



Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) Environmental Programs Risk Communication Primer Overview

The NMCPHC Environmental Programs Department developed the Risk Communication Primer for civilian and military personnel to use as a reference guide for building an effective Navy and Marine Corps risk communication strategy that ensures consistency and minimizes potential negative impacts to the military mission, manpower or budget, thus enabling the continued success of the Navy and Marine Corps mission and core values. This document provides a high-level overview of the Risk Communication Primer. Download the complete Risk Communication Primer at: <http://go.usa.gov/mM7A> OR http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcpHC/Documents/environmental-programs/risk-communication/NMCPHC_RiskCommunicationPrimer.pdf.

The National Academy of Sciences defines risk communication as "...an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves multiple messages about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or to legal and institutional arrangements for risk management."

The Risk Communication Primer identifies five fundamental interactive components of an effective Risk Communication Strategy:

1. Identify and prioritize stakeholders
2. Develop messages
3. Select delivery method(s)
4. Prepare messenger(s)
5. Assess effectiveness



1. Identify and Prioritize Stakeholders

A stakeholder is anyone who will be affected by and/or who will be most interested in a project or issue. Before communicating any information, you must get to know the stakeholders and understand their issues and concerns.

After identifying key stakeholders, take the time to organize them into the following three groups:

1. **Opponents:** People may oppose your project or issues for many reasons, such as concerns over actual or perceived risks, general mistrust or dislike of the Navy and Marine Corps, or as a result of competing agendas. The primary mission of communicating with these groups is to ensure interactions with them do not adversely influence other stakeholder groups.

...continued on reverse

Questions to Help Identify Stakeholders:

- › Who needs to be involved?
- › Who is likely to be affected?
- › Who is likely to perceive they are affected?
- › Who is likely to be upset if not involved?
- › Who has previously been involved in this or related issues?
- › Who could help ensure you receive a balanced range of opinions on the issue?
- › Who might provide third party support?
- › Who would you least like to communicate with on this issue?
- › Who is most active, attentive or passive?

2. **Supporters:** Supporters trust, believe and agree with you and/or the organization's mission and objectives. They are typically very easy to communicate with because they see you as a trustworthy, credible source of information. The primary mission of communicating with supporters is to maintain the established, positive relationship.
3. **Straddlers:** Straddlers fall somewhere between supporters and opponents. They may be undecided or apathetic, but they are typically open to finding common ground and/or listening to suggestions. This group makes up the vast majority of stakeholders and should therefore be the primary focus of risk communication efforts.

2. Develop Messages

Developing well-planned, well-constructed messages can reduce misinformation and help provide stakeholders with the correct information they need to make informed decisions.

Tips for Effective Communication:

- ▶ Keep messages short and simple (6th to 8th grade reading level)
- ▶ Avoid acronyms and jargon
- ▶ Layer information
- ▶ Focus on conclusions and actions
- ▶ Practice delivering messages

When developing a risk communication strategy, there are three basic questions in determining the appropriate messages:

1. What do you want to tell your stakeholders?
2. What do they want to know?
3. What is likely to be misunderstood?

3. Select Delivery Method(s)

There are many available communication channels to choose from and selection should be based on the level of stakeholder interest and site-specific knowledge of how the stakeholders would most like to receive and discuss the information. Some available communication channels include:

- ▶ Fact sheets, brochures, newsletters, and emails
- ▶ Internet resources (websites, social media, discussion forums, etc.)
- ▶ News media, press releases, and articles
- ▶ Meetings (public availability sessions, open house, town hall, one-on-one, etc.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the NMCPHC Environmental Programs Department at <http://go.usa.gov/mMJQ> OR <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/environmental-programs/Pages/default.aspx> or call the NMCPHC Environmental Programs Department at 757-953-0932.

NOTE: The Risk Communication Product Catalog contains links to official NMCPHC products and resources. For convenience and ease of use, these products can also be accessed via shortened URLs provided through go.USA.gov, the trusted source for URL shortening within the US government.

4. Prepare Messenger(s)

Messengers are a critical component of any risk communication strategy. Some tips for messengers to remember include:

Selecting and training the right messengers is just as critical to the communication process as deciding what to say and how and where to say it.

- ▶ Messengers establish trust and credibility with the audience through empathy and caring
- ▶ The messenger's non-verbal presence should match the verbal information being conveyed
- ▶ Non-verbal observation skills are a form of intelligence gathering that successful risk communicators must master
- ▶ Messengers must be prepared to answer difficult questions
- ▶ When communicating with the media, be prepared to help them get the information they need to deliver the right story, while ensuring your message gets out to stakeholders in a timely and efficient manner

5. Assess Effectiveness

A critical part of any risk communication strategy is continually assessing its effectiveness. Do not wait until the end of the project to evaluate the risk communication strategy. Navy and Marine Corps issues

Things to Remember About Evaluation of Risk Communication Effectiveness:

- ▶ There are informal ways to evaluate your effectiveness.
 - ▶ Use evaluation methods throughout the risk communication process.
 - ▶ Measure success based on whether you reach your stakeholder and whether you understand each other's points of view.
- are dynamic and your risk communication strategy should constantly be evaluated to ensure that it continues to meet unique mission requirements. Answering these simple questions on a recurring basis can help determine if your communication strategy is effective:
- ▶ Were primary messages conveyed?
 - ▶ Did stakeholders get the information they needed?
 - ▶ Did stakeholders understand messages?
 - ▶ How can the program/strategy/communication be improved?
 - ▶ What lessons are there to be learned?
 - ▶ With whom should they be shared?