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FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARD GREATER LOS ANGELES

Crisis Communications

A CONTINUITY WORKING GROUP SESSION

FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARD

April 21, 2021

CONSTANT Associates

Resilience is CONSTANT℠

Welcome & Administration

Welcome & Introductions

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- The slide presentation can be downloaded from the “Handouts” drop down in the control panel.
- Please keep you microphone muted.
- Please type all questions into the “Questions” drop down in the control panel.
- Be prepared to answer poll questions.

Session Objectives

1. Provide an overview of the crisis communications process
2. Increase participant understanding of the elements of crisis communications
3. Provide useful resources for participants to further their crisis communications capability following this session

Agenda

- Welcome & Administration
- Psychology of a Crisis
- Basics of Crisis Communications
- Crisis Communications Audiences
- Message Development
- Communications Tools & Systems
- Media Relations During a Crisis
- Additional Resources
- Questions

Poll Question

Which topic are you most interested in learning about in today's session (check all that apply)?

- Psychology of a Crisis
- Basics of Crisis Communications
- Crisis Communications Audiences
- Message Development/Communications Tools & Systems
- Media Relations During a Crisis

Psychology of a Crisis

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How Individuals Process Information During a Crisis

- We simplify messages.
- We hold on to current beliefs.
- We look for additional information & opinions.
- We believe the first message.

"Most of the response to a naturally occurring disaster or a planned attack is psychological. The worried but well don't show up [at the ER] and say, "psychologically I'm not feeling as I usually do". They show up and say, "I've got a headache, I've got a stomachache", and so they come into our medical system in a way that doesn't readily identify them as a psychological victim."

- Ivan Walks, M.D., Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

Mental States in a Crisis

- **Uncertainty** – Acknowledge and express empathy for your audience's uncertainty and share with them the process you are using to get more information about the evolving situation.
- **Fear, Anxiety, & Dread** – Acknowledge these feelings in a statement of empathy.
- **Hopelessness & Helplessness** – Instead of trying to eliminate a community's emotional responses to the crisis, help community members manage their negative feelings by setting them on a course of action.
- **Denial** – Denial can, at least in part, be prevented or addressed with clear, consistent communication from a trusted source.

Media Coverage & Psychological Effects

- Most individuals tend to have a stronger psychological or emotional reaction to a crisis if it is manmade or imposed.
- These types of crises also tend to have increased media exposure.
- The media will often show repeated negative images.
- People who are indirectly affected by the crisis through media exposure may personalize the event or see themselves as potential victims.

Media & Disasters - A Crisis Communications Case Study

- On September 11, 2001, adults watched an average of 8.1 hours of television coverage, and children watched an average of 3.0 hours.
- Several studies show that the amount of time spent watching TV coverage and the graphic content of the attacks on September 11 was associated with increased post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and clinical depression symptoms.

Addressing the Psychology of a Crisis through the Crisis Communications Lifecycle

- **Pre-Crisis** – Important information and assumptions are set during the pre-crisis stage, even before a crisis occurs.
- **Initial** – During the initial phase, the following concepts are important to support psychological health: 1) don't over-reassure, 2) acknowledge uncertainty, 3) emphasize that a process is in place to learn more, and 4) be consistent in providing messages.
- **Maintenance** – Once basic survival needs are met, other needs for emotional balance and self-control emerge.
- **Resolution** – When the emergency is no longer on the front page, those who have been most severely affected will continue to have significant emotional needs.

Basics of Crisis Communications

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Setting the Stage - A Crisis Communications Case Study

- Hurricane Maria, September 2017.
- Communication failures led to confusion, rumors & wide-spread public distrust after Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico.

Poll Question

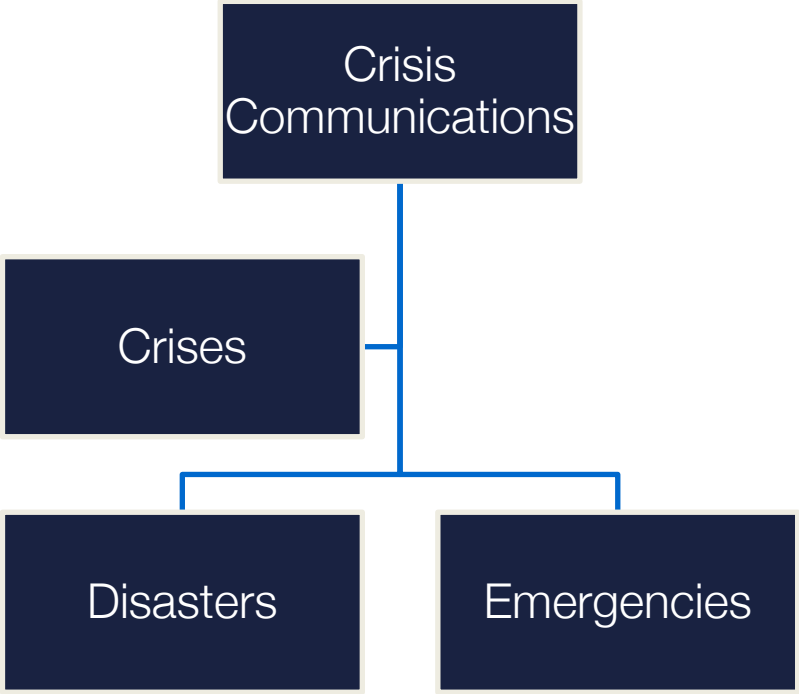
Communications is the number one challenge or area for improvement noted in post incident analysis reports (After Action Reports).

- TRUE
- FALSE

"Companies that do not actively practice, study, and plan for crisis communications – as well, of course, crisis management – are doomed to fail when a crisis befalls them. Crises are, in a word, inevitable, and those macho companies that think, "It can't happen here," or if it does, "I can handle it," will suffer the hardest failures."

- Steven Fink, Crisis Communications Expert

How Crisis Communications Applies to Emergencies, Disaster, and Crises



Comparing the Different Types of Crisis Communications

Type of Communications	Communicator	Time Pressure	Message Purpose
Crisis Communications	Member of organization impacted by incident	Urgent and unexpected	Explain and persuade
Issues Management Communications	Member of organization impacted by incident	Anticipated; timing is somewhat expected by the communicator	Explain and persuade
Risk Communications	Expert who is not directly impacted by outcomes	Anticipated with little or no time pressure	Empower decision-making
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications	Expert who is impacted by outcomes	Urgent and unexpected	Explain, persuade, and empower decision making

The Crisis Communications Lifecycle

Pre-Crisis

- Prepare
- Foster Alliances
- Develop Consensus
- Test Message
- Evaluate Plans

Initial

- Express Empathy
- Provide Simple Risk Explanations
- Establish Credibility
- Recommend Actions
- Commit to Stakeholders

Maintenance

- Further Explain Risk
- Provide More Background
- Gain Support for Response
- Empower Risk/Benefit Decision-Making
- Capture Feedback

Resolution

- Educate a Primed Public for Future Crises
- Examine Problems
- Gain Support for Policy and Resources
- Promote your Agency's Role

Evaluation

- Capture Lessons Learned
- Improve Plan
- Return to Pre-Crisis Planning

Crisis Communications STARCC Principles

- **Simple**—Frightened people do not want to hear big words.
- **Timely**—Frightened people want information now.
- **Accurate**—Frightened people will not get nuances, so give it straight.
- **Relevant**—Answer their questions and give action steps.
- **Credible**—Empathy and openness are your keys to credibility.
- **Consistent**—The slightest change in the message is upsetting.

Unadvisable Crisis Communications Practices

- Mixed messages from multiple experts
- Information released late that events make the issue moot
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
- Public power struggles and confusion

What is a Crisis Communications Plan?

- A Crisis Communications Plan is an internal document which outlines policies and procedures for the coordination of communications functions within an organization in response to an incident, emergency, or disaster.
- A plan is not a step-by-step or how-to document. It provides a basic, general structure that can be adapted to emergency response situations. **Longer is not better.**
- Planning is the most important step for ensuring effective communications. While a plan cannot guarantee successful management, it can create a template and process for initial actions and decisions.
- The process of planning may be more important than the resulting plans themselves, as the relationships and trust built during the process become invaluable in a crisis situation.
- **The single most important communication responsibility that can be assigned to someone in the organization is the duty to keep the plan current.** Update the plan regularly, usually annually.

What Should you Include in a Crisis Communications Plan?

- Approval from leadership
- Contact information for key stakeholders, including media
- Defined roles and responsibilities
- Information verification, approval, and dissemination processes
- Designated spokespersons and spokespersons guidance
- Procedures to secure needed resources
- Information dissemination methods
- Key audience profiles

How to Develop a Crisis Communications Plan

1. Convene a collaborative planning team
2. Understand the situation
3. Determine the plan parameters
4. Develop the plan iteratively
5. Obtain approval on the plan
6. Implement and maintain the plan

Poll Question

Does your organization have a Crisis Communications Plan?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

The best laid plans… no matter what is on paper and agree upon, response officials should understand that plans need to be flexible. The trick is, that the process of creating a plan means that the response officials will not be strangers to each other when the crisis occurs and may have built relationships that can withstand the strain the crisis will naturally cause.

Crisis Communications Plan Development Resources

- **Ready.gov** – "Crisis Communications Plan"
  - https://www.ready.gov/crisis-communications-plan
- **CDC** – "CERC: Crisis Communications Plans"
  - https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Crisis_Communication_Plans.pdf
- **FEMA** – "FEMA Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials – Communication Guide"
  - https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_cx_toolkit_communication_plan_guide.pdf

Crisis Communications Audiences

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Understanding your Audiences

- Different audience segments will have different needs and perspectives in an emergency.
- Consider each segment's relationship to the emergency.
- Pay attention to cultural background when developing messages and outreach strategies.

Communicating with Employees During a Crisis

- Be proactive.
- Do not expect employees to come to you.
- Do not put-up roadblocks.
- Have boilerplate standby statement ready while you gather details.
- Act fast, but only say what you know to be true.
- Don’t go silent.
- Create a feedback loop.

Internal Crisis Communications – A Crisis Communications Case Study

- The Japan 2011 9.0 earthquake and subsequent Tsunami greatly impacted Cisco Systems' staff.
- Five years' later, Terrorist bombs ripped through a metro station and airport in Brussels in March 2016, also impacting Cisco Systems.

Cisco's Crisis Communications Story

- When a magnitude-9.0 earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck Japan in 2011, Cisco personnel struggled to reach 1,400 employees with timely information.
- During the Brussels terrorist attacks in 2016, leaders at Cisco Systems were able to account for the company's 150-plus employees in the area within 24 hours. Thankfully, all were safe.
- Although the scale of affected employees in the two scenarios was clearly different, the faster response in 2016 reflects a dramatic transformation in the way Cisco's leaders communicate with employees in a crisis.
- Following the devastation in Japan, the company implemented a sophisticated emergency notification system.
- Cisco's leaders now have a plan in place for providing updates to employees during crises.

External Audiences

- Community directly affected by the emergency
- Community immediately outside of the affected area
- Business, trade, and industry
- Civic leaders
- Media
- Emergency responders & public health officials
- Partners
- Community leaders
- International community

Poll Question

Which audience segment(s) is most applicable to your organization (check all that apply)?

- Community directly affected, or immediately outside of the affected area
- Business, trade, and industry
- Media
- Emergency responders & public health officials
- Civic leaders, Community leaders, Partners, or the International Community

Primary Audience Concerns

Audience	Primary Concerns	Audience	Primary Concerns
Directly impacted population	• Personal safety • Family safety • Property damage • Loss of livelihood • Disruption to normal activities	Community leaders	• Safety of communities • Representing community needs • Listening to community members • Taking part in decision-making
Community immediately outside of the affected area	• How they can keep the emergency from affecting them • How they can help • Risks to self & family • Disruption to normal activities	Partners	• Understanding their role in the response • Coordinating with other response organizations • Involvement in decision-making process • Access to information, reputation management
Business, trade, and industry	• Employee safety • Interruptions in business • Loss of revenue • Liabilities and reputation	Emergency responders & public health officials	• Professional responsibilities • Availability of resources • Personal and family safety • If they are directly affected by the emergency
Civic leaders	• Responsibilities • Liability and reputation management • Resource allocations • Opportunities to express concern	International community	• Their level of readiness for a similar emergency • Any restrictions on trade and travel to protect their citizens • Their role in response partnerships
Media	• Getting access to information right away • Meeting rapid deadlines		

Message Development

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Message Development Best Practices

- For the general public, present a short, concise and focused message (6th-grade level).
- Cut to the chase.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Give positive action steps, instead of negatives.
- Repeat the message.
- Create action steps in threes or rhyme or create an acronym.
- Use personal pronouns for the organization.
- Be careful about speculation.
- Respect people's fears and perceptions.
- Establish your own humanity.
- Offer people things to do.

How to Craft a Message

Use the following as a template when developing specific key messages in your county in the event of a confirmed crisis.

Response

- There has been a confirmed [insert crisis event] in [insert location]. We are working with federal, state, and local agencies to take the appropriate steps to ensure the health of residents, employees and others in the affected area.
  - **Empathy:** Our thoughts are with the victims and their families.
  - **Scope:** At this time, it is unclear how widespread this situation may be. We are working with federal, state and local authorities to determine the extent of the situation.
  - **[Insert county] Authority Actions:** We are working with federal, state, and local authorities to ensure that all who have been affected are receiving appropriate treatment.

Risk

- **The risk to residents in [insert county] is [insert information on risk].**

Action

- The public can play a key role in helping authorities to be alert for additional events or emergencies.
  - **Be alert:** If you see an unattended or suspicious package in a public place, call 911 or local law enforcement for additional instructions.
  - **Seek medical treatment in case of exposure:** [insert information on recommended actions specific to crisis event].
  - **For more information:** For more information on chemical, biological or radiological agents go to [insert website].

Messaging Pitfalls to Avoid

- Technical jargon
- Unnecessary filler
- Attacks
- Promises/Guarantees
- Discussion of money
- Humor

Sharing the Facts

- The initial phase of a crisis is characterized by confusion and intense media interest.
- Information is usually incomplete, and the facts scattered.
- It's important to recognize that information from the media, other organizations, and from within your organization might not be accurate.
- Your role is to learn the facts about what happened, to determine what your organization's response is to the problem and to verify the true magnitude of the event as quickly as possible.

Building Credibility

Your message delivery can make or break your credibility.

This will affect how audiences react to your initial message and all communications that follow. Two influencers of credibility are the **speed** of release and the **accuracy** of information.

During a blackout in Michigan in 2003, two neighboring health departments gave conflicting messages.

County A announced that restaurants would close until they had been inspected.

County B did not close restaurants, because their food managers were already certified in their emergency food safety program.

This led to intense media scrutiny, public confusion, and worry over what was safe. Some restaurants lost business.

Building Trust

One of the most important factors in effective communication is how much your audience trusts you and your organization.

Establish trust through **empathy** and **openness**.

Cultural Competency in Crisis Communications

You will need to consider audience segmentation and demographics as well as their physical and psychological relationship to the event. When you consider the communication needs of your audience, bear in mind the following characteristics:

- Education
- Income level
- Current subject knowledge and experience
- Age
- Languages spoken and read
- Cultural background norms and values
- Geographic location
- Religious beliefs

Gathering Audience Feedback

Feedback from the audience is critical to get information and to demonstrate openness. Ask questions to discover the explicit wants, needs, and desires of your stakeholders. For example, you can ask leaders the following questions and probes:

- What is most important to your community when faced with a problem?
- What are the specific risks associated with the alternative solutions?
- What are the specific benefits associated with the alternative solutions?

Situational Awareness

The following activities should be performed throughout the emergency:

- Determine the status of the incident (e.g., stable, better, worse).
- Request updates from reliable sources (CDC, FEMA, etc.).
- Monitor alerts issued by the county or state.
- Monitor social media and new agencies for breaking news.
- Ensure regional staff are updated as information is received.
- Prepare staff for confronting potentially harmful misinformation.

Communications Tools & Systems

Poll Question

Have you ever received an inaccurate emergency notification?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Tell us in the chat how you reacted to the alert!

Communications Systems

- Mass notification systems
- Press Statements and Releases
- Social Media
- Organization Websites
- Call Centers and Outreach
- Radio Broadcasts
- Fact Sheets, Background Materials, and Newsletters
- Video and B-Roll

SOURCE
Say who the message is from

THREAT
Describe the flooding event and its impacts

LOCATION
State the impact area boundaries in a way that can be understood (for example use street names, landmarks, natural features, and political boundaries

GUIDANCE/TIME
Tell people what protective action to take, the time when to do it, how to accomplish it, and how doing it reduces impacts

EXPIRATION TIME
Tell people when the alert/warning expires and/or new information will be received

EXAMPLE

SOURCE | GUIDANCE/TIME | THREAT

LCPD Check and monitor local media now Explosion at Superior dam Potential damage and flooding in Sherman Heights Message expires 8:00 AM PDT

EXPIRATION TIME | LOCATION

TEMPLATE

[Insert title and organization of a local, familiar, authoritative message source] **Check and monitor local media now** [insert description of event, dam name, and threat here] **in** [insert location of threat here] **Message expires** [insert time here]

SOURCE *GUIDANCE/TIME* *THREAT* *LOCATION* *EXPIRATION TIME*

Communication Planning for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Literacy

The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data indicate that in 2015, more than 25 million people had LEP, accounting for 9% of the U.S. population 5 years and older.

When communicating with non-English speakers, be sure to:

- Have translation services identified in advance.
- Identify spokespersons.
- Include non-English messages.
- Include non-English print, television, and radio media.
- When developing materials for non-English speakers or those with LEP, take into consideration any cultural sensitivities.
- Vet developed materials with native speakers.

Communication Planning to Address Other Access and Functional Needs

Access and Functional Needs (AFN) refers to individuals with and without disabilities, who may need additional assistance because of any condition (temporary or permanent) that may limit their ability to act in an emergency. Communicating with individuals with AFN during an emergency is an essential element of effective crisis communications.

Individuals with AFN can include:

- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with limited access to communication devices, such as computers or mobile phones
- Individuals with limited access to financial resources
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Incarcerated individuals
- Elderly
- Children

The Importance of Redundant Messaging

Multiple communications approaches, platforms, and tools should be used when disseminating messaging to create redundancy and ensure messaging reaches the broadest customer base.

Media Relations During a Crisis

The Media's Role in a Crisis

- Disasters are major media events. Emergency events will engage the media, especially if an emergency is exotic, catastrophic, or the first of its kind.
- The media are a constant presence in our lives and play a critical role in informing the public during any crisis or disaster.
- It's natural for those responding to a public health emergency to think of the media as a bother and distraction, but a better understanding of their role in an emergency will improve the relationship.

Interacting with the Media

It is important to understand that reporters will not allow you to simply feed them headlines without asking questions. They will decide what to tell their viewers or listeners about what is occurring. Don’t treat them like members of your staff. Offer suggestions, but do not dictate. This will help you establish a cooperative relationship.

Facilitating Positive Media Relations

In the first critical hours or days of an emergency, fairness is of utmost importance. The most ethical way for a public agency to facilitate media relationships is to provide all media outlets with the same access at the same time.

- Distribute messages equally.
- Use teleconferencing or video conferencing.
- Give journalists a reasonable time frame.
- Establish a schedule for information releases.
- Understand journalism deadlines and work to accommodate them.
- Think Local Media First. Don’t ignore local media in favor of the national media and well-known reporters.

Giving Reporters What They Need

Reporters want and need the following:

- Timely answers to their questions
- Access to experts
- Visuals to support their news stories

Media Operations in a Crisis

It is imperative that Crisis Communications plans include the media in response. Here are some of the ways information is disseminated to the public.

- Alert Messaging Systems
  - Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS)
  - Emergency Alert System (EAS)
  - Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS)
  - Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)
  - National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio All Hazards
- Television and Radio
- Digital resources
  - Social Media
  - Websites
  - Mapping and GIS Systems

Getting Information to the Media in a Crisis

There are many ways to disseminate information to the media:

- Press releases
- Press conferences or media opportunities
- Satellite media tours
- Press conferences by telephone and webcast
- E-mail distribution and broadcast faxes
- Websites, video streaming, and webinars
- Response to media calls
- Social media

Best Practices for Communicating your Message

During a crisis or emergency, it is important that your media spokespersons not just “wing it” when it comes time to relay important information about the event. It is critical that you take some time to prepare and develop key media messages.

To be useful, key media messages must:

- Be few in number, usually no more than two or three.
- Be short and concise, generally no more than a sentence or two each.
- Be in writing.

Media Myths, Errors, & Misperceptions

You can speed up corrections using the following approaches:

- Remain calm.
- Analyze the situation.
- Know what to request.
- Know whom to contact.
- Know what you want to communicate.
- Have a plan before you need it.

Additional Resources

Trainings

Source	Title	Link
CDC	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications	https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/training/index.asp
FEMA Emergency Management Institute (EMI)	Basic Public Information Officer Course (G290-291)	https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/g290.aspx
FEMA EMI	Advanced Public Information Officer (L0388)	https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/e388.aspx
FEMA EMI	Public Information Officer Awareness (IS-29)	https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-29
FEMA EMI	Online Training Module: Social Media in Emergency Management (IS-42)	https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-42
FEMA EMI	Online Training Module: Including People with Disabilities and Others with Access and Functional Needs in Disaster Operations (IS-368)	https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-368

Planning Documents, Guidance, & Tools

Source	Title	Link
California Department of Public Health	CERC Toolkit	http://cdphready.org/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communications-toolkit-2/
CDC	CERC: Crisis Communications Plan	https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Crisis_Communication_Plans.pdf
CDC	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication 2014 Manual	https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/manual/index.asp
CDC	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication 2014 Templates and Tools	https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/templates-tools.asp
CDC	Access and Functional Needs Toolkit 2021	https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readiness/00_docs/CDC_Access_and_Functional_Needs_Toolkit_March2021.pdf
DHS	Innovative Use of Social Media in Emergency Management	https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Social-Media-EM_0913-508_0.pdf
FEMA	FEMA Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials – Communication Guide	https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_cx_toolkit_communication_plan_guide.pdf
Oregon Health Authority	CERC Toolkit	https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preparedness/partners/pages/riskcommunicationtools.aspx
Ready.gov	Crisis Communications Plan	https://www.ready.gov/crisis-communications-plan

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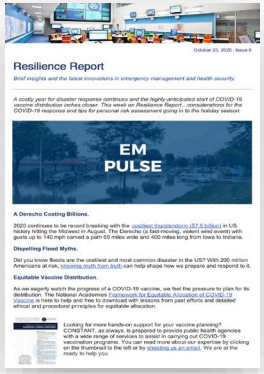
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Resilience Report

Brief insights and the latest innovations in emergency management and health security.

A costly year for disaster response continues and the highly-anticipated start of COVID-19 vaccine distribution inches closer. This week on Resilience Report…considerations for the COVID-19 response and tips for personal risk assessment going in to the holiday season.

EM PULSE

A Derecho Costing Billions.

2020 continues to be record breaking with the costliest thunderstorm ($7.5 billion) in US history hitting the Midwest in August. The Derecho (a fast-moving, violent wind event) with gusts up to 140 mph carved a path 60 miles wide and 400 miles long from Iowa to Indiana.

Dispelling Flood Myths.

Did you know floods are the costliest and most common disaster in the US? With 200 million Americans at risk, knowing myth from truth can help shape how we prepare and respond to it.

Equitable Vaccine Distribution.

As we eagerly watch the progress of a COVID-19 vaccine, we feel the pressure to plan for its distribution. The National Academies Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine is here to help and free to download with lessons from past efforts and detailed ethical and procedural principles for equitable allocation.

Looking for more hands-on support for your vaccine planning? CONSTANT, as always, is prepared to provide public health agencies with a wide range of services to assist in carrying out COVID-19 vaccination programs. You can read more about our expertise by clicking on the thumbnail to the left or by shooting us an email. We are at the ready to help you.

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Questions

Thank You

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