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.