



# Evacuation Communication

## Unit Five

# Factors Affecting Response to Evacuation Warnings

- Warning content - is the risk conveyed?
- Consistency of messages and information
- Credibility of the person issuing information
- Ability to confirm the message
- Adequacy of the information for taking action
- Response to risk

# Unit Objectives



- Decide what information to convey to the public about evacuation.
- Determine how to communicate evacuation information to the public to ensure that instructions will be understood and followed.

# Unit Objectives, Continued



- Determine when to release information about evacuation to the public.
- Determine who is responsible for evacuation communication in their home jurisdiction.

# Educating the Community About Evacuation

- Informing risk-area residents and businesses prior to an emergency will better prepare them to respond to evacuation instructions.
- Education before an emergency partially addresses potential concern about reliability and credibility of information.

# Evacuation Information

- Nature of the hazard(s)
- Methods of warning and who will carry out warning
- Evacuation routes

# Evacuation Information

- Information about emergency shelters
- Information about risks of in-place sheltering
- Information about care of pets and domestic animals

# Discussion Question



What non-emergency periods are appropriate for presenting this type of information?

# Methods of Communication

- Television and/or newspaper
- Radio spots
- Direct mailing
- Display at public buildings and in libraries
- Phone bill insert
- School handouts to students

# Discussion Question

## Communicating Evacuation Readiness



Keeping in mind the factors that determine whether people will understand and follow evacuation instructions, what kind of evacuation information should be communicated at this time?

# Communicating Evacuation Readiness Information

- Build credibility
- Encourage preparedness
- Provide a hot line, e-mail address,  
or other source of information

# Communicating Evacuation Readiness to Tourists

- Check with owners of resorts/hotels/motels to ensure they have a method for warning and communicating evacuation information.

# Communicating Evacuation Readiness to Tourists

- Tourists and other travelers are not likely to be watching TV news or listening to local radio broadcasts and may have to be notified individually.
- Resorts/hotels/motels will lose revenue if guests evacuate, so managers may "downplay" possible risk.

# Communicating the Evacuation Order

- Communicating the evacuation warning officially begins the movement to a safer area.
- Evacuation warning and information from all sources must be consistent.
- Multiple consistent messages will get people to take action sooner.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Select a credible source to deliver the message.
  - Have credible local officials issue the warning message using mass media.
  - Have emergency personnel with previous experience and public exposure in an evacuation operation deliver the message.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Select a credible source to deliver the message.
  - The decision on who to deliver the evacuation message through the media must be made before an event is pending (need regular coordination with the local media).

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Write and present a clear message.
  - People looking for reasons not to leave will find them in ambiguous messages.
  - Be specific about areas that will be affected as well as the risks that are posed.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Write and present a clear message.
  - Describe possible hazard impacts including any plans by local authorities to turn off electricity, water, and/or gas in the evacuation area.
  - Describe evacuation routes and any traffic pattern changes.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Write and present a clear message.
  - Tell where people can go and how to get there if they don't have private transportation.
  - Provide lists of personal belongings to take in the evacuation.
  - Describe arrangements for reuniting family members that become separated during the evacuation.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Keep the message consistent.
  - Local media should repeat the same evacuation message and information.
  - Inconsistent messages neutralize the public's perception of threat.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Present a precise message.
  - Confusing statements about the location, timing and/or magnitude of the event will decrease the perception of the threat.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Repeat the message.
  - If the media repeats the same message multiple times, people will be stirred to action.

# Effective Evacuation Warnings

- Provide sources for confirming the evacuation warning.
  - People will try to obtain confirmation of warnings from different sources before evacuating.
  - A hot line or other point of contact will be useful, but may become overwhelmed if unprepared for heavy call volume.

# Delivering the Message

## Factors

- Type of hazard
  - Amount of warning time
- Size and demographics of the at-risk population
- Capabilities of the local authorities

# Delivering the Message

## Hurricane Hugo

- Evacuation warnings should not depend on any one method of communication.
- Neither cable nor broadcast television was a reliable mode of communication.
- VHF and cable stations in the impact areas were out of service hours before the eye of the storm arrived.

# Delivering the Message

## Hurricane Hugo

- By that time, most residents were without power to operate televisions anyway.
- Only one AM station in the storm path was able to maintain service.
- Most of the radio and television stations in the Emergency Alert System were damaged or lost power and could not transmit for several days.

# Delivering the Message

- Other methods for delivery of the warning message include:
  - Door-to-door notification by emergency responders
  - Travel through neighborhoods using public address systems

# Delivering the Message

- It is important that all methods for delivering the evacuation warning message converge at approximately the same time, providing the same clear, consistent message.

# Communicating with Functional Needs Populations

- Communicating with populations in institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, jails and group homes is not likely to be a problem unless phone service and power are lost.

# Discussion Question

## Functional Needs Populations



What populations may require special communication efforts during the evacuation warning?

# Communicating with Functional Needs Populations

- What types of special communication activity may be needed?
  - Door-to-door notification
  - Depending upon the warning time available, written communications to hotel or resort guests

# Communicating with Functional Needs Populations

- What types of special communication activity may be needed?
  - Instructing hotel, motel and resort operators to conduct door-to-door or other notification of guests
  - Use of emergency vehicles to make public address announcements to homeless and other transient populations that do not have access to media

# Communicating with Functional Needs Populations

- What types of special communication activity may be needed?
  - Announcements in several different languages, as appropriate to the community
  - If the community is multi-lingual, determine the languages in which emergency information will be issued

# Unit Summary

- Work closely with Warning and Public Information staff on the development of the evacuation annex or plan.
- Evacuation warning messages must be credible, consistent, and frequent to be effective in moving people to action.

# Unit Summary

## Include in Warning Messages

- Clear description of the area likely to be evacuated
- Certainty of the hazard
- Severity of the hazard
- Visual evidence of the hazard when media allows

# Unit Summary

## Include in Warning Messages

- Information on safe havens and routes
- Lists of personal belongings to take in the evacuation
- Assurance of family unity or reunification

# Unit Summary

## Warning Messages

- Repeat the message often.
- Isolate the message from routine information.