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A Practical Guide to Public Information during a Crisis

(Budapest Guidelines III)

NATO Civil Preparedness
Civil Protection Group

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Foreword

At the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, Heads of State and Government made a commitment to continue to enhance resilience and to further develop NATO's individual and collective capacity to resist any form of armed attack. Civil preparedness is a central pillar of Allies' resilience and a critical enabler for Alliance collective defence. While this remains a national responsibility, NATO can support Allies in assessing and, upon request, enhancing their civil preparedness. Civil preparedness will be improved by achieving the NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which focus on continuity of government, continuity of essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and support to military forces with civilian means. One overarching element to support these baseline requirements, is the communication between emergency services and the public in crises situations.

The Budapest Guidelines for Public Information were first adopted at a Civil Protection Group Seminar in Budapest, Hungary in 1999 and were revised in 2006. These Guidelines provide a basis for common understanding among NATO and Partner nations on the issue of Public Information and offer a framework for informing the public during the preparation, response and recovery phases of a crisis. They are built on the fundamental values shared by NATO Allies and partners: citizens' rights and responsibilities during a crisis; and national authorities' accountability for the protection of populations and freedom of information. They are designed to assist nations in the development, or review, of national public information policies. The guidelines provide both practical advice and methods to support effective communications between national authorities and the target audience.

The attached Budapest Guidelines III have been rewritten to reflect huge changes in the media landscape. In particular, a new section on social media has been added since in todays' context, the audience drives the traditional news agenda on TV, Radio and Newspapers through social media. In addition, the chapters on subjects such as CBRN communications have been completely updated to cover phenomena, such as social amplification of risk which need to be taken into account when designing a communications strategy.

The team of NATO civil experts within the Civil Protection Group who compiled these guidelines have a vast amount of experience in academia, media broadcasters and national government. Their knowledge draws upon years of dealing with emergencies and terrorist incidents, as well as day to day business related to communications and public information.

The Budapest Guidelines III provide guidance for decision makers to prevent an emergency becoming a crisis.

Friederike DAHNS
Chair, NATO's Civil Protection Group

Section 1
The importance of information and communication during a crisis

Information – a democratic right

1. Public Information is a frequently and intensively discussed topic, particularly in the context of emergency planning and emergency management. In the event of a crisis, the general public has a fundamental right to be informed about what has happened, what is occurring, how authorities intend to respond to the crisis and its potential consequences. This principle is based upon our understanding of democracy. The concept of democracy defines members of society as responsible and able to participate in the decision making process of a country. Citizens are expected to act responsibly during times of crisis and information is a basic requirement in order to assume these responsibilities.
2. Another essential element of democratic societies is the existence of a free press. The press fulfils the important function of raising the difficult issues. As a result, both positive and negative aspects of a government's response to a crisis will be addressed in the public domain. The public is relatively tolerant towards errors, insofar as they are admitted and explained. However, people object when problems are covered up. Attempting to keep matters secret is rarely productive. Reputations suffer easily and the public may lose faith in authorities, institutions or personnel involved.
3. Confidence and credibility are two terms which are central to public information and will arise repeatedly. An open information policy is thus not only a consequence of a democratic philosophy but also farsighted common sense.

Confidence

4. Good information management is particularly important in the context of a crisis. As crises concern humans directly and indirectly, information is a vital element to mitigate the impact of a crisis and can, in many cases, protect people from a deteriorating situation. During a crisis, authorities and emergency organisations require the support and collaboration of the population. If collaboration is good, less effort needs to be invested in convincing people that appropriate measures are being taken. More effort can thus be spent on managing the emergency in question.
5. What factors make people follow the directions of an authority and what makes them resist? The answer to this question is a complex mix of parameters which will not be explored further here. However, one element is clear: if citizens have confidence in their authorities, they will more readily follow instructions even if instructions conflict with personal views.
6. It takes far more to gain confidence than to lose it. The public feels at ease in familiar situations. When confronted with new or unknown situations, the public reacts reluctantly. Therefore, the goal of any emergency management organisation is to be

well-acquainted to its citizens. This work begins under normal conditions when there is no crisis.

7. It is important that emergency management organisations are also well-known to media representatives and that trusting relationships are established thus encouraging the media to remain fair at difficult times. This can be achieved by supporting the media's daily work, answering questions and applying an open information policy at all times.

Credibility

8. The most important precondition for handling a crisis successfully is that a high degree of credibility is already in place. If not, an authority's analysis, assessments, decisions and recommendations will not be taken sufficiently seriously.

9. Credibility is based on four important components: openness, competence, fairness and empathy.

10. Openness: An authority should present its facts, know-how, sources and considerations openly. It should be truthful about the interests it is tasked to represent. It must be willing to enter into a dialogue with the outside world and to take on board new concerns. The authority must also be open about its decision-making process. However, there may be cases where certain information should be withheld and shared only with a small circle of actors in the interests of public safety.

11. Competence: An authority demonstrates competence through a successful combination of theoretical knowledge and experience. In-house competence is most easily demonstrated by a history of positive experiences. This presupposes that the authority possesses genuine competence and that there is a close match between the authority's statements and its actions. There is a logical thread to decision-making and consistency in actions. This consistency should be apparent at all times.

12. Fairness: An authority is perceived as fair when it presents both positive and negative aspects of its activities and when it acknowledges the existence of alternative evaluations. Most citizens wish to know the truth even if it might be unpleasant.

13. Empathy should be shown. People caught up in a crisis need to feel that the authority's personnel have a strong desire to understand and appreciate the seriousness of victims' situations. It is difficult to oblige personnel to show empathy as this depends largely on an individual's personality. However, an appropriate spokesperson should be selected who can communicate well and demonstrate social sensitivity.

The Importance of Crisis Communication

14. Public information is not based simply on an emitter-receiver relationship. Public Information is a process of communication. The content of statements must be well structured and the non-verbal messages accompanying such statements should also be considered. If an authority chooses to say nothing about an issue, this silence may in itself be interpreted. A statement's meaning is not simply derived from its literal content. The method of communication, intonation, gestures and choice of words can all influence meaning. The choice of communication strategy is important. In addition to factual content, messages also express the relationship between an authority and the public. Awareness of this relationship is the first step towards genuine communication between authorities, the public and the media.

15. Crisis communication comprises the exchange of information occurring within and between authorities, organisations, media, interested individuals and groups, before, during and after a crisis. Each actor may have his or her own perception of whether a crisis exists or not, its extent, its nature and consequences for the individual and the authorities. Authorities must be well informed about the various actors' perceptions and knowledge of a given situation.

Three dimensions of crisis communication

16. There are three main dimensions to crisis communication: communication during the actual crisis; communication of the handling of the crisis; and portraying the crisis image. The greatest problems arise not from the crisis itself but from the handling or mishandling of the crisis by those involved e.g. poor preparation, difficulty in finding solutions, lack of flexibility, incomplete knowledge of events, problems in understanding new roles and functions etc.

Communication during the crisis itself

17. A typical characteristic of a crisis situation is that information requirements intensify very rapidly. Handling operational information and updates, giving advice, providing guidance and responding to questions must all be managed quickly and efficiently. In addition, analysing myths and rumours and taking informed decisions must all be done simultaneously.

18. The huge volume of information that has to be exchanged often results in information channels being overloaded so appropriate capacity should be foreseen.

Communicating how the crisis is being handled

19. Successful crisis communication depends on the existence of a functioning and professional information operation. This implies that an authority has an information policy that stipulates its basic approach e.g. the requirement for openness, speed, ease of availability, credibility, being proactive rather than reactive, detailed planning, co-operation with others and continuous assessment. Technical resources for issuing and receiving information are also necessary (phones, faxes, information technology, etc.).

Portraying the image of a crisis

20. Authorities must assume that the crisis image is as real as the crisis itself. Poor handling of the crisis image can result in the actual crisis expanding or taking a different form and direction. The crisis and the crisis image must be handled in parallel.
21. The image of a crisis is, to a large extent moulded by the media. The media decide whether they cover the crisis, how it is described and in what form decisions and actions are to be presented.
22. Today's global society is a huge source of rapidly evolving information. Competition for attention is fierce. Information is transmitted round the clock independently of time and location. Nowadays, populations have access to new media systems and have developed new media habits, e.g. monitoring international news via the Internet, accessing foreign media. It is thus becoming increasingly important that authorities develop a systematic and continuous method for analysing events around the world.
23. Cultural diversity and international exchanges also mean that information services must be aware of multicultural issues. An important role of a professional information officer involves gathering, compiling, evaluating and reporting to the management on developments from the outside world that may be taken into account in operational and planning work.

Matching information requirements to different recipients

24. When authorities communicate with interested parties in a crisis, they should begin by considering who the recipients of information are. The recipient's requirements, expectations, specific situation and media habits collectively determine which information should be sent. This applies to information that citizens, groups, organizations and companies seek, gather and use. It also applies to the channels used by recipients to obtain information, which information is considered credible and should be retained according to importance or interest.

25. The dialogue with different recipients requires that an authority presents its starting point, values and intentions honestly. An authority must work to achieve and maintain a high degree of credibility, the most important concept in crisis communication. As already stated above, recipients rate an authority's credibility on the basis of four fundamental criteria: openness, competence, fairness and empathy.

Section 2
Communication during the preparation, response and recovery phases

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A crisis can be subdivided into three phases: preparation, response and recovery. These subdivisions also apply to communication during a crisis and can usefully structure the actions to be taken during each phase.

Preparation pre-crisis

26. Successful crisis communication will depend on how well an authority has prepared itself in advance and what level of credibility it enjoys. A crisis situation will inevitably increase pressure on authorities. Furthermore, in high pressure situations, personnel are more likely to commit errors. Authorities' internal management organisations must be aware of potential crises and their handling. There is a tendency during a crisis for all involved to become decision-makers. It is vital to establish clear chains of command and guidelines on measures to be taken and the resources required before a crisis arises.

27. Increased training is important. Better familiarisation with details of the response phase and clear procedures have to be in place. It is essential that communication procedures be practised on a regular basis. Roles and responsibilities need to be known in advance. Technical infrastructure used during training for crisis situations should be the same as that used during normal conditions. This allows users to become accustomed to and experienced with the systems, including their potential faults and failings, and trains users to react should something go wrong.

The need for an Information Service

28. A dedicated Information Service is required to maintain an overview of a situation and to ensure cooperation and efficiency. Its four principal aims are to :
    - analyse information requirements and the range of information provided;
    - assist in strategic assessments and decisions;
    - produce information;
    - receive and distribute internal and outgoing information.

29. The tasks of an information service are extensive and diverse. The precise structure of the service is likely to vary according to the overall scale of operations and its resources. The number of people working within each unit depends on the nature and scope of the crisis as well as the availability of personnel. It is not unrealistic to assume that several of the functions described below can be handled on a temporary basis by a single person. However, it is important to discuss requirements and scope internally.

Again, a top priority of crisis preparedness work is the establishment of a high degree of credibility. Further explanations on the organisation of an information service during a crisis can be found below (see Organising crisis communication).

Crisis awareness

30. An authority's management team should actively demonstrate support for emergency planning work both through written statements and actions. This may mean allocating resources, defining management participation in project groups, underlining the need for thorough planning in various contexts, and participation in exercises.

31. Experts within an organisation should work together, particularly crisis planners, emergency coordinators and information personnel.

32. A high level of crisis awareness requires, inter alia, that on-going attention is paid to crisis management internally so that all personnel, irrespective of their specific function, are aware of procedures.

The need for internal support

33. In addition to an agreed internal organisational structure, it is important that management levels and the information service share the same set of fundamental principles with respect to the aims of crisis communication. These principles may, for example, involve the need for external analysis, definition of relevant information directives and their assessment. Information-related activities are a strategic resource for all aspects of information operations and should not be considered as a budgetary extra. Information-related activities should be thoroughly integrated within overall objectives. Goals and activities planned should form part of a specific crisis communication plan.

34. The information service should be represented at the senior management level of the authority in question. It is impossible for an authority to execute strategic assessments on how to handle crisis communication if the Head of Information is not part of the management team.

External support networks

35. Authorities should make every effort to create robust networks which incorporate all potential actors involved in emergencies of different types. Networks build awareness and confidence between the major parties with whom the information service cooperates during a crisis. Networks are particularly important for establishing inter-authority contacts. Parties need to address the demarcation of tasks, responsibilities and roles, and also agree on linguistic use and terminology which may differ. The form of telecommunications and data technology-related cooperation should be agreed.

36. Networks should include horizontal contacts, e.g. between local authorities, and vertical ones e.g. between a local authority and a government authority. Networks should be activated during a crisis to ensure that all those requiring identical information receive it in real time and that dialogues can be conducted between different parties prior to information being released to the media.

37. An information service requires a network of suppliers, e.g. photographers, printers, transport services, interpreters and translators etc. It also requires a network from which to recruit personnel for units or sections that need reinforcement during a crisis. Such networks can be composed of information officers from major companies, PR consultants, journalists, university researchers, international relations experts, personnel possessing specialist skills from within the authority and personnel from voluntary organisations.

Drawing up registers in advance of a crisis

38. Authorities should draw up registers designed to facilitate the search for key personnel (such as interpreters) and the distribution of information to special groups (e.g. employees, families).

39. Registers should be structured to enable rapid dissemination of information via group faxes, intranets, e-mail, fliers or letters. Speed is crucial.

40. Registers are only helpful if information is correct and up-to-date. Mechanisms for continuous updating should be established. Distribution channels during a crisis should be the same as those for everyday work under normal circumstances. This guarantees that channels are tested and users are familiar with them.

Communication technology capacity and skills

41. If authorities are to engage a dialogue with the population and relevant actors during a crisis, they must have access to sufficiently large communications technology capacity to handle the massive volumes of calls and contacts that can increase very rapidly. Access to alternative power supplies and systems is essential. Authorities must have access to channels for mass distribution of information – such as websites. Other channels should be designated for messages aimed at a restricted number of recipients. Specific information should be available for responses to questions from individuals or groups with special needs. Provisions for physical or psychological handicaps should also be addressed.

42. An information service must have access to skilled personnel responsible for ensuring the correct functioning of communications technology systems. These personnel should have the ability to handle the information service's systems, such as computers, faxes,

etc. These personnel should also be able to liaise with other parties in the field and contract services from telecommunications technology companies, Internet service providers/ operators or call centres as necessary.

Organising crisis communication

43. For successful communication during and after a crisis, an information service needs to be clearly structured comprising functional units and an analysis unit.

44. The *Head of Information* is a designated manager who is part of the crisis management group. This senior manager is responsible for ensuring that information issues are taken into account and that information flow to and from the authority functions satisfactorily. He/she makes sure that the importance and role of information activities are clearly understood by all involved.

45. A *Production Unit* is responsible for internal and external information and for providing journalists with background material, texts, images, statements from those responsible.

46. A *Media Relations Unit* should be established in advance of a crisis. Its main duties are to convey the authorities' view of a crisis, measures taken and further developments. The media relations unit analyses media content and facilitates journalists' work. This unit should be well-known to the media and serve as their primary source of up-to-date and reliable information. Good cooperation must therefore be established during normal conditions.

47. An *Information Centre* acts as the intermediary between the authority and the general public. This centre follows the course of events, stays in contact with the crisis management team and other cooperating authorities. Its main tasks are to:
    - answer the general public's questions;
    - provide details of the authority's assessments, decisions and measures;
    - draw attention to incoming information from outside sources that need to be passed on to the crisis management team.

48. An *Internal Information Unit* should be set up for everyday use as well as for use during a crisis. If the authority is to deal with the outside world in a coordinated manner, internal information flow between units, irrespective of geographical distance or other circumstances must be efficient. Internal coordination procedures must be addressed, approved and tested in advance. It is of major importance that employees receive information before – or at least no later than the media. Furthermore, particular attention must be paid to employees' next of kin. This enables them to concentrate on their duties with the assurance that their next of kin are kept informed.

49. A *Coordination Unit* helps ensure efficient distribution of coordinated information. Coordinated outgoing information helps avoid misunderstandings, double messages and contradictions.

50. A *Documentation Unit* is responsible for noting all important decisions and information activities in chronological order. This is essential to avoid issuing double messages or messages that do not correspond to the course of events. Clear and simple operating procedures have to be developed in advance. Documentation is a major issue and should not be treated lightly. Following a crisis, documentation provides material for evaluating work and for making improvements. To this end, outgoing and incoming information should be registered and saved.

51. Finally, a *Multicultural Service Unit* is responsible for highlighting and resolving specific communication problems which may arise due to different cultural characteristics of particular groups affected by the crisis. This service should also take account of special requirements that may arise for religious or ethnic reasons.

52. An *Analysis Unit* plays no direct role in operational work. Its primary task is to assist the management in the decision-making process by providing source data.

Crisis communication exercises[1]

53. An *Emergency Management Exercise* is a focused practice activity which places the participants in a simulated situation requiring them to function in the capacity that would be expected of them in a real event. The objective of exercising crisis communication during emergency exercises is to promote crisis communication preparedness by testing policies and plans, and training personnel.

54. *Crisis Communications Exercises* can be done for just the Communications team, or as part of a larger Emergency Management exercise. Start by developing the specific exercise objectives for the Communication team, which will allow you to design the Exercise Crisis Communication Scenario around those objectives. One important aspect of the exercise is the actual simulation. To achieve these objectives, the exercise will need to be fully simulated in order to really push the team to respond in real time. Three things will make it feel realistic to the communication team:

    - Use a “Simulation team” for the Communication team to interact with. The Simulation team can act as the media, the public, relatives of victims and other key stakeholders. This gives the Communication team someone to have to talk to.

1 This section takes into consideration the lessons learned on public information and media play component of NATO-EADRCC Consequence Management Field Exercises that took place during 2003 - 2012 (Dacia 2003- Romania, Joint Assistance 2005- Ukraine, Idassa 2007- Croatia, Uusimaa 2008- Finland, Zhetysu 2009-Kazakhstan, Armenia 2010- Armenia, Codrii 2011- Moldova, Georgia 2012-Georgia).

Journalism and/or Communication Studies' students are a good resource to act in your Simulation team.

- Use live media injects to force the team to respond to these "media" inputs. This can include radio broadcasts, television (i.e., video) clips, newspaper or web articles, Facebook and Twitter feeds, or blogs. So the teams get used to handling a large, continuous stream of questions and learn how social media comments now drive the news agenda for traditional media TV, radio and newspapers.
- Do not prepare every media or public insert on forehand. Let the crisis communication team "feel" what the consequences of their efforts are with "media" and "public" (simulation teams). Is the crisis communication capable to gain and maintain public and media trust?

55. There are a variety of specific *Crisis Communications Deliverables* you might want to have your team develop during an exercise. The list has to be developed as part of creating the exercise objectives. At a minimum, we would suggest the following activities as part of your crisis communication exercise:

    - Create Organization *website Messages*; how are updates posted on the organization website? Which team makes the changes? If a dummy webpage can be set up, it is great practice to change the page to reflect the events development during the exercise. If that isn't possible, ask the team to develop the messages and then post it on a status board in the Emergency Operations Centre.
    - Prepare *Press Releases*; prepare News Feeds; news feeds and formal press releases should be developed covering the development of the events during the exercise, either in response to media inquiries or just as a matter of course. Press releases should be developed, approved through the agreed-upon channels, and distributed to the Simulation team in the exercise; that's helping the simulation to feel as realistic as possible. Having pre-approved press release templates should speed up the process.
    - Prepare for a *Press Conference*; this is a great conclusion to any exercise. The pre-identified spokesperson, decision makers or experts get up before a group of "reporters" to read the press statement and take questions. Where do you get these "reporters"? The Simulation team participants (with whom the players have been interacting) make great reporters. Ask each of them to have two or three questions ready about different aspects of the scenario and events during the exercise. After the spokesperson delivers the statement, the reporters spring into action, asking all types of questions. This is good practice for the spokesperson. If it is possible, videotape it so the spokesperson can see their performance for their own professional development.

- Create *Facebook, Twitter* and/or other social media response(s); social media has exploded as a means of communication. Often when an emergency occurs, the news is exploding on Twitter and Facebook before the Communications team knows what hit them. Being skilled at getting on top of these sites is critical. Many media outlets now scan Facebook pages and Tweets (and other similar sites) for information; ideally, you want those media sources to be looking to your Communications team for the "inside scoop." Develop Twitter messages and Facebook postings (or other forums that you find) during the exercise. Post these messages on the communications status board of the exercise so everyone can see what you are developing in real time.

56. However, even if these are done, but not done in a timely manner, they will not achieve the type of results that the organization is looking for after a major incident. Work with your team in advance to develop the plans and tools, and then exercise them regularly to produce the crisis communication results that you are looking for.

Response during a crisis

57. In emergency management, the response phase is characterised by a high pressure environment in which authorities must operate. This phase is associated with a lack of time and a lack of reliable facts with which to work. This environment also applies to information management with additional pressure arising from the media.

Basic requirements

58. The first rule of information management is simple but often difficult to achieve: Information must be submitted quickly. The authority responsible should not hesitate to engage the public's attention. It needs to demonstrate rapidly that it is handling the situation and to establish itself as the official source of information.

59. An authority cannot afford to speculate. It should stick to facts. Its most important asset is its credibility which should not be jeopardised. In practice, this is often difficult because it is during the initial phases of a crisis situation when information requirements are expanding greatly but only partial answers can be provided.

60. An authority should provide information on a regular basis in an active and open manner. Media representatives should be aware of the authority's desire to update the public about events in a transparent way without withholding information. This must be demonstrated through *actions* and not merely through statements. It is preferable to transmit the latest information to the media rather than wait for questions to arise.

If an authority keeps the media regularly updated about its latest findings and actions, it will retain its credibility even when certain answers cannot be provided. The public understands and accepts that an authority may require time to obtain well founded and reliable information. However, if an authority appears to provide information reluctantly, it risks giving the impression of a cover up which generates a poor image.

Understanding the media's point of view

61. Information officers need to understand the position of media representatives. What are their needs? What are their concerns? What are their positions? Journalists and reporters require information for articles and news reports. If official information from the authority is not forthcoming, journalists are forced to find it elsewhere which can open up scope for speculation and rumours.

62. If information about events is insufficient, an authority can provide background information including examples of measuring devices in use, relevant techniques, history of related events, the structure of the emergency management board, etc. Graphics and photos are important. They provide material for journalists to back up a potentially meagre story regarding the course of events.

63. Some obvious questions can be pre-empted and answers provided to save time and alleviate the situation. These texts can be prepared in advance to ensure their quality. Background material needs to be adapted to the media's needs regarding length and complexity but care should be taken in shortening or simplifying material too much at the risk of producing misunderstandings or errors.

How to inform

64. Good information practice can be summarised as follows: Information has to be truthful, exhaustive, adapted to the situation, neutral, timely and competently presented. These points are developed in greater detail below.

65. *Truthful information*: Information officers should only address issues that they know and should never conjecture. Questions requesting a prognosis should be answered with great caution. Correcting false statements is detrimental to an authority's reputation and credibility. It is more sensible to admit that something is unknown or beyond a field of competence and instead explain the measures being taken to find answers. Such information is valuable for the public and can help build confidence. It is inevitable that mistakes will arise. What can appear to be fact on one day may prove wrong on the next. In such cases, the best approach is to communicate the truth actively and openly. If other actors uncover a mistake and leak it to the press, credibility suffers.

66. *Exhaustive information*: It is important to provide as much information as possible, in a controlled, clear, understandable and commented form. Continuous updates about most recent developments should be provided. If the situation has not evolved significantly, such information should also be communicated.

67. *Information adapted to the situation*: Good information practice implies understanding the situation of those affected by a crisis. Information should reflect their needs, interests and cater to their principal concerns. An information service does not work in isolation. It has to adjust to the public's reaction by showing sympathy for the situation and empathy for the victims. Questions and answers can usefully be prepared in advance.

68. *Neutral information*: Provision of impartial information is important in emergency management. There must be no impression that an authority represents the interests of one sector over another e.g. industry. If the public doubts the partiality of an authority it will not be taken seriously. Correcting poor impressions is extremely hard. An open, proactive and neutral information policy is therefore the only means of preventing an impression of partiality.

69. *Competent presentation of information*: Crisis communication is based on the "one-voice-principle". One spokesperson is appointed at the beginning of a crisis who addresses the public on behalf of the authority. In this way, the authority is personalised by a face and a voice which assists in confidence building. The spokesperson presents the authority's view to the media and answers questions of a general nature. Specific questions may require the support of specialists and experts. Impressions of how an emergency management agency handles a situation are naturally based on what people see, hear or read. If specific questions are asked, there is a risk that the spokesperson will appear imprecise, vague or provide a slightly false answer. Specialists can assist in such cases but should be instructed appropriately before talking to the media. A scientific or technical answer can on occasion be too complex for the general public. It can provoke further questions and could increase the public's anxiety. It is important to strike the right balance between information that is scientific and technically sound and information which is simple to communicate.

70. *Timely rather than comprehensive updates*: The importance of providing information quickly has already been underscored on several occasions. Rapid and open communication of information should take precedence over completeness which can introduce unwanted time delays. There are two main reasons for this. First, provision of continuous situation updates, even if the situation has not evolved, and announcing the time of the next press release reduces the number of cross-checks by the media. This provides the authority with an element of breathing space. Second, the public needs

to be kept informed constantly. A regular flow of information about the current state of events demonstrates that work is in progress and that action is being taken. The public must never get the impression that it is being abandoned or left to solve problems alone. Frequent updates avoid this impression.

Press conferences, press releases and hotlines

71. The media offer the main channels for informing the public about a crisis situation. Good cooperation with the media is therefore essential. The subject of media relations is addressed in detail later in these guidelines. A couple of specific actions are outlined below.

72. The task of information dissemination during a crisis should begin as soon as possible, usually by calling a press conference. Press releases should be published on a regular basis. In the early phase of an emergency situation, frequent press releases on an hourly basis may be necessary. If possible, radio broadcasts offer an efficient means for rapidly responding to the public's major concerns. Contact lists of the media should be prepared in advance and be ready for immediate use. To ensure rapid distribution, adequate technical infrastructure (for example fast fax) should be in place and have been exercised under normal circumstances.

73. A hotline for the public should be set up as soon as possible. It must be supported with sufficient infrastructure and the number of telephone lines should correspond to the personnel available. A hotline must be capable of responding to hundreds if not thousands of calls per day, 24 hours a day and on several consecutive days depending on the nature and scope of the crisis and its impact on the population.

Recovery post-crisis

74. Information provision in the post-crisis recovery phase may be required for up to several months or years and usually begins shortly after the incident. The main aim is to inform relief workers and parties concerned about remaining problems, measures taken and proposed solutions. Close contact with the media is required. In practice, it is difficult to delineate the response phase and the recovery phase of an emergency situation as there is an inevitable overlap. This overlap and the prolonged nature of the recovery period can complicate post-crisis information provision. Moreover, during the recovery phase, authorities have to address the problems of a wide range of target groups. A reliable plan for providing structured information in the recovery phase is important.

Information during the recovery phase: why?

75. A crisis plan foresees arrangements for repair and reconstruction. Its goal is to re-establish normal life as soon as possible. Information provided during the recovery phase concerns two major areas:
    - explaining the reasons for policy choices made during the response phase;
    - addressing problems which have arisen or may arise as a result of the crisis and how to deal with them.
76. Major issues for information management in the post-emergency period are: avoiding a secondary crisis; returning to normal conditions; ensuring continued medical and social services; dealing with damage claims; re-housing and reconstruction.
77. The way in which information is given, the amount and frequency will depend on the type and extent of the crisis. Certain questions will always arise following any kind of crisis. What are the effects of the crisis? Is there a possibility of a reoccurrence? Rapid and accurate information on these points and on any preventive measures the public can take, e.g. to protect health, is required.
78. Other likely topics for questions are: why has the crisis happened, why was nothing done beforehand, could it have been avoided? Answers to these questions are particularly pertinent in the event of a crisis caused by human failure. Information should be open and clear.
79. Post-crisis information should be provided to victims in accordance with an individual and personalised approach. This may also be necessary in the event of a crisis abroad. Victims returning home may feel isolated by their trauma especially when confronted with their usual surroundings. They may feel lost and lack contact with others who have experienced the same trauma. A personal approach is helpful in order to emphasise that traumatic experiences are taken seriously by the authorities.

Target groups

80. Provision of information during recovery should address specific target groups each with its particular requirements and needs. The following target groups can be identified:
81. The *general public*: those directly involved, those who experienced the crisis but who did not suffer direct harm, those not involved but who are interested to know more. For the general public, a hotline is a useful means of providing information.
82. The *press* is always considered as a target group as information is provided through the media.
83. *Relief organisations* and those involved in relief operations during and after the crisis.

84. *Intermediaries* such as organisations or individuals willing and able to play a part in information provision, for example family doctors, legal advice centres and minority organisations. The types of intermediaries involved will depend on the nature and scope of the crisis.

85. Information for *casualties* and their relatives is a high priority. This applies to all those who have suffered physical or psychological injuries or whose property has been damaged. Relatives of casualties may also suffer physical or psychological damage and are also considered as victims.

86. Finally, *administrators* with responsibilities in the recovery period require information about reactions in the press and within the public which may affect policy decisions. They also require advice on the information strategy to be pursued.

Organisation of information provision

87. In the aftermath of a crisis, a policy team is responsible for determining a recovery policy based on a survey of the crisis' effects. An operational team is responsible for implementing this policy. Representatives from the information service should participate in both teams. In the policy team, the Head of Information advises the responsible authority on information-related issues and relations with the media. He/she can also act as the spokesperson. In the operational team, an information service representative is present in order to be kept updated on current actions.

88. The information service representatives in both teams should remain in close contact with the information service as a whole and report back to ensure a clear and coordinated information policy.

Preparation of recovery phase information

89. Preparations for recovery phase information can usefully coincide with those for information provision during the crisis itself. For example, when companies or municipalities make arrangements with local or regional broadcasters for announcements and warnings during a crisis, information on the recovery phase can also be provided.

90. Intermediaries can play a supplementary role. When the information strategy is being elaborated, consideration can be given to which intermediaries could play a part in providing information during the recovery phase. This is particularly applicable for special target groups, such as the illiterate, the hard of hearing and those speaking other languages. Arrangements should be made with organisations representing these groups' interests.

91. Check-lists can prove helpful:

- public telephone numbers for information;
- lists of organisations for specific questions;
- lists with recent figures of dead, missing and injured;
- lists with major questions/answers regarding public health, dangers etc.
- lists of addresses for psychological support.

Aftercare for victims and their relatives

92. Victims include all those who have suffered harmful effects in one way or another: physical, psychological or damage to property. Relatives of those injured or killed also constitute a group requiring special aftercare. The importance of a personal approach cannot be stressed enough.

93. Help for victims needs to be organised as quickly as possible following the crisis. This should include a helpdesk where people can obtain help or information, including information on compensation and organisations offering legal advice. Furthermore, authorities need to provide information on how to obtain assistance for temporary or replacement housing, if necessary.

94. As in the pre-crisis and crisis phases, the principle of keeping people up to date on an open and regular basis applies during the recovery phase.

Section 3
Relations with the media

Facilitating journalists' work

95. Good relations with media representatives facilitate the task of public information during a crisis. The relationship is a two-way street. Authorities need the media to transmit messages to the public. The media needs the authority for obtaining reliable information about the crisis. A first step towards good collaboration is recognising and accepting each other's functions and respecting each other's specific needs.

96. Information provided about a crisis situation should be adapted as much as possible to journalists' needs and should take account of the media's rhythm of work. Awareness of how the media handles news is important. Supporting the media's approach will facilitate the transmission of important messages in a timely and reliable fashion.

97. Points to keep in mind are:

    - The message to be communicated should be formulated as a news story preferably under a headline.
    - Information under the headline should capture the public's attention and encourage further reading or listening.
    - Brief, simple language is required. Pictures and graphics make it easier to understand complicated information. Smileys can be used to clarify issues.
    - Journalists try to predict the public's questions and provide answers, they seek to advise the general public.
    - Television journalists require images. Adequate media access to the crisis area and space in which the media can work should be foreseen. A guided tour of the area facilitates the work of TV reporters.
    - A proactive approach to contacts with the media should be adopted. What is said, written and shown in the media should also be monitored.

Communicating an authority's viewpoint

98. An authority must be able to communicate rapidly and clearly a viewpoint on the crisis, its development, its consequences, decisions and statements by politicians or officials. An authority should take active steps to draw the media's attention to important aspects of its crisis management mechanisms. This can take the form of a daily briefing to cover the course of events and of a summary of what has happened. An authority can also provide examples of emergency work e.g. experiences of people at the centre of the crisis, guided tours of the area, use of databases, etc.

99. There may be occasions when in-house assessments must be presented unambiguously on the authority's terms. When this is the case, the authority should consider complementing the information supplied to the media's editorial departments with advertisements in the printed press and commercial broadcast media, as well as via its website. The information service should also prepare interviewees and provide support to those who do not wish to be interviewed (e.g. victims or next of kin).

Actions of the Media Relations Unit

100. The Media Relations Unit of the Information Service should set up a clearly designated area for media representatives close to the location of the crisis. An Information Officer who is kept up-to-date should be stationed in this area and serve as the point of contact for journalists and photographers.

101. During the acute phase of a major crisis, radio and TV will often broadcast live from the scene. The Information Officer is tasked with making it easier for the media, in cooperation with those responsible for security (the emergency services, police, armed forces, medical services), to take photographs quickly and safely, visit the crisis scene, and to gain access to people for interviews.

102. The Media Relations Unit must keep the media updated constantly about latest events. This is done at the scene with verbal and written information, interviews with those responsible for handling the crisis and through press releases and press conferences.

103. Provision of continuous information implies that the Information Service has access to the latest news at all times from the crisis management teams in the various authorities concerned and about ongoing activities. This information should then be passed to the Media Relations Unit, the Officer at the scene of the crisis, the Information Centre and the appropriate websites.

Interviews with authority representatives

104. An authority should, whenever possible, accommodate requests from the media for interviews even during the acute phase of the crisis. If the authority does not communicate its version of events and its role, the media very rapidly finds others willing to give their versions. Alternative descriptions can, if inaccurate, lead to rumours, half-truths and confusion.

105. Who should be interviewed? The media is keen to obtain the comments of senior officials and to have access to those actively involved in handling the crisis, e.g. the

police, emergency services, doctors and experts. Those selected for interview should be thoroughly prepared by the Information Service as to how the interview will proceed and how journalists operate. A person with little press experience will require training and background information.

Points to consider during interviews

106. Before an interview takes place, an authority's representatives should find out: the name of the journalist, his/her organisation, the journalist's stance, when and where the interview will be used. The interviewee should clarify the authority's position, role and responsibility.
107. Where possible, an interviewee should prepare and predict all possible questions. Journalists are interested in details of deaths, injuries, damage, costs, where responsibilities lie, similar happenings elsewhere, measures that the authority is taking to ensure a similar crisis does not happen again etc. Facts and figures should be at hand as should draft answers to likely questions.
108. Before the interview, the points which the authority wishes to convey should be agreed and key messages formulated.
109. It is often preferable to start with information on the health and well-being of people and animals, followed by consequences for the environment, surrounding areas, property, economic aspects etc. After these aspects have been covered the potential consequences for the authority may be addressed.
110. Everything that is stated during the interview may be published. Revealing private or confidential information is not advised.

Interviews with the broadcast media

111. Interviews with the broadcast media are usually very short and may last no more than 30 seconds. They can be crucial in establishing confidence and respect. It is essential to prepare and train for these opportunities. Useful background information to obtain in advance:
    - What is the programme?
    - Who is conducting the interview and what does he/she know about the facts?
    - Is it being broadcasted live or recorded? When will it be transmitted?

- How long will the interview last?
- Where is it to be conducted? What background decor is used?
- Who else will take part in the programme?
- Will there be a debate?
- Are there other considerations e.g. dress code, etc.?

Practising interview technique

112. If time allows, information officers and their colleagues should prepare a range of questions and draft model answers for each. It is important to practise answering the questions a few times before the interview and it is easier to remember points that have been written down personally. Two or, at most, three messages should be conveyed and they should be restated whenever possible. Focused, concrete, concise and positive answers give the best impression.
113. During an interview, the basic rules of communication should be respected. Every question should be taken seriously. Listen to the whole question and think before responding. Stick to areas of competence. Adhere to facts and avoid answering hypothetical questions.

Tips on answering questions

- Never speculate.
- Do not answer questions based on inaccurate or misleading assumptions.
- Counter inaccuracies and untruths immediately.
- Correct inaccurate assumptions in the question before responding.
- Use everyday language and avoid jargon.
- If unable to answer a question, explain why; avoid saying “no comment“.
- Never argue with the journalist, be friendly and diplomatic.

Analysing media content

114. It is important to monitor how interviews, information and the general image of the crisis are presented in the media. The general public’s perception of events is shaped by the media’s descriptions.

115. The Media Relations Unit should gather and analyse what is written, said and shown in the media. Material should be analysed from the following standpoints:

- Is the image correct?
- Which actors appear?
- What statements are made?
- How is the authority portrayed?
- Is the course of events described correctly?
- Does the material offer new information for the crisis management team?
- Is the media spreading rumours?
- Are there any factual errors?

116. If serious misapprehensions or incorrect quotations appear, these should be dealt with as quickly as possible while the issue is still topical. Factual errors need to be corrected and substantiated with expert information from the field. Requesting correction of minor errors should be avoided. It is important to differentiate between factual matters and values. Differences in values tend to decrease the more facts are presented.

117. Analyses should assess whether the media's portrayal of the crisis affects how the crisis develops and its management. Trends and potential problems should be identified. Monitoring the media implies the following elements:

- The Media Relations Unit monitors constantly what is said, written and shown in the media.
- The unit has a proactive problem-solving approach that deals immediately with incorrect information, confusion, rumour spreading, etc.
- The unit is tasked to inform the crisis management team immediately of any information which could affect the course of events.
- The unit generates summaries containing overall descriptions of the media's coverage and submits it to the crisis management team.
- The unit records and documents what is said, written and shown. This provides input for subsequent evaluation.

118. A special unit should focus on providing updated information about the crisis via the Internet to media-orientated websites. These can include descriptions of events, analyses of incoming questions, presentations of the management's assessments, new actors and addresses, statements by people responsible, details of meetings and conferences. This unit should also analyse how the crisis is described and discussed on the Internet. This information can be passed on to the Analysis Unit.

Press conferences

119. Regular meetings with all branches of the media are essential during a crisis. The frequency and timing of press conferences will depend on the nature, scope and severity of the crisis.

120. A press conference is an opportunity to find out how the media perceives the crisis, to eliminate misunderstandings and confusion, to display empathy and to emerge as the official source of detailed, comprehensive and up-to-date information on the crisis.

121. Before the press conference, consideration should be given to suitable participants. Only those who possess specific knowledge of the crisis or who are responsible for strategic decisions and who can make statements on the authority's behalf should be assigned. The number of speakers should be kept to a minimum. Specialists should be on hand to answer specific technical questions. Prior to the conference, time should be set aside for training and review of potential questions.

122. The press conference should be chaired by a person in a position of responsibility with the requisite communication skills. The start of the conference and its duration should be determined in advance. Tight control should be kept over who is admitted. The press conference should begin with a short introductory statement during which the authority describes what has happened, how it has responded, its decisions, what resources have been allocated, next steps, and what the authority regards as most important issues at that given moment. The floor should then be opened for questions. The same principles for an interview with an individual journalist also apply to answering questions during a press conference.

123. A person should be assigned responsibility for organisational matters. This person will call on individual journalists during the conference. Discipline during the question and answer session is improved with the use of a roving microphone.

124. Media representatives at a press conference should be given written information including diagrams and photos etc.

125. After the conference, time for individual interviews should be allocated for TV and radio broadcasts. If officials in charge do not have time to give separate interviews, a pooling approach can be used whereby the media agree to a group interview and film the person in question. The product is then handed over to all interested media.

Internet as a media channel

126. The majority of journalists use the Internet to search for, process and produce information. It is vital for individual authorities to develop homepages and databases that facilitate journalists' work during a crisis.

127. Websites should be structured so that the media can access relevant information immediately. It is important that this information is updated continuously so that journalists and editorial departments can follow the sequence of events via the Internet. Websites can include databases that give access to background information, statistics, graphics, models, statements, press releases, organisational structures, etc.

128. Press conferences and interviews can also be presented on the homepage as a valuable complementary source of information for journalists unable to attend. Journalists should also have the opportunity to contact authorities for questions via the Internet. A rapidly accessible and well-run homepage helps journalists to find much of the information they need thus enabling both media and the authorities to work more efficiently.

Section 4
Social media

Changing media landscape

Direct access to the audience

Monitoring and myth-busting

Peer factors – Trust, Control, Benefit & Empathy

The messenger is key

Connect with established community channels before the crisis

10 steps for an effective social media strategy

Useful websites

Changing media landscape

129. The media landscape has changed. TV, radio and newspaper audiences are no longer passive – they are active and they drive the traditional media news agenda through social media.
130. If a story breaks overnight in any part of the world, be it a shooting incident or a health story, news correspondents will routinely turn to social media as part of their research and ask the public for information about the town where the shooting happened or about the professor who's pioneered the latest development.
131. In emergency planning, traditional media was often regarded as a vital tool for command and control, but social media is about devolved control – you don't preach from an ivory tower, you engage in a two-way conversation and people then pass on your messages through what is commonly known as 'viral spread' on platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Direct access to the audience

132. One great strength of social media is that you can bypass some of the journalistic filters and biases prevalent in traditional media because you can talk directly to your audience.
133. We're just starting to realise the potential of analysing social media for quantitative data using geospatial systems and universities are looking at the potential of MOOC – Massive Open Online Course.
134. But the public are already using many of the free tools available to analyse social media. Tools like Tweetdeck, TwitScoop and Twitter Weather tell you what subjects are trending – they count the number of times certain words are used in messages around the world and translate text data into visual forms so you can see what people are talking about.

Monitoring and myth-busting

135. The ability to receive near real-time feedback and qualitative information from the public is a great strength of social media. However, to turn information into intelligence requires time and resources, but again there are lots of tools – many of them free – which help you to sift and monitor social media.
136. Aggregators like Addict-o-matic allow you to search for a subject like 'Large Floods' and it will display on screen what people are saying about this topic on various platforms

like Bing, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr as well as traditional newspapers, radio and TV. This means that you can then engage with people on platforms like Twitter and join in the conversation.

137. Then there's Crowdsourcing. There are free platforms like Ushahidi, developed in Kenya, which provides a map and the public can populate this map with information that is relevant to them. It has been used during the Haiti earthquake, by the BBC during industrial action on the London Underground train system, and there was a really good example in Australia called Bush Fire Connect which lasted 2 years but it folded due to lack of funding.

138. Some people will tell you that a weakness of crowdsourcing is the fact that the public can feed in false information but Fire Fighters at the Rural Fire Service (RFS) in Australia said that any information not verified was taken down very quickly. In effect, the public self-censored these sites because the information was vital to saving lives.

139. Rumour and false information have always surrounded news stories, long before social media: The difference with social media is that the two-way process allows you counter false information and rumour – it is called Myth-Busting.

140. More sophisticated systems using Mass Opinion Business Intelligence (MOBI), which was developed by Rajiv Delepet – systems like WiseWindow – can predict stock market fluctuations based on analysing opinions within social media messages.

Peer factors – trust, control, benefit & empathy

141. Many of the factors that improve the effectiveness of traditional media campaigns – trust, benefit, control and empathy – are common to social media. But trust does not come overnight – it takes a long time to build but can be destroyed very quickly. This is why it is vital to understand how factors such as social bonds built between friends, family and close colleagues are so important. These social bonds are to communications what ammunition is to an army.

142. Social media netiquette is all about listening – not imposing your agenda – finding out what concerns people on sites that they are using – sites like mumsnet or in chat rooms – and addressing those concerns first to build up trust.

143. Put yourself in the place of the young mother whose baby is unwell . In the past the medical profession could give her advice and say "Trust me, I'm a doctor". But now the woman's own mother and friends are telling her the baby needs some antibiotics and they will scour the Internet to find the evidence that supports their argument.

144. Hazards are real – but risk is a personal perception and social media will have a huge effect on individual's perception. So to get your message across you need to start a detailed risk analysis, taking into account phenomena like social amplification of risk and availability heuristics. Only then will you begin to understand how to deliver effective 'tweets' and tailor your Facebook messages so that they are not ignored.

The messenger is key

145. The role of individuals is vital when it comes to trusting advice on social media. It is all about the messenger – who's telling me this – why should I trust them? Research by Opinion Leader, part of Chime Research and Engagement Division. published in Marketing Week in May 2009 refers to this as the 'Age of Emotional Proximity' where peer recommendations surpass all other forms of marketing. So it is not always about the official spokesperson – it is about finding out who are the trusted voices in the community who will engage with the particular audience you want to reach.

146. A local fix using a local voice can become a global solution because it is spread by the World Wide Web.

Connect with established community channels before the crisis

147. The riots in London and other English cities in 2011 were called by some as the 'Blackberry riots' due to the use of mobile devices. Some suggest that rioting was coordinated using social media while others point to the way social media was used by residents to organise mass clean-ups in their communities.

148. It is worth looking at the West Midlands in the UK where emergency responders have long understood the importance of nurturing community resilience and working with the natural established community leaders – some are faith leaders, some lead interest groups like young mothers, sports groups, scouts, guides, farmers. Emergency responders maintain a dialogue with various community groups. It helps build trust and cohesion and in times of trouble the emergency responders can use these channels to pass out key messages and also receive near real-time feedback. Social media can help this process and it was noticeable how emergency responders in the West Midlands were able to damp down a lot of potential problems during the 2011 riots.

149. Social media is dynamic – constantly adapting and evolving. Everyone is talking about Facebook and Twitter now, but what happened to Friends Reunited? Is it true that Instagram is attracting so many people in the 15-24 year age group because when they upload their photos to share with their friends they can use a filter which hides their acne blemishes?

150. To be an effective communicator on social media you need to understand which platforms appeal to different demographics and which hashtags people are following.

10 steps for an effective social media strategy

151. Plan, Prepare, Mitigate – 3 steps that underpin business continuity apply equally to social media – Connect before the Crisis, not during the crisis.

152. Media and Communication Strategies need to constantly adapt and evolve and that means you need to have a properly resourced and trained team to engage and build up a report with the audience prior to a crisis so that when the crisis happens you will be regarded as a trusted source of information.

- *Define Objectives*; who do you want to reach, what do you want to say?
- Target Audience; who are they, age, gender, demographic – what are their concerns, what media platforms do they use, do those platforms change across the day?
- *Listen*; Listen to their conversations – understand the style, tone and language that your audience uses – identify people worth listening to and those that you can ignore –
- feedback information to media teams;
- *Consistency*; how will you ensure consistency of messages with other NATO media platforms and support their efforts?
- *Resources*; Social media is global so it is 24/7 – so how many people will you need and what tools will they use to monitor social media, what tools to Mythbust and counter false information/rumour?
- *Engage*; Social media is about a two-way conversation – engage and identify the key issues that people are talking about and understand the different speed and style of conversations on different platforms. Also note changing hashtags and keywords. Always be honest and do not allow false information to go unchallenged;

- *Speed, Top Line and Experts*; ask yourself 'What If x or y happens during a crisis' – how will we prepare 'Top-Lines' to answer people's concerns. For instance, if there is a CBRN incident people affected are likely to ask if they can drink water. Have your answer prepared in advance, ready to go and identify the experts you will call upon during the emergency to answer further questions;
- *Key Partners & Community Leaders*; who are the natural leaders in the community – identify people who can 're-tweet' your messages and help the viral spread of important information;
- *Stay Focussed*; You cannot do everything – stick to your task - the FEMA social media guidelines have a lovely phrase "Stick to your Lane'";
- *Evaluation*; How will you measure success?

Section 5
Communicating in the event of a CBRN-crisis

Monitor

Speed

Flexibility

153. Crisis communication in CBRN-crises is not really that different from any other crisis situation. Communication must be open, transparent, honest and adapted to the stakeholders. Social information should lead the crisis communication – ask yourself: if my family was caught up in this incident, what information would they need

154. What makes CBRN-crises special is the unfamiliarity of the public with the (alleged) effects of the release of certain agents and substances on their health. An attack with either chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons will certainly create an enormous concern and fright among the public.

155. The same agent might also cause different responses in different genders or age groups – for instance some research among hospital first responders in Norway has shown that when it comes to handling radiological incidents, women are particularly concerned about possible effects on their fertility or effects on their children. It is therefore important to identify your target audience and their concerns and then adjust your messages accordingly.

156. Rumours and myths will occur and increase when no information and instructions are provided, so it is vital you have prepared and planned how you will respond to this concerns as quickly as possible.

Monitor

157. Crisis communication starts with listening, not with sending messages (see the chapter on social media). In the case of CBRN-crises it is essential to monitor how the crisis is perceived by the public and specific stakeholders:

- What symptoms do people describe in phone calls to emergency services, on social media or in media reports?
- What questions do they have?
- What is their behavior - do people flee, or are they staying where they are, are they going to get their children from school, what medication are they taking?
- What is the general perception of the different stakeholders?

158. Knowing this information is essential to determine what advice to give and the best platforms and messages to use for effective communication.

Speed

159. Speed of communications is essential in CBRN incidents and one technique to help this process is to determine 'rings on concern' where you identify who needs the information first, which group second and which group third.
160. The make-up of these rings can vary according to the nature of the agent. Lessons from previous CBRN incidents have shown that first responders accounted for a high percentage of the casualties, so we now know the importance of fast communications for responders like ambulance crews so that they do not rush in to a scene where they become the victims.
161. Clearly scientific analysis is a vital element in determining 'rings of concern' but monitoring social information and collecting feedback is also an important part of the process.

Flexibility

162. If the agent is odorless, colorless and tasteless, it is much harder for the public to evaluate the dangers and threats of that agent, and research has shown that people often amplify the risk of unknown hazards.
163. Fear and social disruption can go far beyond the number killed or injured. For instance during the Sarin nerve gas attacks in the Tokyo subway in 1995, 11 people died but 5000 people sought medical advice. Your communication plan must therefore take into account that you might need to deal with large numbers of people who are concerned and frightened when the actual threat to their health is minimal – the so-called 'Worried Well' who might overwhelm medical resources.
164. On the other hand some people might think things are not too bad, especially if they cannot see or taste anything, when the reality is that they are in great danger – sometimes this effect is known as the availability heuristic or the optimistic bias – so it is vital your plan can communicate the dangers very quickly.
165. For instance, just after the radioactive leak at the Fukishima Daiichi plant in Japan in 2011, some people in Tokyo were asking whether they should leave the city. However, the Japanese Government has since pointed out that background radiation levels in Tokyo were lower than some major European cities during the summer months.

166. Research has shown that people rarely panic in disaster, but they want fast accurate information so that they can feel in control. Your communication strategy needs to reassure the stakeholders and the public by communicating with all means available.

167. The central message should always be one of empathy – showing that you understand why people are frightened or why they actually think there is no danger – but you need to provide them with the facts and figures to reassure them.

Section 6
Cross-border information issues

Different assessments of a situation

Different policies

Different legislation

Practical trans-national cooperation

168. Crisis situations do not respect national boundaries. Emergency management has an international dimension which poses challenges for public information.

169. National sovereignty cannot be challenged. Each country is responsible for its own public information policy. Considering the highly interdependent nature of modern societies and the means of communication, it is clear that populations will not restrict themselves to reading or watching national media. Information distributed in surrounding countries is readily available, via radio, TV and Internet.

Different assessments of a situation

170. In a complex emergency situation, the competent authority assesses the situation and adopts measures accordingly. The information service is solicited to communicate decisions and explain their impact and consequences.

171. Across the border in a neighbouring country, the situation is not necessarily the same. A different strategy may be being followed. The situation may not have been assessed in the same way or different infrastructure may necessitate the adoption of different measures. For example, in certain countries shelters exist for the entire population. In the event of an accident at a nuclear power plant with release of radioactivity, the population would be sent to shelters and asked to stay there until the radioactive cloud had passed. Other countries may not have enough shelters for the entire population and may need to evacuate citizens to other locations. Communicating to people in one village to stay at home, while only a few kilometres away people are being evacuated is a difficult situation to handle. Frequent and detailed information bulletins explaining why differing strategies apply cross-border will reduce public confusion and disconcertion.

Different information policies

172. Information policies differ from one country to the next. Decisions about what information is communicated is a national competence. For populations living in border areas it is difficult to understand these differences which may cause uncertainties and can lead to distrust of the authorities.

Different legislation

173. Countries have varying legislations regarding emergency management and crisis communication. For example, different threshold values for radioactivity can be especially problematic. A measurement may be considered normal in one country while the same measurement in another country may be considered in the red zone. Following the Chernobyl disaster, consumption of potatoes was permitted on one side of the frontier while it was prohibited a few kilometres away. Such situations create uncertainties and doubts among the population. Efforts at political level to harmonise criteria should be pursued.

174. Other problem areas relate to differences in procedures for the use of alarms. If alarms in a border region of one country sound some time before those in a border region of a neighbouring country, this causes anxiety and distress. Procedures should be agreed in advance to ensure close and constant contacts between authorities of neighbouring countries during an emergency situation. Actors need to be aware of the psychological impact and aim to adopt appropriate actions and procedures.

Practical trans-national cooperation

175. Collaboration between authorities of neighbouring countries should be enhanced. Cross-border exercises which simulate emergency situations assist considerably in finding practical solutions to specific problems, such as the use of alarms.

176. One of the basic requirements for a consistent information policy is that all partners are in possession of the same knowledge. Establishing a convention on direct notification exchange between neighbouring countries is a useful first step. In case of an emergency situation, simple notification is not enough.

177. Considerable improvement can be achieved by using a shared information platform: every partner involved in an emergency situation should have simultaneous access to the platform by means of a user identity and password. Reading and writing permissions should be defined specifically.

178. Press releases can be provided as well as background information and a "frequently asked questions" section. It should be agreed that all partners answer the same question with the same answer. This makes for a consistent, one-voice information policy.

179. Enhanced trans-national collaboration breeds satisfactory solutions. In some areas, significant progress has already been achieved, such as in the field of notification. Cooperation in the field of information policy requires further progress.

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