UTILIZING THE COMMUNITY IN A CRISIS

COMMUNICATING THROUGH ESTABLISHED NETWORKS

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TIMELINE OF EVENTS

City of Flint water supply switches from Detroit water to Flint River

April 2014

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha finds high blood lead levels in Flint children

September 2015

State of Michigan validates high blood lead levels, begins water filter distribution and water, schools, and blood tests

October 2015

City of Flint switches back to Detroit water

December 2015

City of Flint declares a state of emergency

January 2016

State of Michigan declares an emergency for Genesee County, followed by a Presidential declaration of a state of emergency
What basic Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication principle was the key determining factor to the Flint water crisis communication strategy and response?

- Acknowledging uncertainty
- Building trust and credibility
- Being transparent and honest
CRISIS AND EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

**Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:**
- Empathy and caring.
- Competence and expertise.
- Honesty and openness.
- Commitment and dedication.

**Top Tips:**
- Don’t over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Express wishes. (“I wish I had answers.”)
- Explain the process in place to find answers.
- Acknowledge people’s fear.
- Give people things to do.
- Ask more of people (share risk).

**As a Spokesperson:**
- Know your organization’s policies.
- Stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- Embody your agency’s identity.

**Prepare to Answer These Questions:**
- Are my family and I safe?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who is in charge here?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?
- Were you forewarned?
- Why wasn’t this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What does this information mean?

**Stay on Message:**
- “What’s important is to remember…”
- “I can’t answer that question, but I can tell you…”
- “Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers…”
- “Let me put that in perspective…”

CONSISTENT MESSAGES ARE VITAL.
UTILIZE COMMUNITY LEADERS

- How to address mistrust and reach vulnerable populations:
  1. Utilize community partners
  2. Think outside of the traditional communication toolbox
COMBINE COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Before, during, and even after a crisis: establish and maintain strong community relationships
- Couple community relationships with traditional communication tactics: press releases, social media, etc.
- Keep it simple:
  - Translate materials as often as possible
  - Utilize infographics over text-heavy documents
  - Get out into the community for face-to-face conversations
Emergency managers, city officials charged in Flint water crisis

Michigan must deliver bottled water to Flint residents, judge rules

Court: Judge shouldn’t have issued Flint orders

Michigan health director Lyon targeted in Flint water criminal probe
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QUESTIONS?