

# Risk and Crisis Communication: At a Glance



Information adapted from Dr. Vincent Covello, Director of the Center for Risk Communication seminar.

Risk Communication is a science based approach for effective communication in \* High Concern \* High Stress \* Emotionally Charged \* Controversial Situations.

### Three objectives of Risk Communication:

1. Straight and pure education (knowledge).
2. Establishment of trust of all stakeholders (through actions, words and gestures) \*Trust is established 75% on non-verbal cues such as body language.
3. Informed decision making, providing sufficient information about options.

♠ When dealing with the media, 95% of all concerns of stakeholders in a high stress situation are predictable. Which means you can have pre-scripted messages already prepared before going into any interview feeling comfortable that you know 95% of the questions that will be asked.

A list of the 77 Most Frequently Asked Questions by Reporters in a Disaster can be found on-line at:  
[www.naccho.org/general565.cfm](http://www.naccho.org/general565.cfm)

In order to protect yourself from mosquitoes; remove standing water, wear insect repellent with DEET and wear protective clothing, long pants and long sleeves at dusk and dawn.

The above is an example of a 27-9-3. When dealing with media either print or televised it is important to make your statement concise using the **27-9-3 template**.

### 27 Words, 9 seconds, 3 key messages

Oftentimes both print and televised media is limited to space and time and can only provide the 27-9-3 sound bite. There is chance if you provide too much text that it will be edited and effect the tone or accuracy of your messages or if given too little information that reporter might fill with additional text. It is a good idea to craft messages using the 77 Most Frequently Asked Questions before an event occurs.

*During an interview you can use the following templates to assist you in your responses.*

### IDK Template

The I Don't Know Template can be used when asked a question you do not know the answer to or can not comment on at the moment, possibly because you don't have a prepared statement, you are not the expert or not the responsible party.

*Example:* An event occurred while you were out of town. When you arrive back to the office, reporters are waiting for you. You might use the IDK Template to delay questions until you are properly prepared to respond.

### IDK Short Form

\* Say you don't know, without saying you don't know"

("I wish I could answer that, I wish I knew.")

\* Say that you are not the expert in that area. ("That is not the area of my expertise, but I can connect you with xyz")

\* Give reason why you can't answer or don't know ("I need to check with my office before I can comment.")

\* Indicate a follow-up with a deadline. ("I need to check with my office, but I will be holding a press conference at 10 a.m." or "I will call you back by 1:00 p.m.")

### IDK Long Form

\* Say you can't answer that question and give they reason why (confidentiality, privacy, investigation going on).

\* Indicate follow-up with a deadline

\* Bridge to what you can say ("What I can tell you is...")

**Question:** Can everyone be vaccinated for Smallpox?

**27-9-3 Reply:** Only people possibly exposed to Smallpox should be vaccinated. Vaccination is safe for most people. Some people are more likely to experience side effects than others. ♠ You can then elaborate on one or all of the messages.

### Guarantee Template

- \* Focus on factual information.
- \* Avoid saying that there are no guarantees, or saying that there are guarantees.
- \* Tell people three things, three times - Tell them, Tell them more, Tell them again (using your 27-9-3).

### Interrogation Template

If an interviewer asks you the same question multiple times, the Interrogation Template can be used.

1<sup>st</sup> time asked: Give them your 27-9-3 prepared statement.

2<sup>nd</sup> time asked: Preface with “As I’ve said or let me repeat” give them your 27-9-3 possibly elaborating on one of the three messages.

3<sup>rd</sup> time asked: Say “I believe I’ve answered that, do you have another question?”

4<sup>th</sup> time asked: You could say “It looks like we’ve covered everything, if there isn’t anything else...” Be polite “It’s been a pleasure working with you, but I have other things to attend to and I look forward to reading the article”.

### False Allegation Template

- \* Identify and state the opposite of the false allegation, assumption or criticism.
- \* Validate/affirm the opposite, indicate the value is important.
- \* Indicate three things that you have done or will do to maximize the value.

*Example:* A public health official is called a “baby killer” for spraying pesticides. His/Her response using the False Allegation Template can be:

We are saving lives by spraying pesticides for mosquitoes and in order to protect the children we are taking the following measures. We inform the parents of when we will be spraying, we do it at night when the children are not outside, we instruct them to take to protect their children from the pesticide such as taking in their outside furniture and toys before spraying occurs.”

**NO, NOT, NEVER, NOTHING, NONE** should be used sparingly, trying to avoid these unnecessary negatives. It has shown that you lose credibility/trust when these words are used.

Cont...

**NO, NOT, NEVER, NOTHING, NONE** makes people defensive, stops communication, produces a challenge, doesn’t leave options open and there are always exceptions, these words back you into a corner.

### VVH Template

VVH is often used to organize a news story. Three components **V**illain, **V**ictim, and **H**ero.

*Example:* Broadcast on primetime news program - West Nile Virus

**Villain:** Public Health for spraying pesticides.

**Victim:** Residents being exposed to pesticides.

**Hero:** News broadcast team for helping citizens, by “exposing” public health officials.

### Negative Dominance Rule

When giving people tasks/option to do, give them the most important first and last. Studies show people tend to forget those listed in the middle and remember the first and last listed most often.

### One Negative = Three Positives

After shedding a tear during an interview with Barbara Walter General N. Schwartzcoff was asked “Generals cry? Real men cry?” His reply was yes, human beings cry...Lincoln cried, Lee cried, Grant cried.

Three positive statements balance one negative statement.

### Information Forum and Town Hall Meeting

It is suggested that Information Forums (IF) be set up before a Town Hall Meeting (THM). Information should be divided up into separate booths (i.e. Safety, health risks, legal issues). People can have their questions answered one-on-one which is proven much more affective rather than at a large meeting. 85% of people who attend the IF go home before attending the THM because their questions and issues were already addressed. Keep THM to 90 minutes or less, after 90 minutes 10% of information is lost because of a person’s attention span during high stress situations. You could then set up the IF again afterward.

### *For more information on Crisis and Risk Communication:*

Center for Risk Communication:

[www.centerforriskcommunication.com](http://www.centerforriskcommunication.com)

CDC Office of Communication:

[www.cdc.gov/communication/cdcynergy.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/communication/cdcynergy.htm)

Peter Sandman Risk Communication:

[www.petersandman.com](http://www.petersandman.com)