

DERP Forum

Strengthening Relationships with our Regulatory Partners

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***Risk Communication:
A Survival Guide to Trust and Credibility***

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Risk Communication vs Crisis Communication

- **Risk Communication**
 - “Peacetime”
 - Way of doing business
 - Integrated into everything you do
 - Continually building Trust and Credibility

Risk Communication vs Crisis Communication

- **Crisis Communication**

- When things go bad
- Crisis (emergency) communication plan
- Relies on Trust and Credibility cultivated during “peacetime”

Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication

(Covello and Allen 1988)

1. Accept and involve the public as a partner.
2. Plan carefully and evaluate your efforts.
3. Listen to the public's specific concerns.
4. Be honest, frank, and open.
5. Work with other credible sources.
6. Meet the needs of the media.
7. Speak clearly and with compassion.

Risk Communication Lessons Learned

- Listen to the public's specific concerns
- Be honest, frank and open
- Meet the needs of the media

Listen to the public's specific concerns

- Don't assume you know what people are concerned about, you may be surprised or frustrated
- People may not be concerned about the actual risk
- Actual risk vs perceived risk
 - Most people don't care about statistical significance (sorry)
- People may be more concerned about whether the government:
 - Is telling the truth
 - Really cares about them
 - Is willing to work with them

Listen to the public's specific concerns

- **Big River Mine Tailings Blood-Lead Study**
 - DHSS blood-lead study
 - Community distrust of government
 - “Don’t mess with our chat piles!”
 - Generational loyalty to mining company
 - Provided jobs, housing, company store credit (WWI)
 - Local newspaper:
 - Publisher politically active locally
 - Public opinion influencer
 - Distrust of government

Be honest, frank and open

- **Building trust and credibility is the ultimate goal of risk communication**
 - Takes years to build, but just moments to destroy
 - Set and manage expectations
 - Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."
 - The Power of a *Sincere* Apology

Be honest, frank and open

- **Takes years to build, but just moments to destroy**
 - Follow through on promises
 - Meet time estimates
 - Under promise - over deliver
 - Build on successes

Be honest, frank and open

- **Set and manage expectations**
 - “This is a very complex site...so allow me to explain.”
 - “This could take years to resolve.”
 - “This is an extremely fluid situation that could change dramatically over time, but here’s what we know right now.”
 - Be prepared to answer every question – public and media (even if it’s “I don’t know.”)

Be honest, frank and open

- **Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."**
 - Really hard for scientists, technicians and bureaucrats
 - People have a sophisticated B.S. meter, especially for government
 - Option: "We don't know right now, but we're working to find out and we'll tell you as soon as we know."

Be honest, frank and open

- **The Power of a *Sincere* Apology**
 - Apologies not popular with attorneys
 - Be careful
 - Be sincere
 - Timing is crucial
 - Not the same as an empathy statement

Be honest, frank and open

- **The Power of a *Sincere* Apology**
- **Litton Resources, Inc.**
 - Former electroplating company
 - State involved for 30 years
 - Significant TCE contamination
 - Groundwater contamination
 - TCE showing up in private wells
 - We did not do a good job of communicating with the community

Be honest, frank and open

- **The Power of a *Sincere* Apology**
 - Follow-up private well testing
 - Communication with well owners and community
 - Engaged with media
 - People were upset that they were not aware of groundwater contamination.
 - Combined public meeting/availability session to provide results and discuss concerns

Be honest, frank and open



Ed Galbraith, director of the Division of Environmental Quality for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, apologized for the state's handling of TCE pollution around the former Litton Systems site at a public forum held at Ozark Empire Fairgrounds March 14, 2019. (Photo: Greg Holman/News-Leader)

Be honest, frank and open

- **The Power of a *Sincere* Apology**

“For those people for whom this came as a surprise...I apologize. We didn't tell people about it in a timely manner. We're here in part to make amends.” Ed Galbraith, director of the Division of Environmental Quality, Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Be honest, frank and open

- **The Power of a *Sincere* Apology**

DNR official at public forum: 'I apologize' for how Missouri handled TCE pollution

[Wes Johnson and Gregory J. Holman](#), Springfield News-Leader

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Meet the needs of the media

- **The media are neither our enemies nor our friends – they are our allies**
 - Too often we treat the media as our adversaries
 - A key (but not only) element of our communication strategy
 - Not our primary audience, but an information conduit
 - Social media vs. traditional media

Resources

- Dr. Vincent Covello
Center for Risk Communication
centerforriskcommunication.org/
- Peter Sandman
The Peter Sandman Risk Communication Website
psandman.com/
- CDC Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication
emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/