Risk Communication: “Lessons from the Field”

Kenny Foscue 11/15/2013
Agenda

• Some Key Basics
  – Outrage Factors

• Beyond the “Traditional” Public Meeting

• Community Advisory Panels

• Working With the Media
Beware!

Bad Things Can Happen!

(Video Clip)
"The most important finding... The agency’s behavior, and the agency–community relationship have a substantial impact on the public’s perception of risk ... more impact than the objective seriousness of the risk, and far more impact than any technical explanation of the risk”

Peter Sandman
“People Want To Know That You Care Before They Care What You Know.”

- Will Rogers
Environmental Risk

Risk =

• Magnitude of Effect \times \text{Probability}

• Hazard + Outrage
Factors in Community Outrage
Voluntary Risks Vs. Imposed Risks
Natural Vs. Artificial Risks
Familiar vs Exotic Risks
Uncertain Vs. Understood Risks
Risks Associated with Memorable Events
Traditional Public Meetings

• Avoid if Possible – Less Productive

• Recruit Independent Moderator
  – Clergy, Board Member, etc

• Establish Ground Rules

• Written Questions
Alternatives to Traditional Public Meetings

- Open Houses
- Public Availability Sessions
- “Hybrid” Events: Open House/Meeting
“Hybrid” Events

- Begin With Open House Hours
- Agencies Provide Information Exhibits, Answer Questions 1 on 1
- Brief Public Meeting w/ Short Presentation(s)
- Open House Hour(s) After Meeting
Why “Hybrid” Events?

- Strategy to Avoid Long, Contentious, Unproductive Meetings
- Individuals’ Questions Can be Addressed
- Provides Time for Presenting Message, Questions
- Allows Forum for Controlled “Venting”
- More Information Provided
Community Advisory Panels

- Advisory Group Representing Affected Community

- Generally for Larger, Complex Sites
  - Rarely utilized

- Agencies Have Ex-Officio Role

- Paid Facilitator/Moderator Helpful
Community Advisory Panels

- Provide More Efficient Way for Community Feedback
- Help Stakeholders Find Constructive Ways To Address Concerns
- Increase Community Knowledge/Expertise
- Enhance Trust And Credibility Among All Parties
Examples:

• Raymark, Stratford

• Cheshire - Community Concerns

• Stamford Private Wells Project
Smaller, “Quick Turnaround” Sites

- Frequently for Emergency Removal Sites
- Flyers/Fact Sheets Re: Contaminants, Upcoming Removal Actions
- Door-to-Door Home Visits
- Letters
Men In White Suits!
Meeting The Media’s Needs

• Do Not Ever Lie

• Okay to Say “I Don’t Know”

• If You Can’t Provide Information - Explain Exactly Why & When
Meeting The Media’s Needs

• Help Them Meet Their Deadlines
• Be Succinct In Your Answers
• Be Patient & Help Them To Understand
Closing Thoughts

• Good Risk Communication Integral to Addressing Site Public Health Issues

• Plan Risk Communication from Start – Not Just an Afterthought