?
- ◆ How will this affect our quality of life—property values, the stigma of X attached to our community, etc.?
- ◆ How will we be protected in the event of an accident?

Data and Information Concerns

- ◆ How sure are you?
- ◆ What is the worst-case scenario?
- ◆ What do these numbers mean and how did you get them?
- ◆ How do we know your studies are correct?

- ◆ What about other opinions on this issue?
- ◆ How do our exposures compare to the standards?
- ◆ You say X can't happen. Why not? And what will you do if it does?

Process Concerns

- ◆ How will we be involved in the decision-making?
- ◆ How will you communicate with us or reach us in an emergency?
- ◆ Why should we trust you?
- ◆ How and when can we reach you?
- ◆ Who else are you talking with?
- ◆ When will we hear from you?

Risk Management Concerns

- ◆ When will the problem be corrected?
- ◆ Why did you let this happen and what are you going to do about it?
- ◆ What are the other options? Why do you favor option X?
- ◆ Why are you moving so slowly to correct the problem?
- ◆ What government agencies are involved and in what roles?
- ◆ What kind of involvement will we have?

Criteria for Communication Evaluation

Criteria for Evaluating Messages Designed to Explain the Magnitude of a Risk			
Criteria	Description	Application	Examples of Possible Survey Questions
Comprehension	Does the audience understand the content of the message?	Determining understanding, not agreement.	According to the information you received, what is the risk that someone would get cancer from a lifetime of living in a house with X radon level?
Agreement	Does the audience agree with the message?	Determining agreement with message and/or plans to take recommended action.	Given your test result and the recommendation in the brochure, what do you plan to do to reduce the radon level in your home?
Dose-Response Consistency	Do people facing a higher dose of a hazard perceive the risk as greater and/or show a greater readiness to take action than those exposed to a lower dose of this hazard?	Determining whether response (e.g., worry) increases as exposure increases. Does not assess correct degree of response, but rather appropriate degree relative to other exposure levels.	Given the results of your home radon test, how worried are you about the effects of radon exposure on your health? (Very worried, not worried, etc.)
Audience Evaluation	Does the audience judge the message to have been helpful, accurate, clear, etc.?	These criteria are usually necessary but not sufficient for determining whether communications have been successful.	How easy or difficult to understand was the brochure you received last week? (Very easy, very difficult, etc.)

Adapted from Weinstein and Sandman 1987.

E. Using the Health Risk Communication Quick Planning Guide

Although using the more extensive planning document in the Appendix is preferable, sometimes you have less than an hour to plan your communication activities. In those cases, use the quick planning guide that begins on the next page as a framework for developing a health risk communication plan. Try, however, to develop a more complete plan once you have the time.

Note: An understanding of the audience is critical to developing effective communications that convey your intended message. Appendix includes a Message Design Planning Tool for use in crafting messages.

Health Risk Communication Quick Planning Guide

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Site Team

Think about the people on your site team. Who will have what communication responsibilities? (Do not forget about team members outside the agency, such as state health and environmental departments, community representatives, EPA, etc.)

Name, division, phone

Responsibilities/expertise

Situation Overview *(Attach a site map)*

Summarize the environmental situation.

Quick Planning Guide (continued)

Summarize the health risk situation.

What are the community's main concerns?

Health _____

Environmental _____

Economic _____

Legal _____

Resources and Contacts

List the name, address, phone, and e-mail for these key contacts.

State Health Department _____

Local Health Department _____

EPA Regional Representative _____

Quick Planning Guide (continued)

Media

List the station/paper contact name, address, and phone for the major media serving the community.

Newspaper _____

Radio _____

Television _____

Audiences

List the three main audiences at the site, identify the contact, and summarize each group's concerns.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Objectives ("what" you want to accomplish and how long it will take)

Determine your health risk communication objectives. Consider what behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes of community residents you want to influence.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Messages

Write out your three main communication messages and stick to them.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Quick Planning Guide (continued)

Strategies and Techniques

Outline your communication strategies (what you plan to do) and tactics (how you will do it).

1. _____
Tactics _____

2. _____
Tactics _____

3. _____
Tactics _____

4. _____
Tactics _____

Timeline

Create a timeline for health risk communication activities, including the responsible party and due date.

Evaluation

Outline your plan to track your work against your original objectives.

Planning (formative) evaluation to test messages and materials _____

Immediate impact (process) evaluation to review/document activities conducted _____

Midpoint (outcome) evaluation to determine whether short-term objectives were met _____

Results (impact) evaluation to assess long-term impact _____

Resources

1. Chess C, Hance BJ, Sandman PM. 1989. Planning dialogue with communities: a risk communication workbook. Trenton (NJ): New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Energy.
2. Sandman PM. 1987. Emergency preparedness digest. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
3. Weinstein ND, Sandman PM. 1987. Some criteria for evaluating risk messages. *Risk Analysis* 13(1):103–114.

Chapter V: Selecting and Using Communication Channels for Messages

This chapter identifies message delivery channels and examples of tools for community interaction, including briefings, community mailings, exhibits, news releases, and open houses/public availability sessions. The communication channels and tools you will use at a site depend on your audience, how participants prefer to receive information, and the information you need to communicate.

Chapter Checklist

- Choosing Communication Channels**
- Identifying Specific Communication Tools**
 - Briefings**
 - Community Mailings**
 - Exhibits**
 - Fact Sheets**
 - Newsletters**
 - News Releases**
 - Open Houses/Availability Sessions**
 - Presentations**
 - Public Meetings**
 - Small Group Meetings**
 - Telephone Contacts**
- Public Speaking**

Chapter V: Selecting and Using Communication Channels for Messages

Determining the best channels for your message depends on understanding when to use which tool and knowing how the community prefers to receive information.

WHY:

Achieving effective communication with your audiences depends on selecting methods of communication that will reach them. This is especially important in health risk communication, where the audience participants can become disenfranchised quickly if they do not feel they are getting information.

Message delivery channels include:

- ◆ Face-to-face (e.g., health care professional to patient, or ATSDR staff member to state partner agency or individuals in the community)
- ◆ Group delivery (small group meetings or public meetings)
- ◆ Organizational (constituents of influential community organizations)
- ◆ Mass media (radio, television, newspaper, or direct mail)
- ◆ Community (e.g., employers, schools, malls, health groups, or local government agencies)
- ◆ Combination of any or all of these (most likely to work best)

A. Choosing Communication Channels

Using several different channels ensures repetition of the information, thus increasing the chance the target audience will be sufficiently exposed to the information to absorb and remember it.



© The New Yorker Collection 1977 James Stevenson from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

Questions to Ask

- ◆ Which channels are most appropriate for the health risk problem/issue and messages?
- ◆ Which channels will the target audience find credible and accessible?
- ◆ Which channels fit the program purpose (inform, influence, allay fears, influence attitudes, or change behavior)?
- ◆ Which channels and how many channels are feasible, considering your schedule and budget?

B. Identifying Specific Communication Tools

The tools you will use depend on your audience, how participants prefer to receive information, and the information you need to communicate. Possible tools include

1. Briefings

A briefing is a session held with key state and local officials, media representatives, and community leaders. Agency staff conducts these sessions in person. Briefings help to notify key state and local officials, media representatives, and community leaders of developments at the site, e.g., results of studies or actions that should be taken to protect health. A briefing can be used to introduce ATSDR

and explain the agency's role and work process. Briefings usually are not open to the general public.

Conducting a Briefing

- ◆ Schedule the briefing in a small public room, such as a hotel meeting room or a conference room.
- ◆ Hold the briefing in a neutral location, particularly when dealing with an antagonistic situation.
- ◆ Prepare a fact sheet or Q&A sheet.
- ◆ Present a short, official statement about the agency's findings, health concerns, or recent developments.
- ◆ Use simple yet complete language.
- ◆ Avoid jargon, acronyms, and overly technical terms.
- ◆ Answer questions about the statement.
- ◆ Work with the ATSDR Office of Policy and External Affairs to coordinate briefings.

Benefits of a Briefing

- ◆ Allows state and local officials, the media, and citizens to question ATSDR directly about any activity before the public release of information.
- ◆ Prepares officials and citizen leaders so they can answer questions from their constituents when the information becomes public.
- ◆ Allows for the exchange of information and concerns.

Limitations of a Briefing

- ◆ Although briefings can be effective, they could become the only means of communicating with site communities. Briefings should always be complemented by activities to inform the general public, such as small group or public meetings.
- ◆ Bad feelings or bad publicity could result if some individuals believe they should be invited to the briefing and are not. Be sure not to

exclude such persons or convey favoritism toward certain parties.

2. Community Mailings

A community mailing sends information by mail to key contacts and concerned/involved members of the community. It disseminates information quickly and easily in writing, and is particularly useful when you have updates for the community.

If the updates are straightforward, noncontroversial, and easy to understand, the mailing can stand on its own. However, if the updates are more complicated and require discussion or further explanation, the mailing should be done in addition to a public meeting or small group meetings. The community mailing can announce upcoming meetings and provide information in advance or serve as a follow-up for people who did not attend previous meetings.

Developing a Community Mailing

Compile a mailing list and include

- ◆ State and local officials (check with city clerk for assistance)
- ◆ Community leaders (check with local chamber of commerce)
- ◆ Local residents of the site area (check with city clerk for assistance)
- ◆ Community members who have signed up to receive information

Creating Mailing Materials

Include these mailing materials

- ◆ A cover letter that introduces you, briefly explains the purpose of the mailing, and provides contact information for comments or questions
- ◆ A fact sheet, newsletter, report, or other documents you want to deliver to the community
- ◆ First-class postage to deliver the mailing quickly

Benefits of a Community Mailing

- ◆ Enables you to deliver information quickly and may require less planning time than conducting a meeting.

Limitations of a Community Mailing

- ◆ Allows no interaction or opportunity for community members to ask questions.

3. Exhibits

Exhibits set up visual displays of maps, charts, diagrams, or photographs, and can help illustrate health issues and proposed actions associated with hazardous substance problems in a creative and informative display. Effective exhibits can make technical information accessible and understandable. Exhibits can be used during any phase of your site work.

Developing an Exhibit

- ◆ Identify the target audience and the message.

Possible audiences include

- General public
- Concerned citizens
- Environmental groups
- Media representatives
- Public officials

Possible messages include

- Description of the health risk
- Historical background information related to the site
- Community relations activities
- Proposed remedies and actions to protect community health

Creating an Exhibit

- ◆ Determine where it will be set up. Place it in a highly visible location, such as a public library, convention hall, or shopping center, especially if

your target audience is largely the public of the town.

- ◆ Set up a temporary exhibit at a public meeting if a segment of concerned community members is the target audience.
- ◆ Design it according to the message to be transmitted.
- ◆ Include photos or illustrations. Use text sparingly.
- ◆ Keep it simple and visual. It could be a bulletin board, if appropriate.
- ◆ Staff the exhibit with a person to answer questions, guide people through complicated issues, and gain informal feedback.

Benefits of an Exhibit

- ◆ Stimulates public interest and understanding.
- ◆ Creates visual impact and leaves a lasting impression.

Limitations of an Exhibit

- ◆ Exhibits are a one-way communication tool and do not provide an opportunity for community feedback

4. Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is a brief report summarizing current or proposed activities at the site. Fact sheets are appropriate whenever new information is available.

Fact sheets can be useful for

- ◆ Introducing ATSDR to the community and explaining the agency's role
- ◆ Explaining the health risk associated with a site
- ◆ Guiding community members in precautionary health actions
- ◆ Announcing new findings
- ◆ Handing out at public meetings or community gatherings

Types of Information in a Fact Sheet

- ◆ Explanation of the triggering event that caused the health risk situation
- ◆ Timetable for the proposed actions
- ◆ Description of the health issues or problems associated with the site
- ◆ Description of the health actions necessary
- ◆ Description of public participation opportunities
- ◆ Name, address, and phone number of an ATSDR contact person who can provide additional information on request

Presenting the Information

- ◆ Select a simple format
- ◆ Be concise—avoid using jargon, acronyms, or highly technical language
- ◆ Provide written information (a news release summarizing your announcement, fact sheets, copies of your prepared statement, and biographies of your speakers)
- ◆ Open the conference to questions to be answered by agency officials, local officials, and technical staff

Benefits of a Fact Sheet

- ◆ Effective in briefly summarizing facts and issues
- ◆ Provides background for information discussed during a meeting

Limitations of a Fact Sheet

- ◆ Is a one-way communication tool
- ◆ Requires careful writing and coordination between making technical information easy to understand and message delivery

5. Newsletters

A newsletter is a publication created to inform community members of activities, findings, health precautions, and other information concerning a health assessment.

Newsletter Topic Areas

- ◆ Overview of ATSDR and background of ATSDR's involvement at the site
- ◆ Plans for ATSDR's work on the site and findings, if available
- ◆ Health guidelines, if applicable
- ◆ Upcoming activities and previous ATSDR activities, if any, that have taken place in the community
- ◆ Frequently asked questions and answers
- ◆ Contact information for ATSDR staff

Newsletter Design

- ◆ Use simple, understandable language with headlines, boxes, rule lines, type variations, and other effects to make the newsletter attractive and easy to read
- ◆ Establish a four-page limit (an 11-by-17-inch sheet of paper folded in half makes a good four-page newsletter)
- ◆ Ask someone not involved in the project to test-read the newsletter and provide feedback on message clarity
- ◆ Use two colors if resources allow
- ◆ Photocopy or print the newsletter

Mail the newsletter to your mailing list and/or distribute it at public or small group meetings. If there is a central gathering place in the community, ask if you can leave copies there for community members.

Benefits of a Newsletter

- ◆ Explains your work and findings to the community
- ◆ Allows you to deliver a document in writing that community members can keep and refer to later

Limitations of a Newsletter

- ◆ Can backfire if community members do not understand or are angered by what you have written.

- ◆ Does not give community members the opportunity to ask questions. (Always include contact information in your newsletter so people have a way to ask questions.)

6. News Releases

A news release is a statement released to the news media. Prepare a news release when you have milestones or delays to announce in the program and need to disseminate the information to large numbers of community members. Work with the ATSDR Office of Policy and External Affairs (OPEA) on any news release. Share copies of the release with local officials and community group leaders before the release is given to the media.

Writing a News Release

- ◆ Enlist the aid of a public affairs specialist (ATSDR OPEA)
- ◆ Limit the news release to essential facts and issues
- ◆ Try not to exceed two or three double-spaced pages
- ◆ Avoid technical jargon and overly technical words
- ◆ Include quotes from an ATSDR spokesperson (get permission from any individual quoted)

Formatting the Release

- ◆ Number each page at the bottom
- ◆ On the last page type “# # #” or “—30—”
- ◆ The top of the sheet should include
 - ATSDR name and address
 - Release time and date (“For Immediate Release” or “Please Observe Embargo Until”)
 - Contact’s name and phone number
 - A short (no more than 10 words), active headline summarizing the main message
- ◆ Fax the news release to your media list

- ◆ Make follow-up calls to restate the importance of the issue, answer questions, or provide interviews

Benefits of a News Release

- ◆ Reaches a large audience quickly and inexpensively, if used by news media

Limitations of a News Release

- ◆ Because of its brevity, it excludes details of possible interest to the public
- ◆ Can focus unneeded attention on a situation

7. Open Houses/Availability Sessions/Poster Sessions

An open house or availability session is an informal meeting where community members can talk to agency staff on a one-on-one basis. It is most appropriate when key milestones or major decisions have been reached.

Conducting an Open House/Availability Session

- ◆ Determine community interest in the site before planning an open house.
- ◆ Select a date, time, and location for the open house. To encourage attendance, choose evening hours or weekends at an easily accessible building familiar to residents (a public library or local meeting room).
- ◆ Anticipate the number of attendees and plan accordingly. Consider holding two open houses if necessary to enable staff to greet and talk with each attendee. One staff member per 15 to 20 attendees generally fosters an informal atmosphere for conversation and avoids the situation where a staff member must speak to a crowd.
- ◆ Publicize the open house at least 2 weeks before the event. Send announcements to newspapers, television and radio stations, citizens on the mailing list, and any interested community organizations that publish newsletters.

- ◆ Create exhibits and fact sheets to provide background information that enables citizens to ask more informed questions about the site during the open house.
- ◆ Include staff who are prepared to discuss technical information in an easy-to-understand manner.

Benefits of an Open House

- ◆ Allows for one-on-one conversation
- ◆ Helps build trust and establishes a rapport between community members and agency staff

Limitations of an Open House

- ◆ Can require significant staff time for planning and conducting an open house. A low turnout may not justify the effort.

8. Presentations

A presentation can be speeches to clubs, civic or church organizations, school classes, or similar local audiences. Presentations are more effective if they focus on major milestones, such as research findings or health recommendations.

Developing a Presentation

- ◆ Describe the health risk situation
- ◆ Describe how the health risk affects the community
- ◆ Discuss what ATSDR is doing to alleviate the health risk situation
- ◆ Discuss how citizens can assist ATSDR and obtain additional information
- ◆ Select materials to support the presentation, such as slides, graphics, and exhibits that will hold the audience's attention
- ◆ Conduct a trial presentation in front of colleagues and rehearse the presentation as much as possible

Benefits of a Presentation

- ◆ Offers the audience a chance to ask questions and the agency can gauge community concerns
- ◆ Reaches many people at one time, reducing individual inquiries

Limitations of a Presentation

- ◆ Can distort community members' view of the situation if poorly presented
- ◆ Can only address individual community concerns during a question-and-answer period following the rehearsed presentation; could try people's patience
- ◆ The presenter may be confronted with difficult or argumentative questions from community members

9. Public Meetings

A public meeting is a large meeting open to the public where experts present information and answer questions, and community members ask questions and offer comments.

Arranging a Public Meeting

- ◆ Create an agenda. Involve citizens in developing the agenda.
- ◆ Hold the meeting in a public, comfortable setting that is easily accessible, well lighted and has adequate parking and seating, especially for persons with disabilities.
- ◆ Be sensitive to special needs of community members. Consider translations for non-English speakers or sign language for deaf or hard of hearing participants.
- ◆ Announce the meeting in local media 2 weeks in advance. Distribute flyers to community members and groups interested in attending. Clarify that the meeting is not a formal public hearing, rather a place to exchange information and comments.
- ◆ Follow-up with media closer to the meeting time to encourage them to attend. Send a "media alert," which contains brief information on

where and when the meeting is and what the topic will be, and/or make phone calls to key contacts.

Conducting the Meeting

- ◆ State the purpose of the meeting, then outline the agenda and the procedures for making statements.
- ◆ Present preliminary findings and proposed course of action.
- ◆ Distribute materials, including fact sheets and other materials for participants to take home.
- ◆ Prepare a transcript of the meeting, make the transcript publicly available, and announce how it can be obtained.
- ◆ Allow time for citizen comments. Include a question-and-answer session. Meetings should last from 1 to 3 hours.
- ◆ Consider audio or videotaping the meeting as a record so you can refer to it to refresh your memory on community concerns if necessary.

Benefits of a Public Meeting

- ◆ Allows the community to express concerns and the agency to present information

Limitations of a Public Meeting

- ◆ Can intensify conflicts rather than resolve controversies surrounding a site by bringing the public together. If public meetings at the site have failed in the past, use an alternative method (small group meetings or a formal public hearing) to transmit information and obtain feedback.

10. Small Group (or Focus Group) Meetings

A small group meeting is where agency staff share information with interested community members and state and local officials. It is especially useful for informing and keeping in touch with community concerns, answering questions, and clearing up any misconceptions or misunderstandings.

Preparing for a Small Group Meeting

- ◆ Identify interested citizens and officials. Contact each citizen, group, or local agency that is directly affected by site activities. Offer to discuss health issues at a convenient time.
- ◆ Limit attendance to 5–20 individuals. If a greater number of community members and officials are interested, schedule additional small meetings.
- ◆ Decide whether to invite the media. Media presence may intimidate the community. You may want to hold a similar meeting for media only—this is called an editorial board briefing.
- ◆ Select a meeting place conducive to two-way interaction. Arrange chairs in a circle or other informal setting.
- ◆ Select a date and time that allows for maximum participation. Make sure that the date and time do not conflict with other public meetings, holidays, or other special occasions.

Conducting the Meeting

- ◆ Ask people to sign in so you have a record of who attended, along with their contact information.
- ◆ Begin with an overview of current and future health-related site activities and findings.
- ◆ Invite citizen participation. Explain that you want to involve the community.
- ◆ Distribute fact sheets and other written information for attendees to take home.
- ◆ Follow-up on major concerns. Stay in touch with the group and contact any new groups that have formed.

Benefits of a Small Group Meeting

- ◆ Allows two-way interaction with the community

Limitations of a Small Group Meeting

- ◆ May require a day or more of staff time to reach only a few citizens.
- ◆ May be perceived by community groups as an effort to limit attendance or a tactic to prevent

large groups from exerting influence. (Hold additional small group meetings with those organizations that express concern about being left out of the process.)

- ◆ Irate groups or individuals may accuse ATSDR staff of telling different stories to different groups. (Avoid criticism by inviting a cross-section of community interests to each small group meeting and by keeping a written record.)

11. Telephone Contacts

Telephone contacts are calls to state and local officials and concerned community members, informing them of ATSDR's activities, finding out who is involved at the site, and gathering information about the site. After this initial contact is made, you may make telephone calls during your work onsite to inform these individuals and monitor the extent of community concerns.

Telephone calls also should be made periodically to inform key contacts of any major findings and the progress of site activities. Telephone contacts are important to understand community concerns and gather information.

Making Telephone Contacts

Know exactly what information to request (e.g., additional references, site specifics, or background information) and tailor questions accordingly. Information to solicit from these contacts might include

- ◆ Background on the site and the problem
- ◆ Recent government activities at the site
- ◆ Nature and extent of citizen involvement
- ◆ Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other possible contacts.

C. Public Speaking

Be prepared for public speaking by outlining key message points in advance. Whether presenting to the media, at a public meeting, or in a small group

with community members, it is vital that you appear to be a reliable source of credible information.

Tips for Public Speaking

- ◆ Keep your overall objectives and audience needs in mind.
- ◆ Prepare your presentation and commit the key message points to memory.
- ◆ Start with an outline, then write out every word in your own language.
- ◆ In most cases, your talk should not be more than 20 minutes.
- ◆ Read your talk out loud several times, but do not memorize it. Appear as if you are speaking from knowledge, not struggling to remember every word of a prepared script.
- ◆ Use visual aids to reinforce key points and enliven your presentation. If you use overheads, try not to make them all text. Other effective visual aids include maps, charts or diagrams, cross-section displays, models, and sampling equipment.
- ◆ Practice your presentation in front of your peers. Have them ask questions so you can practice your answers.
- ◆ Check the setup of the room in advance and adjust it to foster interaction, if necessary. If you are in a large room with chairs in rows and a podium up front, be sure there is room for people to get to their seats, even after the meeting begins. If you have a small group (30 people) and tables, seat people around the tables with visual reference materials at the center of each table. If you have a very small group (10 or fewer people), seat everyone, including presenters, around the table.

Understanding Body Language

Actions often speak louder than words. Be aware of these tips to send positive messages through your body language to community members.

- ◆ Do not stand with your arms crossed. This makes you look defensive, argumentative, and

nonreceptive. Stand with your arms straight at your sides.

- ◆ Do not fidget. Keep your feet planted on the ground. Sitting or standing still will make you look more controlled and confident.
- ◆ Avoid shuffling papers or playing with your pen.
- ◆ Do not slouch in your chair. Sit up straight to show that you are paying attention and respect your audience.
- ◆ Make eye contact. Avoiding eye contact can make you look deceitful. If it is very difficult to make eye contact, focus on the back of the room, not on your notes or the floor.

HOT TIP

Always test your messages with a small group before you take them to the public to ensure that the meaning is clear.

Resources

1. Chess C, Hance BJ. 1987. *Communicating with the public*. Piscataway (NJ): Rutgers University Press.
2. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1992. *Tipsheets*. Adapted from: *Community relations in Superfund: a handbook*. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Chapter VI: Working With the Community

This chapter provides tips for developing trust and for working with the community and various audience groups within the community. Misunderstandings can arise when community members do not fully understand ATSDR's role in the health risk communication process.

Chapter Checklist

- Developing Trust**
- Working With Community Leadership and Other Partners**
- Working With Special Audience Groups**
 - Developing Translations for Minority Populations**
 - Targeting Low-Literacy Populations**

Chapter VI: Working With the Community

One of your first challenges when you arrive on site is to clarify ATSDR's role at the site to the community. Misunderstandings can arise at sites when the community does not fully understand ATSDR's role in the health risk communication process.



© The New Yorker Collection 1988 Mischa Richter from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

WHY:

Working effectively with the community is the backbone of health risk communication. Clearly explaining the ATSDR's role and responsibilities at the site upon arrival can alleviate misunderstanding or anger and mistrust. Community members may expect ATSDR to clean up a site, provide health care services, or perform other duties outside the agency's governmental mandate. It is important to clarify ATSDR's role.

Most likely, community members have become accustomed to seeing EPA and other government workers at the site. They have likely formed assumptions based on previous interactions and may associate you with other government agencies.

Steps to Help You Clarify ATSDR's Mission, Role, and Responsibilities in the Community

- ◆ Involve the community at the earliest stage possible.
- ◆ Prepare a fact sheet and establish yourself as the agency contact.
- ◆ Distribute fact sheets at meetings. Carry copies with you and include a copy in any correspondence you send to reinforce your role and introduce yourself.
- ◆ Contact community leaders. Explain your role and discuss how you can best work together.

- ◆ Contact local media representatives covering the site. Introduce yourself, explain your role, and offer to serve as a source for health-related questions. Follow up with a thank-you letter and business card or a contact sheet with ATSDR contact information.
- ◆ Inform ATSDR staff and other agency site team members of your role in communication with the site and the community. Ask them to keep you apprised of site activities and tell you about citizen questions or concerns that they hear.
- ◆ Be aware of community misunderstandings or confusion. Clarify what the agency does and provide correct information.
- ◆ Do not try to define the roles of other government agencies. Speaking on behalf of other agencies may confuse the community. Concentrate on clearly defining ATSDR's role. Refer community members to appropriate sources in other organizations for clarification.

A. Developing Trust

Once the community knows who you are, you can establish trust. This is a process that takes time, patience, and persistence as well as a good deal of two-way communication. At some sites, you may be fighting against negative preconceived notions about government bureaucrats.

Steps to Establish Trust

- ◆ Show that you are sincere about your role in the community. Be visible. If you doubt the need or

usefulness of the project, the community will know.

- ◆ Ask the community members for their opinions and thoughts. Do not be afraid to ask if you can quote them when talking to others if something they say seems to be important.
- ◆ Maintain confidentiality. Do not repeat comments of one group or person to others without permission.
- ◆ Be honest and explain information carefully. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Find the answer and get back to people as soon as possible. Disclose information quickly and do not minimize or exaggerate the level of risk.
- ◆ Always meet your obligations to the community. If you meet all of your obligations, return phone calls, and respond honestly when community members ask for information, you are more likely to be accepted as a credible person.
- ◆ Do your homework to understand what is going on in the community, what has happened in the past, and how the community feels. Community members will trust you if they respect you and think you are a credible source of reliable information.
- ◆ Always write down community concerns and questions for follow-up and consider any suggestions for future actions to show that you are listening.
- ◆ Treat community members with respect and patience. Listen carefully and acknowledge the community's thoughts and input.

B. Working With Community Leadership and Other Partners

Working with different individuals and agencies can increase your effectiveness in gathering and disseminating information. Because each of these individuals will provide different ideas and expertise, the sum will help create a more comprehensive, satisfying outcome.

Important Networking Resources

- ◆ Community leaders

- ◆ Local government representatives
- ◆ Local health department representatives
- ◆ Leaders of local organizations
- ◆ Other federal government agencies on site

Facilitating Networking Activities

- ◆ Share information with other groups who may have information that will decrease the amount of research you need to do.
- ◆ Bring together a group of community leaders to brainstorm issues and ideas to view the health risk situation from the community's perspective. This networking will enhance your credibility with the community because community members will see you working with local leaders they know and trust.
- ◆ Issue information in collaboration with other agencies at the site, when possible. Issuing single, joint documents enhances clear message delivery. If this is impossible, be sure your separate statements are consistent. When government agencies contradict each other without explaining contradictions, the community loses trust and confidence in all agencies involved.
- ◆ Document all networking interactions and share them with other community leaders. This network of shared information will assist in pointing out inconsistencies, discrepancies, and missing information. As material is reviewed by the network, each participant can help resolve these differences. Consider creating a monthly newsletter to keep community leaders up to speed. The logs of these interactions should become part of the documents on the overall project.

Community Members Requiring Special Attention

- ◆ If you are dealing with a state governor, state congressional representative, U.S. senator, or other government official, contact ATSDR's Washington office at (202) 690-7536 for procedures and assistance.

- ◆ If approached by attorneys working at the site, go to your supervisor and together get ATSDR attorneys involved.

Staying Involved

The community will expect to have an ongoing relationship with you after communication activities commence, even if you are not on site all the time. Staying involved can be accomplished by

- ◆ Progress reports and newsletters. These are a good way to stay in touch with the community. Progress reports can be issued monthly or quarterly, depending on how quickly the project is intended to move along. They do not have to be long—a page or two will generally be sufficient.

The progress report can

- Update information, including new contact information and status of the various activities underway
 - Discuss problems and their resolution
 - Announce or remind about upcoming meetings or interactions with the community
- ◆ Telephone contact. Call key members of the target audiences to keep them apprised that the work is progressing.
 - ◆ Local contacts. Stay in touch with your local contacts in the health department. Ask them to be your “eyes and ears” for media coverage and community concerns. Check in with them regularly for updates.

C. Working With Special Audience Groups

Pay attention to subgroups of the community with special needs for different communications, such as non-English speaking and low-literacy populations.

Special care should be taken to ensure that all community members are informed about site activities and have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. If there are special

audience needs, you will want to make arrangements to communicate with them.

1. Developing Translations for Minority Audiences

Two ways to effectively reach non-English speakers are translating materials for their use and working with media serving their community to provide information. A translation is desirable when a significant number of community members are non-English speakers.

There are two types of translations:

- ◆ A written translation of materials originally written in English. Written translations should be provided for fact sheets or letters, unless a presentation or public meeting would be more appropriate.
- ◆ A verbal translation of a public meeting or news conference. Each sentence should be translated after it is spoken. Verbal translations are recommended when there is considerable concern over the site, extreme hostility, or suspicion of ATSDR’s communication efforts.

Steps for Developing a Successful Translation

- ◆ Assess the demographic characteristics of the community to determine the need for translation. Consider whether community members’ ability to take part in health risk communication activities is limited by their inability to speak or understand English.
- ◆ A successful translation depends on the skill of the translator. Many translators will not be familiar with the technical terms associated with hazardous waste cleanup.
- ◆ Contract someone with experience in translating technical information. Ensure that the translator is a neutral third party so your message is translated exactly as you have phrased it.
- ◆ Double-check the translation for accuracy. If possible, arrange to have another person, preferably a staff member who can speak or read the appropriate foreign language, check the

translator's work to ensure that the content and tone are compatible with ATSDR's intent.

- ◆ Avoid the use of jargon or highly technical terms. As a matter of standard practice, a staff member should take time to explain all technical terms to the translator in advance.
- ◆ For verbal presentations, provide prepared statements and/or notes to the translator ahead of time. This enables more time to work out vocabulary problems and reduces the chances of making inaccurate word choices.
- ◆ When speaking through a translator, address the person or group you are speaking to, not the translator. If possible, practice with the translator before the actual meeting or presentation.
- ◆ Anticipate questions from the audience and media. Have the technical aspects such as the chemical names or statistics translated in advance.

2. Targeting Low-Literacy Populations

According to the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey, almost half of the adult population reads at only basic levels. Low-literacy populations may need more one-on-one contact to ensure that they receive and understand the information you are communicating.

To work with low-literacy populations, remember what you have learned about the community, especially this subgroup.

- ◆ What are their concerns?
- ◆ What is their realm of experience?
- ◆ What concepts are difficult for them?

Speak to their needs in words you know they will understand.

For presentations

- ◆ Determine if a low-literacy community is in a specific geographic area near the site. This can be accomplished by reviewing community

demographic data or by interviewing community leaders, civic groups, or volunteer organizations. Conduct community meetings in a place that is well-known, safe, and welcoming to all citizens, such as a church, community center, or other community focal point. This should be done at all sites to ensure that people feel included in the health risk communication process.

- ◆ Speak slowly and clearly. Do not use jargon or complex scientific phrases. People are concerned with how the situation affects them and their family, what you are doing to fix it, and what they need to do to protect their health.
- ◆ Remember you are communicating complex information that you are trained to understand, but the audience is not. Your audience groups do not have the same training and look to you to interpret the messages for them.
- ◆ Use visuals to enhance the audience's understanding of what you are saying.

For written materials

- ◆ Strive for a 6th grade (or below) reading level. Most health information is written at the 10th grade reading level or above. In written materials, short words (with few syllables) are not necessarily better.
- ◆ Focus on three main points. Use headers and subtitles to make information easy to follow.
- ◆ Your main concern should be with ease of understanding. Avoid jargon, write in a conversational style, use short sentences, and use bullets for lists.
- ◆ Typefaces of at least 12–14 point are easier to read. This is important for both low-literacy and elderly populations. Avoid reverse print, do not use all capital letters for text, and keep lines no longer than 5 inches.

- ◆ Use pictures and graphics as much as possible. Keep the document uncluttered by using ample white space. Make it engaging, appealing, and culturally appropriate.

The best measure of your materials is to test them with your target audience. As a starting point, use this test to determine the literacy level of your written materials.

Literacy Level Test

- ◆ Choose 10 consecutive sentences from near the beginning, middle, and end of your text for a total of 30 sentences.
- ◆ Within this sample, circle all polysyllabic words—that is, words that contain three or more syllables and count them. Include repetitions of the same word and proper nouns. Abbreviations and numbers should be pronounced to determine if they are polysyllabic. Hyphenated words are considered one word.
- ◆ Take the square root of your total word count and add 3. This is your approximate grade level.
- ◆ Calculate the results:

# total syllables	grade level
0–2	4
3–6	5
7–12	6
13–20	7
21–30	8
31–42	9
43–56	10
57–72	11
73–90	12

- ◆ In general, always strive for 4th–6th grade literacy level and do not go above 8th grade level. Here's how to determine if something is low literacy:

4th grade: low literacy

6th grade: very easy to read

8th grade: easy to read

9th grade: average

11th grade and above: difficult

Note: The community wants to know that you are a credible resource that is able to provide reliable information. A Community Interaction Planning Tool that can help you develop an understanding of different groups in the community and their communication needs is in the Appendix.

Resources

1. Ontario Ministry of Health. 1991. Social marketing in public health: a communications guide. Ontario, Canada: Ontario Ministry of Health.
2. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1992. Community relations in Superfund: a handbook. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
3. National Cancer Institute. 1992. Making health communication programs work. Bethesda (MD): National Cancer Institute.

Chapter VII: Interacting Effectively With the News Media

This chapter outlines steps for effective interaction with the news media, which serve as a conduit ATSDR staff can use to reach diverse groups in the community. Working with the news media is an opportunity for ATSDR staff to create awareness of important health risk information and communicate it to the public.

Chapter Checklist

- ATSDR Procedures for Media Relations**
- Selecting a Spokesperson**
- Preparing for Media Interviews**
- Handling Difficult Media Questions**

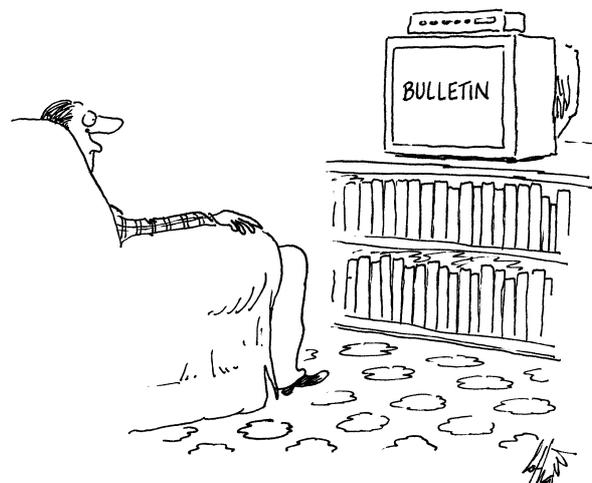
Chapter VII: Interacting Effectively With the News Media

Working effectively with the news media helps build awareness of ATSDR's mission and provides the public with needed information about ATSDR activities.

WHY:

The media are an important secondary target audience. They often influence the behavior and knowledge of communities and individuals.

It is impossible to control the messages the media disseminate, but it is possible to work with them to ensure that they have current information, understand the situation, and view you as a source for reliable information.



"We interrupt this program for a late-breaking slant on the news."

© 2001 Frank Cotham from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

A. Working With the News Media

By establishing a relationship with the news media, you can take a proactive role in encouraging balanced news coverage of the site.

Types of News Media

The first step in effective media relations is understanding the characteristics and needs of the types of media.

Print

Magazines, Newspapers, Newsletters

- ◆ Need more detailed coverage
- ◆ Need more time to research information
- ◆ Have shelf life—stories stay alive longer when others can read them, pass them to others, or save them

Broadcast

Radio

- ◆ Communicates instantaneously
- ◆ Information should be simple and succinct
- ◆ Be wary of call-in programs for community interaction (can be controversial and inflammatory)
- ◆ Good for public warnings

Television

- ◆ Needs visuals—use charts, maps, and graphs
- ◆ Can help citizens visualize what is happening at the site
- ◆ Good for public warnings

Media Serving Ethnic Groups

Generally, if there is a sizable ethnic group in a community, there will be media serving that community. To work with media serving special populations:

- ◆ Develop relationships with community organizations serving ethnic groups. Learn about

which newspapers, radio stations and television stations to approach.

- ◆ Develop relationship with local media serving ethnic groups. Offer to be a source of information about the site.
- ◆ Add media serving the ethnic community to your regular mailing list. Be sure to send them any translated materials you have produced.

B. ATSDR Procedures for Media Relations

ATSDR, through OPEA, has established the following guidelines and procedures for working with the news media. Follow these steps to ensure that you involve the appropriate people and receive the necessary approvals throughout the process.

- ◆ Know who the state health information officer is and his or her required involvement (approvals, knowledge of, etc.) in media activities at a site. Also know whether there is a local health information officer who should be made aware of activities. This is especially important if the site has legislative or significant legal concerns.
- ◆ Determine with your supervisor and local public information coordinator or manager (titles vary) the appropriate approval/clearance process for media materials before beginning your communications activities. This will allow you to better manage timelines and get information out quickly and correctly.
- ◆ If you are working with an ATSDR regional representative and/or technical project officer, make sure that they review or participate in preparing any media materials that refer to ATSDR and/or ATSDR activities at a site.
- ◆ Whenever possible, route requests from the media through the Public Affairs Specialist at OPEA. The Public Affairs Specialist will respond to media requests and, when necessary, arrange for interviews with ATSDR personnel with expertise in the subject matter of the inquiry. The toll-free number is 1-888-42-ATSDR.
- ◆ If you are contacted directly by the local media when working in the field, and if you are an

expert in the area in which questions are being asked, supply the needed information. If you are not an expert on the topic, arrange an interview with an expert onsite, or contact the Public Affairs Specialist to determine the best agency source. After any media interviews, inform the Public Affairs Specialist by phone, e-mail, or voicemail as soon as possible.

- ◆ If you receive requests for interviews with national news media, such as CNN, CBS News, or the *Washington Post*, refer them immediately to the Public Affairs Specialist. Special coordination is required with the CDC Office of Public Affairs and the PHS News Division. The Public Affairs Specialist will coordinate ATSDR's response with the appropriate entities at PHS and CDC.

Working With Local Media

You want local media to come to you with questions about health issues on a site. To establish yourself as a resource and begin building a positive working relationship with the media

- ◆ Make yourself known and available. Initiate contact with your target media by providing background information on your organization. Let them know who you are, what your organization is about, and where and how to reach you (including after hours).
- ◆ Be dependable, respect deadlines, and provide the information you promise. Remember to return calls promptly.
- ◆ Provide solid information. Help reporters do their job by providing complete, unbiased information and offering to help them interpret confusing or very technical reports.
- ◆ Be cordial and friendly, yet professional. Do not become overly comfortable with a reporter and risk confiding in him or her or leaking information.

C. Selecting a Spokesperson

Although everyone at a site has health risk communication responsibilities, not everyone will feel comfortable or be effective in front of a large group or camera. To ensure that you put the best person in the public eye and to keep your messages consistent, consider selecting a site spokesperson.

The spokesperson may not be the site leader but should work closely with the site leader to stay abreast of the latest development and ensure that the information going out is accurate.

A credible spokesperson is one who can

- ◆ Deliver messages effectively and accurately
- ◆ Speak clearly, slowly, and confidently
- ◆ Lead interviews and be enthusiastic and dynamic
- ◆ Be influential and credible without being rigid or uptight
- ◆ Know messages and facts by heart
- ◆ Be connected to the community

If you decide to designate a spokesperson, instruct each staff member onsite to refer media to that person for interviews. Be sure to notify the spokesperson when you send someone his or her way. OPEA can help train and prepare spokespeople.

D. Preparing for Media Interviews

The messages you develop for community residents are basically the same messages you will use with the media. On the basis of what you know about the types of media and their needs, you can tailor your messages to make them most useful for reporters. Part of a journalist's job is to simplify information for the audience. The person most qualified to simplify the information is you.

For broadcast media

- ◆ Speak in concise sound bites (10-second statements that can easily be worked into a story).

For print media

- ◆ Help the reporter simplify the story. Instead of handing over reams of technical information, offer a synopsis in simple terms.
- ◆ Offer to interpret complicated data or scientific information as needed.
- ◆ Always warn reporters when you are simplifying to avoid sounding ill-informed or dishonest if another source provides the information you left out. Sketch in an overview the sorts of information you are omitting.
- ◆ Have examples, anecdotes, and images ready for reporters who want to personalize a story. Reporters prefer specifics to abstracts.

Think through your communication goals in advance of any interaction with reporters. Keep in mind what you want the reporter and the audience to come away with. Stick to these key messages, expanding them if necessary to address the reporter's questions, but do not get sidetracked with technical details.

Developing a Media List

Knowing the media that serve your community and compiling a contact list are important not only so you can mail key information to media, but also so you are prepared and familiar with reporters when they call.

Identifying Media in the Community

- ◆ Ask EPA for a media list. Chances are they've already developed one and have worked with media in the area. They may even be able to tell you about specific reporters' interests, biases, and styles.
- ◆ Check television and radio stations to see what kind of programming is on and what the major stations are.

- ◆ Visit a news stand to see which state and local papers are sold in the community.
- ◆ Consult a media directory, such as Bacon's or Burrelle's. Use the Internet to look up news media resources for your site location.

Identifying Your Contact at Each Media Source

Call the station or newspaper and ask who is covering the site. If no one is assigned, find out the name of the assignment editor for radio and television stations and the city editor for newspapers.

At large newspapers, there may be both a health and environmental reporter covering the site.

In smaller communities, the newspaper may rely on "stringers," or contract staff, rather than full-time employees. If this is the case, your contact may change frequently and you will have to do more explaining every time you work with that paper.

Setting the Tone With Reporters

- ◆ Be professional, polite, honest, and helpful. Clearly establish the limits of your authority.
- ◆ Probe for details, or at least what the nature of the request is.
- ◆ Do not be pressured by a reporter's request for immediate information because of a deadline. Collect your thoughts, go over your key messages, then call the reporter back.
- ◆ Establish the time frame for callback. Find out how and when the appropriate person can get back to the reporter.
- ◆ Determine whether you need to refer the call to the Public Affairs Specialist at OPEA. Call if you are unsure.
- ◆ Use a media contact log to keep track of contacts.

Handling Interview Requests

- ◆ Ask the reporter what the story is about before agreeing to the interview.

- ◆ Set the ground rules for the interviews beforehand, including the length of the interview and the range of topics to be covered.
- ◆ Determine how much the reporter knows or understands about the issue.
- ◆ If you are concerned about biased or adversarial coverage, request a live or live-to-tape interview so your responses will stand as given. If this is impossible, insist on having your position on the issue used on the air.
- ◆ Remember your right to communicate your views and positions with as much editorial balance as your story deserves.
- ◆ If you decline an interview, ask that your reasons for doing so be used on air.

E. Handling Difficult Media Questions

- ◆ Clearly establish the limits of your authority
- ◆ Direct reporters' questions to a source who can answer them
- ◆ Do not react with hostility or impatience
- ◆ Use "broken record" technique—repeat why you cannot give the information
- ◆ Never go "off the record"

HOT TIP

As important as the media are, you do not want community leaders and officials to hear new developments first from the media. Communicate directly with these community members.

Note: Interacting with the media requires an understanding of how to communicate effectively in different interview situations. Chapter IX includes informative interview tips for television, radio, and telephone that can help you prepare for media interactions. In the Appendix you will find a Media List Planning Tool that will help you develop a targeted media list.

Resources

1. Sandman PM. 1986. Explaining environmental risk. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Chapter VIII: Dealing With a Communication Crisis

This chapter describes how to handle a communication crisis and provides tips for dealing with difficult situations. Differing or unclear expectations between community members and ATSDR staff can lead to conflict if community members perceive that they are being humored or that participation is a tool to gain support for premade decisions.

Chapter Checklist

- Managing Conflict**
- Handling Difficult Situations**
- Negotiating With Community Representatives**

Chapter VIII: Dealing With a Communication Crisis

In the emotionally charged environment of health risk communication, conflict is likely to arise between government officials and the community. Understanding potential sources of conflict and knowing how to manage conflict can save you time and stress.

WHY:

The nature of health risk communication necessitates your heading off some crises or handling them better by planning in advance. In any situation where health and community uncertainty is involved, crisis can be expected. You may step into a crisis even if you were not involved early in site activities, or one may develop during your time at the site.

When community members are included in the risk management process, they may expect to have decision-making and veto power over government actions. At some sites, the agency may expect merely to solicit input from the community, whereas the community expects something else.

Handling a Communication Crisis

Media calls should be directed immediately to the lead communication team member who should contact and work with ATSDR and OPEA. Determine together your media messages. The communication representative should be prepared to deliver concise and accurate messages quickly about the situation. This person should be available 24 hours a day—be able to forward his or her business number to his or her home rather than giving out a home number, if possible.

Addressing Communication to Community Audiences and Through News Media

Define messages quickly and accurately. Immediately give the who, what, when, where, and why as well as convey what you are doing to remedy the situation. Be sure everyone on the site team is delivering the same message.



"I have a brief statement, a clarification, and two denials."

© The New Yorker Collection 1993 Peter Steiner from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

- ◆ Make information public. Information that does not involve some security or confidential issue should be made public. People may very well find out anyway through another source. Follow this rule even if the information is embarrassing to you personally—it is better to acknowledge the situation once than to live with wrong or incomplete information.
- ◆ Answer media calls as soon as possible. If your full answer is not ready, say so—but promise to get back to them as soon as possible and keep your promise. If the answer is confidential, tell them. Never say “no comment.”
- ◆ If you are not the right contact, do not talk. Do not guess at questions outside your area of expertise. Refer reporters to the right person, and follow up with that person to be sure they responded to the reporter’s request.
- ◆ Reach out to your media contacts. Focus on the reporters with whom you have a good relationship. Get your side of the story to them immediately.

- ◆ Prepare general information packages in advance. Have fact sheets, statements, backgrounders, etc. prepared ahead of time and add specific information relative to the crisis.
- ◆ Offer third parties as sources. Give reporters sources at other organizations sympathetic to your side of the issue. They give credibility because they have nothing to gain by being quoted.
- ◆ Provide regular updates (if applicable). Minute-by-minute accounting builds trust and confidence. Lapses in the information flow will stimulate speculation and heighten anxiety.
- ◆ Be especially sensitive to oversimplification. You will be rushed, but do not skimp on the information you provide.

A. Managing Conflict

Be aware of the main kinds of conflict and work to manage them before they become problematic.

Reasons for conflict include

- ◆ Limited opportunities for citizen participation. Be sure citizens have information in advance of the meeting so they can prepare questions and discussion.
- ◆ Lack of useful information. Be sure that information you provide is complete, easy to interpret, and not biased by ATSDR's position. Ask yourself if the information is free of specialized language understandable only by someone in your profession.
- ◆ Mistrust of the government official. If the community does not trust and respect you, conflict can arise as community members try to take control from you. They may also appeal to higher authorities in an attempt to "work around" you. It is imperative that you be perceived as sensitive, involved, and honest throughout the process.
- ◆ Sometimes citizens will intentionally create conflict to get your attention or to make demands. This is especially true when government has seemed unresponsive in the past. The best way to avoid this kind of conflict is to be fair and open from the beginning.

Tips for Managing Hostility and Responding to Angry Community Members

- ◆ Calm yourself, breathe deeply, and remind yourself of your greater purpose.
- ◆ Do not pass judgment when people express their feelings. Listen and respond to the feelings and concerns being expressed.
- ◆ Keep the discussion focused on the facts. If you are being personally attacked, remember that the person is not necessarily angry at you but at the situation.
- ◆ Use open body language. Sit or stand with your arms relaxed by your sides. Do not cross your arms or put your hands on your hips. Make eye contact when possible.
- ◆ Use a slightly lower tone and volume of voice than the angry individual.
- ◆ Show that you heard a person's concern. Repeat back what you understood was said and ask if you heard correctly.
- ◆ Take notes about concerns, questions, and expected action.
- ◆ Let people express their feelings, then ask them to allow you to record their concerns and give them information.
- ◆ Admit when you do not know an answer and offer to get it. Follow-up with answers quickly, and offer to return if they need additional information.
- ◆ Do not promise what you cannot deliver. Unless you are 100 percent in control, do not commit to a firm deadline. Explain that variables such as weather conditions and lab results could make the schedule slip, but that you are doing everything you can to keep it on track.

B. Handling Difficult Situations

A difficult situation arises when the audience is adversarial towards you. There are usually reasons why this happens. There is nearly always a history of missed commitments, poor credibility, incomplete information in reports, and the appearance of playing favorites.

There are several potential causes for such a situation:

- ◆ Bad information occurs when a person or group deliberately leaks information or claims that the agency is hiding information. Always have more than two people in any conversation to avoid “your word versus theirs.” Always follow-up any interaction with a written summary of the conversation.
- ◆ Missed commitments occur when you promise what is not in your control. If this has occurred at your site, you should begin to rebuild the credibility through presenting a time line that is in your control and that you will follow.
- ◆ Mixed messages most frequently occur when different agencies, purporting to work together, provide the residents with different information or disagree in public on issues. Government agency representatives need to consult with each other before going public with information on how to explain any differences that have been identified. Another mixed message occurs when the same agency releases reports on the same issue with different facts—for example, if an early report suggested that the site had used a specific chemical and a later report determined that this was false.

When you are the bearer of bad news, consider in advance which community members are likely to be frustrated by your announcement. Visit after any group meeting with these people personally, listen to their concerns, and see if there is any information that you can provide to help them better understand the issue.

C. Negotiating With Community Representatives

Basic negotiating skills can serve you well when dealing with hostile audiences. Although you may not have great flexibility in the final solution because of scientific mandates and agency policy, the people skills required in any negotiation situation hold true.

Separating the People From the Problem

- ◆ Remember that you are not dealing with abstract representatives of “the other side.” You are dealing with human beings who have emotions, deeply held values, and different backgrounds and viewpoints.
- ◆ Deal with your “people problems.” Your frustration may obstruct an argument, your perceptions may be one-sided, and you may not be listening or communicating well.
- ◆ Put yourself in the community’s shoes. Withhold judgment for a while as you consider community members’ views. You can never fully understand how they feel—and do not say you do. You can, however, try to see their perspective.
- ◆ The opposition may be making your job a challenge, but they are just standing up for their concerns. Whether or not you know the roots of the conflict, be constructive.
- ◆ Let adversaries save face by making your proposals consistent with their values. Often people in a negotiation will continue to hold out, not because the proposal is inherently unacceptable, but simply because they want to avoid the feeling or appearance of backing down to the other side.
- ◆ When explaining your position, put the problem before your answer. For example, rather than saying, “We believe you should put a fence around the area,” say, “To keep your children safe and away from the site during investigation, we propose installing a fence.”
- ◆ Look forward, not back. Talk about where you want to go in resolving problems rather than where you have been. Avoid rehashing old issues.
- ◆ Do not search for a single answer. Consider many possible solutions. Involve the community in brainstorming possibilities.
- ◆ Do not view a negotiation as an “either/or” proposition. Keep the other side’s interests in mind, identify and focus on shared interests.

HOT TIP

Use symbolic gestures, even something as simple as a handshake or an apology, to defuse emotions.

Resources

1. Sandman PM. 1986. Explaining environmental risk. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
2. Fisher R, Ury W. 1981. Getting to yes: negotiating agreement without giving in. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Chapter IX: Tip Sheets and Evaluation Planner

When conducting health risk communication activities, the Tip Sheets contained in this chapter can help you to determine your evaluation strategy and plan for media interviews. Use the tip sheets to supplement information contained in Chapter III: Planning Health Risk Communication and Chapter VII: Interacting Effectively With the News Media.

Chapter Checklist

- Tips for Successful Evaluation**
- Interview Tips for Television, Radio, and Telephone**
- Evaluation Planner and Checklist**

Chapter IX: Tip Sheets and Evaluation Planner

A. Tips for Successful Evaluation

- ◆ Think about evaluation throughout the process of risk communication. Many people think about evaluation only after they have completed a project. However, to demonstrate changes in knowledge or attitude, evaluations should involve baseline data. Even the results from a simple pretest survey will provide evidence that changes in these areas were in fact due to the risk communication activities performed.
- ◆ Keep written survey instruments simple and clear.
 - Avoid two-in-one questions, which are difficult for respondents to answer and provide results that may be difficult to interpret. Instead, ask two separate questions.
 - Test the reading level of survey questions before you administer the survey. Words and concepts that are familiar to you may be confusing to others. Have a small number of members of the community complete the survey and check to see that responses seem appropriate, or have community members tell you in their own words what they think each survey item is asking.
 - Use standard response options (on a scale from 1 to 5, with one being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree...) and keep response options consistent throughout the survey.
 - Avoid asking for sensitive information about things such as drinking or drug use, income, marital status, or other health conditions unless they are truly necessary for your evaluation. Inform respondents whether their responses will remain anonymous and/or confidential and that they may refuse to complete the survey or skip any items.
- Include simple but complete directions on how to fill out the survey, and be sure to include a “Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey” at the end.
- If using a mail survey, be sure to include the name and phone number of a person respondents can contact if they have any questions about the survey, and where they should send their completed survey.
- Stand back and look at your survey instrument when you think it is ready. Does it look like it would be easy to complete? Would you want to fill it out if someone approached you? Is there white space on the page or is it completely filled with text? Are items clearly numbered? Is it obvious where respondents should write their responses?
- ◆ Consider evaluating at multiple levels. A process evaluation alone tells you very little about whether you were successful in communicating effectively with your audience. Although it is important to keep track of and document the number of phone calls to a hotline or the number of meetings held, this kind of evaluation is not a sufficient evaluation of the true impact (or lack thereof) of risk communication activities.
- ◆ Tell people why you are doing what you are doing. Informing community members that you would like to hold a focus group to help determine whether your agency is communicating effectively with them will likely foster more cooperation than simply attempting to bring people together to answer the agency’s questions. Be deliberate in encouraging honest responses.

B. Interview Tips for Television, Radio, and Telephone

Being prepared for different interview settings can make you feel more confident.

Telephone interview tips

- ◆ Arrange to have your interview in a quiet room without interruptions.
- ◆ Treat a telephone interview as if you were in the studio. Do not be distracted.
- ◆ Do not use your speaker phone.
- ◆ Stand up. It helps your voice and makes you alert. Smile to enliven your voice.
- ◆ Keep key messages at hand and check them off as you proceed with the interview.

Radio interview tips

- ◆ Be prepared for interviews that may run longer than expected.
- ◆ Get comfortable; expect small taping booths that are less than ideal.
- ◆ Use notes if necessary, but do not rustle your papers.

Television interview tips

- ◆ Do not make broad, unnatural gestures or move around in your chair.
- ◆ Look at the reporter, not the camera.
- ◆ Sit comfortably but do not slouch.
- ◆ Use a conversational tone, short sentences, and layman's terms.
- ◆ Stay enthusiastic.

What to Wear on Television

When you appear on television, consider your wardrobe. Dressing properly for bright studio lights and cameras can help you look more comfortable and confident.

Men

- ◆ Choose gray, blue, or brown coats or suits. Avoid black because it absorbs too much light. Avoid stripes, checks, and flashy patterns because they distract the viewer.
- ◆ Button double-breasted jackets—single-breasted jackets may be unbuttoned.
- ◆ Wear white, off-white, or light blue shirts.
- ◆ Wear neckties with muted colors or quiet patterns. Do not wear ties with a small dot pattern. If your tie is patterned, wear a solid colored shirt and solid colored suit.
- ◆ Avoid large or flashy belt buckles.
- ◆ Wear knee-length socks darker than your suit.
- ◆ Be sure to have a clean-shaven look.
- ◆ Make sure your hair is neat and well trimmed.

Women

- ◆ Wear a tailored dress or suit and blouse, free of fussy necklines. Avoid slacks (unless they are part of a matched suit), short skirts, and clothes that are too tight or loose.
- ◆ Wear neutral colors such as pale blue, varying shades of gray, brown, or khaki. Avoid wearing tightly patterned or geometric designs larger than one inch. Avoid white or very light colors because they tend to make the face appear too dark on color television.
- ◆ Wear dark shoes—white or light colors make feet appear larger.
- ◆ Do not wear light-catching or jangling jewelry. Small gold or pearl earrings are good choices.
- ◆ Wear regular makeup in natural tones. Use a neutral face powder, eyeliner, pastel shades of eye shadow, blush applied high on the cheekbones and a soft shade of lipstick in rosy pink or coral. No bright red lipstick or fingernail polish! Lip liner gives more definition to your lips.

- ◆ Bring a scarf that is a contrasting color to what you are wearing in case your outfit is the same color as the set background. Tie the scarf around your shoulders and it will keep you from disappearing into the background.

Seeking a Correction

If you are misquoted or the media reports inaccurate information, consider the seriousness of the error. Generally, unless you can prove that the information is causing public distress or harm, it is not worth seeking a correction. To quote an old public relations adage, never pick fights with people who buy ink by the barrel or own satellites.

If you do need to correct information:

- ◆ Wait 24 hours to see if you still want a correction. Often a story will “blow over,” and seeking a correction will only serve to reignite it.
- ◆ Call the reporter to explain, patiently and calmly, the error and request a correction. Remember that most newspaper corrections appear in a very small box on page 2; do not expect a full story.
- ◆ Consider a letter to the editor or op-ed piece. This allows you to give the correct information in your own words. Be careful not to criticize the newspaper or repeat the misinformation—simply explain the correct facts.

C. Evaluation Planner and Checklist

Before arriving at a site

- ◆ Review evaluation results from similar sites.
- ◆ Think about how things that went well at previous sites could be applied at your site. To identify comparison sites, consider:
 - Is the community at this site similar to any other site communities in terms of demographic characteristics, such as income, languages spoken, racial and ethnic makeup, urban versus rural, education level, etc.?
 - Are the toxic substances at this site similar to those at other sites?
 - Are the possible routes of exposure similar to those at other sites?

Once you arrive onsite

- ◆ Gather baseline data. Some examples include:
 - Conduct a knowledge survey at an early public meeting.
 - Review phone logs or survey staff to determine baseline number of calls to local health department.
 - Gather baseline data about number of children brought in to local health department.
- ◆ Plan for and conduct formative evaluation. Examples include:
 - Create drafts of posters, brochures, fact sheets, or other written materials. Hold two focus groups with different subgroups of the community to test materials.
 - Ask for feedback on the layout, readability, cultural appropriateness, and comprehensibility of the materials. Revise materials based on feedback.
 - Use a computer software program to test literacy level of fact sheets.

- ◆ Develop tracking and/or documentation systems for process evaluation. Some examples include:
 - Maintain phone logs for hotline calls.
 - Create sign-in sheets to track meeting attendance.
- ◆ Plan for and conduct outcome evaluation. Some examples include:
 - Readminister your knowledge survey at a public meeting as a posttest.
 - Conduct a small number of door-to-door interviews with members of specific communities.
 - Conduct a review of health department records on the number of children seen since your activities started.
 - Compare with baseline data gathered when you first arrived at the site.

After onsite activities are concluded

- ◆ Continue outcome evaluation. Examples include:
 - Conduct follow-up mail survey with a sample of community members to assess behavior change, attitudes, and knowledge.
 - Continue to review health department records to assess behavior change.
- ◆ Consider if impact evaluation is appropriate:
 - Can the risk communication activities conducted be expected to affect health status? Can the combination of risk communication and other interventions combined be expected to affect health status?
 - Think about ways that these changes could be measured.
- ◆ Record your findings in the evaluation section of your overall health risk communications plan.

Appendix

- Health Risk Communication Plan Sheets (Long Version)**
- Media List Planning Tool**
- Message Design Planning Tool**
- Community Interaction Planning Tool**
- Health Risk Communication Strategies and Techniques Planning Tool**
- Health Risk Communication Evaluation Planning Tool**

Health Risk Communication Plan Sheets (Long Version)

Staffing Plan

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Define Health Risk Communication Responsibilities Within the Site Team

Name, division, office, phone number, e-mail

Responsibilities

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

- _____

Other Team Members Within ATSDR

Office of Policy and External Affairs Contact

Community Involvement Branch Contact

Health Risk Communication Objectives

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Set measurable, specific objectives for health risk communication, not for the overall program. This is one of the most important pieces of your plan—and one of the most overlooked.

Considerations

Why are you conducting communication activities at this site?

What **behaviors** of community residents do you want to influence?

What **knowledge** of community residents do you want to influence?

What **attitudes** of community residents do you want to influence?

Communication Objectives

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

How will you determine whether these objectives are being met? (Are your objectives clear, time-specific, and measurable?)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Situation Overview

Site Name _____ Date _____

CERCLIS # _____ CRS # _____

Summarize your knowledge of the situation, including a brief site history, overview of work to date at the site, and any unique circumstances of the ATSDR investigation.

Type of Site

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> NPL/Superfund | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Agreement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Department of Defense | <input type="checkbox"/> Minority Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Department of Energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Base |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brownfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Justice |

Public Health Situation

Contaminants of concern detected _____

Environmental media with potential or known contamination

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> air | <input type="checkbox"/> sediment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> soil | <input type="checkbox"/> biological (fish/game) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> water | |

Residents on groundwater wells? yes no

Potential health effects _____

Suspected and/or documented health effects _____

Completed exposure pathways _____

Potential exposure pathways _____

Known exposures _____

Site History

Attach a map of the site and its relationship to residences, schools, parks, water sources, etc.

Past uses of site _____

Ownership of site _____

Employment at site _____

EPA involvement _____

Critical decisions and significant actions _____

Key dates in the future _____

Government Structure

Local government type _____

Key political players _____

Community's past involvement with government/agencies _____

Community Description

Geographic boundaries _____

Total population density _____

Commuting populations _____

Age distribution of residents _____

Education level _____

Ethnic mix _____

Languages spoken _____

Socioeconomic status _____

Religious groups _____

Interests _____

Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) set up? ____ yes ____ no

If yes, local contact _____

Technical advisor _____

Characteristics

____ Immediate neighborhood

____ Wildlife/natural resource areas

____ Schools/childcare facilities

____ Community medical facilities

____ Community buildings (churches)

____ Additional industries in area

____ Office buildings/work facilities

____ Other potential sources of pollution

____ Parks and recreation areas

Community Concerns

Health concerns _____

Environmental concerns _____

Economic concerns _____

Legal concerns _____

Unmet needs for information, education, or training _____

Perceived lack of response to concerns _____

What does the community know about the site? _____

What gaps exist in the community's knowledge? _____

What does the community want to know? _____

What attitudes/beliefs do community members hold that may **negatively** affect their willingness to engage in preventive actions or community collaborations? _____

What attitudes/beliefs do community members hold that may **positively** affect their willingness to engage in preventive actions or community collaborations? _____

What are community members doing that puts them at risk? _____

What can community members do to protect themselves from site-related hazards? _____

Community Organizations and Contacts

Environmental _____

Business _____

Social _____

Religious _____

Community Leaders

Elected _____

Nonelected _____

Site Publicity

News coverage _____

Visibility of site _____

Media List Planning Tool

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Determine the media serving the community. Be aware of past media coverage of the site.

Media	Contact	Past Coverage
Newspapers		
Radio Stations		
Television Stations		
Other Media		

Message Design Planning Tool

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Solidify your messages so you communicate accurate, consistent information.

Community Questions to Answer

Am I (Are we) safe? _____

What have you found that will affect us? _____

What is the source of this problem(s)? _____

Does this contaminant cause health problems? (specify) _____

Can you fix it? If not you, who? _____

Considerations

How will you define the health risk? _____

What inconsistencies in messages from different sources already exist in the community? How will you clarify them? _____

What doubts or uncertainties do community residents have? How will you clarify them? _____

What other communicators are working in the community? What messages have they put out? _____

Key Messages

1. _____

Supporting data/evidence _____

2. _____

Supporting data/evidence _____

3. _____

Supporting data/evidence _____

Community Interaction Planning Tool

Site Name _____

Date _____

CERCLIS # _____

CRS # _____

Define the community and the individual audiences for health risk communication activities.

Consider:

Individuals/groups that can facilitate action _____

Individuals/groups previously involved _____

Individuals/groups likely to be concerned _____

Individuals/groups likely to be affected _____

Individuals/groups likely to be angry if not involved _____

Audience Group	Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
State agency staff		
Elected officials		
Local agency staff		
Citizen groups		

Audience Group	Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Area residents		
Local health professionals		
Local business representatives		
Civic groups		
Public interest groups		
Local school principals		
Potentially responsible parties		
Other federal agencies (EPA)		
Other ATSDR staff		

Audience Group	Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Other		
Other		

Subgroup	Main Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Non-English speakers		
Social/cultural situations		
Activists		
Workers and their families		
Other groups with special characteristics		

Health Risk Communication Strategies and Techniques Planning Tool

Site Name _____
CERCLIS # _____

Date _____
CRS # _____

Map out a specific plan for health risk communication activities. Strategies are what you plan to do, and techniques are how you will do them. For example, "Explain nature of ATSDR work" is a strategy under which you might find the technique "Distribute ATSDR fact sheets."

Strategies and Techniques

Strategy: Introduce ATSDR to the community.

Technique

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Strategy: Involve the community in health risk communication.

Technique

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

Strategy: Work effectively and inclusively with community leadership and other partners.

Technique

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

Strategy: Communicate early and regularly with the community.

Technique

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

Strategy: Use the news media to convey accurate information.

Technique

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Strategy: Be prepared for a crisis.

Technique

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Strategy: If applicable, stay connected to the community after the main work is finished.

Technique

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Health Risk Communication Evaluation Planning Tool

Site Name _____
CERCLIS # _____

Date _____
CRS # _____

Outline your plan to track your work against your original objectives. Revisit this section often to make program notes, suggestions for future work, and observations. After you leave the site, this section will complete the plan, giving you a comprehensive record of your work at the site.

Baseline data against which you can measure (e.g., prevalence of activities or beliefs you hope to change)

Planning (formative) evaluation to test messages and materials

What are you evaluating? _____

How will you evaluate it? _____

What were the results? _____

Immediate impact (process) evaluation to review and document activities conducted

What are you evaluating? _____

How will you evaluate it? _____

What were the results? _____

Midpoint (outcome) evaluation to determine whether short-term objectives were met

What are you evaluating? _____

How will you evaluate it? _____

What were the results? _____

Results (impact) evaluation to assess long-term effects

What are you evaluating? _____

How will you evaluate it? _____

What were the results? _____
