

Risk Communication and Indoor Air Quality: Lessons from the Field

Scott A. Damon

Health Communication Lead

CDC Air Pollution & Respiratory Health Branch

Presenter Disclosures

Scott A. Damon

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Case study: “FEMA Trailers”

- August 2005: Hurricanes Katrina & Rita hit the Gulf Coast
- Tens of thousands are displaced
- FEMA supplies Temporary Housing Units—aka “FEMA Trailers”
- Residents complain of respiratory and other symptoms
- CDC called in to study and address health concerns

Lesson 1: Start with what you know

Logistics:

- Working on a tight deadline
- Working with federal, state, local, and private entities
- Outsourcing key tasks
- Media attention

Audience factors:

- Mental health issues, substance abuse, upper respiratory infections
- Safe & affordable housing concerns

Lesson 2: Define your Multiple & Varied Audiences

- **Primary: THU residents**
- **Secondary: Intermediaries & Stakeholders**
 - Local public health
 - Local clinicians
 - Faith-based and community-based organizations
- **Of note:**
 - National media
 - Local media
 - Policy makers
 - Business community (including trailer manufacturers)

Question 1: What can you find out quickly—from the office?

- Web-based searches to compile a list of community-based organizations providing health-related services to displaced residents
- News article review to identify key contacts within the communities
- Additional available data and studies about the populations

Question 2: What can you find out quickly—in the field? (Rapid Appraisal)

- **Contacted 62 organizations**
- **Talked with 40 representatives:**

Louisiana

- **14 community-based organizations**
- **3 health care providers**
- **2 public health providers**

Mississippi

- **10 faith-based organizations**
- **4 community-based organizations**
- **4 public health partners**
- **2 disaster response groups**
- **1 advocacy group**

What we found out

- Wide variety of trailers
- Louisiana and Mississippi have substantial Vietnamese and Spanish speaking populations
- More community advocacy in Louisiana than in Mississippi
- CDC is a trusted source of health information in the communities
- More concern about mold problems than formaldehyde

Lesson 3: Decide and limit what you plan to do

- Raise awareness and *provide action steps* residents can take to address poor indoor air
- Provide resources for healthcare providers and others to assist residents
- Explain four scientific investigations
- Assist with resident participation
- Maintain an open dialogue

What we did: Mass communication

Based on field research

- Printed fact sheets for residents and clinicians
- Radio public service announcements
- “Laundromat” posters
- Meeting materials in 3 languages
- Meeting announcements, blast fax, PSAs, and flyers to advertise the sessions



What we did:

Interpersonal communication

15 public sessions in LA & MS:

- engaging community-based and public health partners in planning outreach activities
- identifying and scheduling venues
- coordinating service contracts for meeting support
- coordinating security for venues
- coordinating transportation for residents to attend the public availability sessions

1-800-CDC-Info also served as an interpersonal channel



Basic Lessons : Risk Communication Questions

- Am I/ is my family safe?
- How can I make us [more] safe?
- Can you fix this?
- What actually happened?
- Who is in charge [of what]?

Basic Lessons : Stuff we already knew

- Base your work on your audience
 - Use existing findings
 - Do the formative work you can
 - Take what time you have to know your audience
- Be clear on what you want to, and can do
 - Set some objectives—preferably ones you can measure
 - Use channels appropriately to the audience, your time, and your budget
- Simplicity: Plain language

Two helpful links

**CERC: Crisis and
Emergency Risk
Communication** online
training

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/v/cerc/training/basic/index.asp>

**CCI: Clear Communication
Index** online tool

<http://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/>

Scott A. Damon

scd3@cdc.gov

