

MESSAGES

1.0 Background

Messages depend on the concerns of the public and the nature of the event. This presentation talks about describing the message content and form, also presenting the different types of communication tools for message dissemination. The participants should be able to understand the message content and form and their relationship to public concern, knowledge and fears, also to understand the various demands for messages before, during and after an emergency and the different tools through which to disseminate them.

2.0 General rules

Effective messages are succinct, factual and specific.

They inform audiences about the type of radiation involved in the emergency and provide a context by comparing the expected doses with various natural sources of radiation exposure. Follow-up messages should explain to audiences how they can avoid exposure or minimize the radiation doses through specific actions.

3.0 Prepared statements

One of the key actions that can help make an emergency more manageable for communicators is preparing and publishing informative statements in advance. The general public normally knows very little about the basics of radiation. Prepared statements, on topics listed on this slide, help the public better understand the potential dangers of radiation exposure and how to avoid them. They can describe exposure symptoms and treatments and lead audiences to further details and in-depth information.

Messages developed and tested before an event and made available to the public are usually intended to create some familiarity with terminology, response procedures and protective actions. They may also include types and health effects of various radionuclides and basic information on potential emergencies and contingency arrangements in place.

4.0 Public health recommendations

The rationale underlying any public health recommendations should be clearly communicated. For example, sheltering inside buildings can easily be understood when there is radioactivity in the outside environment. If people have come in from outside, simple precautions can minimize contamination, especially regarding shoes and clothing.

Also showering can be effective and the need for such measures is easily understood. Regarding specific measures, the need to take iodine blocking tablets during some nuclear emergencies should be clearly explained. The tablets can be misunderstood as “anti-radiation”

tablets which they are not. They only minimize the dose from radio-iodine isotopes, particularly iodine-131.

5.0 Communicating uncertainties

For some incidents, there may be genuine uncertainties about the precise nature of the release, particularly in the early stages. In these cases the uncertainties should be made clear and the need for precautionary measures can then be easily understood. This is most likely if a deliberate release or unforeseen incident has occurred.

Radiation has its risks but it is very measurable and uncertainties in the early stages of an incident can be minimized by a monitoring program. Most people should find this re-assuring provided the message is clear.

6.0 Families and children

In an emergency people naturally have concerns for members of their family who are involved or they think are affected. This is particularly the case for parents and young children and is very understandable. Messages about protection and precautions need to take this into account particularly if they involve sheltering or evacuation. For example, parents may want to collect children from a school in an affected area as a precaution, but this may actually increase risk for children and parents. Messages about precautions for children need to be very clearly explained by appropriate spokespersons.

7.0 Radiation monitoring

In some situations it may be necessary for people to attend special monitoring centres set up in response to an incident. Some people will not wish to attend the centres because, for example they may believe they could be contaminated by others. Very clear messages are required to ensure that a comprehensive monitoring programme can be carried out.

Individual confidentiality will need to be respected in such a programme but general information could be made public. Communications on what will happen when people arrive at a centre should be clear and the expertise of the centre's staff should be explained.

8.0 Warning messages – Key features

An emergency response plan should include a tested warning system.

A warning is a sign for activity, providing concrete information. A warning, delivered directly before the threat is not intended to acquaint people with detailed information about the danger and its possible consequences. Its main aim is description of the danger, stating the probable time of its outbreak, and recommendation of adequate adaptive behaviour. Recommendations serve as reminders for more detailed, previously learned behaviours.

Warning messages must be effectively drafted, alerting the public to the key dangers in an emergency and permitting the public to be better prepared to cope through specific actions described in the warning messages.

9.0 Structuring a press release

General rules for press release:

- A press release should be brief and primarily factual. Members of the public will want to receive authoritative and reliable facts and figures.
- Describe the radionuclide and the type of radiation involved in the incident. Describe also the possible pathways by which people could be exposed to radiation.
- If possible, give estimates of radiation doses to people and how they might compare with doses from other sources of radiation (e.g. natural radiation and medical practices).
- Where appropriate, describe how people might be able to reduce radiation doses (e.g. sheltering).
- Make clear the areas where populations might be affected and those where people are not (or are unlikely to be) affected.
- Advice needs to be consistent, concise and clear. During a prolonged event, providing information at regular times will help people cope with the effects.
- During emergencies, people affected can be extraordinarily resilient, while others can feel affected by the event even though they are not actually involved or at risk. Reliable information and clear advice on protection helps everyone.

9.1 Periodic press updates

An alternative or complementary approach to the traditional press release can be used during a longer-lasting radiation emergency. As an emergency evolves, the PIO might deem it appropriate to provide information as it arrives, or on a pre-determined frequent schedule, in the form of a periodic update. This format follows the form and style of a traditional press release but offers shorter text updates describing specific developments as information about the emergency becomes available. An example of the IAEA's periodic press updates during the response to TEPCO's Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant accident is shown here.

Periodic updates are then regularly posted in a cumulative manner (most recent message on top, older messages on bottom) on a dedicated radiation emergency website so that information is current and readily available.

All communications should be logged in the PIC and/or the Emergency Operations Centre.

10.0 Purpose-built emergency website

Creating a purpose-built dedicated emergency website that is prominently displayed by the organization's main website can help to ensure that the largest possible internet audience is informed during a radiation emergency. The surge in demand following a large-scale emergency will overwhelm most servers. Surge capacity should be configured to handle bandwidth demands that are at a minimum fifty times greater than average levels. External hosting

agreements may offer cost-effective, instant-on capacity to host just the emergency pages. One way to ensure constant availability of information via the internet if website capability is overwhelmed or lost is to provide the same updates via social media.

This purpose-built website should be easy to update and the ability to edit should be shared with appropriate members of the communications team. It is imperative that the website have the ability to be updated and modified from a remote location in the event that on-site resources are unavailable. It should also be easy to post images, video, and hyperlinks so that all types of relevant data (e.g. maps, facility diagrams, relevant photographs) about the radiation emergency are accessible to the general public. Additional useful features for a dedicated emergency website include web feed capabilities (such as RSS*), easy-to-read functionality for mobile devices, and low-bandwidth design for usability where internet resources may be limited. An externally hosted emergency mini-website would satisfy these requirements. As an example, a screenshot of the IAEA Alert Log used during the response to the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear accident is provided on this slide.

RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication' or 'Rich Site Summary' RSS is a way of allowing web users to receive news headlines and updates on their browser or mobile appliance from selected websites as soon as they are published.

11.0 Press briefings

The PIO has the role of organizing a press briefing and is responsible for seeking approval by the IC and senior management to do so. A press briefing should be considered when there is significant information that needs to be communicated about the emergency to the media and the general public. The press briefing should be moderated by either the Lead PIO or the spokesperson. Technical experts who can answer questions relative to their field of expertise should be available during the briefing to provide information and respond to questions posed by the media.

In advance of the media briefing, all presenters should discuss roles and responsibilities and determine which speaker will answer particular queries. Every effort must be made to ensure that messages are unified among all speakers before the press briefing begins, and appropriate preparation should be undertaken by the PIO and/or spokesperson to ensure that information is clear and consistent. If press briefing speakers are not able to meet in person, a preparatory meeting can be conducted by teleconference. Presenters should be provided with as much coaching as possible on what questions to expect from the media. The PIO and/or spokesperson should also help technical experts to prepare concise, non-technical answers.

Once the briefing begins, all presenters (names, titles, organizations) should be identified for the media. The moderator should briefly introduce each presenter and their area of expertise and set an amount of time allotted for the briefing. The moderator may also give a brief summary of the radiation emergency details to date. Following this introduction, each presenter might make a brief statement, after which the moderator will call for questions from the media (Q&A session).

In the Q&A session, the moderator should ask each media member to identify his or her name and media affiliation before asking a question. The moderator will bring the briefing to a close. The PIO should arrange all preparations related to organizing a briefing room, sound system, phone dial-in access, video and/or audio recording, and language interpretation (if necessary). It may be useful to arrange for dial-in audio access for journalists who cannot attend the briefing in person. The press conference room should be separate from the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) Operations Room to ensure no interference with the actual emergency response operation. However, where possible the EOC should be visible to the press room.

Members of the media should be notified well in advance of the briefing by a media advisory, which should be prepared and approved following the same process as a press release. The briefing should be recorded by audio and/or video (if possible) so that there is a verbatim record of the proceedings. A summary of key points could be prepared, in the form of a press release, for issue after the briefing.

12.0 Social media

The term social media applies to internet and mobile appliances primarily used for dialogue, content sharing and discussion. Social media are distinct from more traditional media in that they now reach a wider public in many regions. Social media can trigger swift, organized and massive public responses, and requires very little financial investment to implement, and can be accessed and updated almost instantaneously. In contrast, the human resource costs of maintaining an effective and ultimately beneficial relationship with the public via social media is as large as the existing investment in public information personnel. In an emergency, public activity may surge by a factor of 100 times or greater. Monitoring, responding to and leading the social media dialogue requires a dedicated team, a clear set of editorial guidelines to maintain decorum and protect free expression, and prior experience in managing social media outreach.

For the purposes of this manual, social media applications refer to internet- and mobile-based tools such as blogs, podcasts, social networking sites, and other relevant communications applications.

Social media allow for instant and direct two-way communication between people and organizations. The primary difference between an organization's website and a social media platform is that social media allow your audience to react and respond to information that is provided. A sample of how the IAEA has used social media in emergency response is shown on this slide.

The two-way social media communications model holds benefits and risks for an organization. It is strongly recommended that an organization conduct a thorough analysis of these benefits and risks before implementing a social media strategy. Before a social media presence is created, an organization should establish:

Clear and consistent strategy for types of information to be provided.

Ownership and assignment of duties to update and maintain social media outlets.

Rules of engagement for how to respond and react to commentary by the general public.

Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that an organization does not undertake the creation of a new social media channel during a radiation emergency. A communications team must have experience using social media tools during normal operations to be prepared for the surge in activity and response that may arise during a large-scale radiation emergency.

Comments by the public may be enabled for a social media resource but should be monitored closely on a daily basis. Dialogue is the purpose of social media and even critical dialogue must be allowed for the use of social media to be successful. Censorship would be very damaging for the organization's reputation. Comments made by the public should be sent to a manager of the social media resource and circulated in the event of an offensive comment (do not provide any incentive for censorship). In the interest of transparency, it would be advantageous to implement a set of guidelines that the audience must follow when responding to comments. For possible guidance, as an example: "Racist, abusive or threatening posts are not acceptable and will be removed by our moderators. We aim to respond to all legitimate complaints/comments as soon as we can."

13.0 Conclusion

Advanced preparation & training is required for message dissemination to public and also ensure that Message content should be factual, concise and quantitative.

Message form and content should respond to needs of multiple audiences.