

2006 Winter Public Health Institute
Gainesville, Florida

Risk Communication & Food Safety:
*Preparing for Catastrophic
Foodborne Illness*

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FOOD PROTECTION AND DEFENSE
A HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

In collaboration with

FAZD CENTER

National Center for
Foreign Animal and Zoonotic
Disease Defense

Risk Communication & Food Safety:

*Preparing for Catastrophic
Foodborne Illness*

Module 2: Introduction to Concepts and Best Practices

Risk Communication Team

National Center for Food Protection and Defense

Objectives

- Explain unique dimensions of risk and crisis communication
- Trace evolution of risk communication
- Outline the “how to” of risk and crisis communications
- Review the best practices for effective risk and crisis communications

Risk Communication - definition

- "...an integrative process of exchange of information and opinions among individuals, groups, and institutions; often involves multiple messages about the nature of the risk or expressing concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or to the legal and institutional arrangements for risk management."

National Research Council 1989

Or in lay terms...

Risk communication embodies a set of skills and abilities to engage people in understanding risk, and making informed decisions about risk

Why is risk communication unique?

Because risk is a complex concept

Risk involves both objective and subjective factors...

- *Hazard* – something that can go wrong
- *Probability* – likelihood of it happening
- *Consequences* – implications of hazard
- *Value* – subjective evaluation of the relative importance of what might be lost

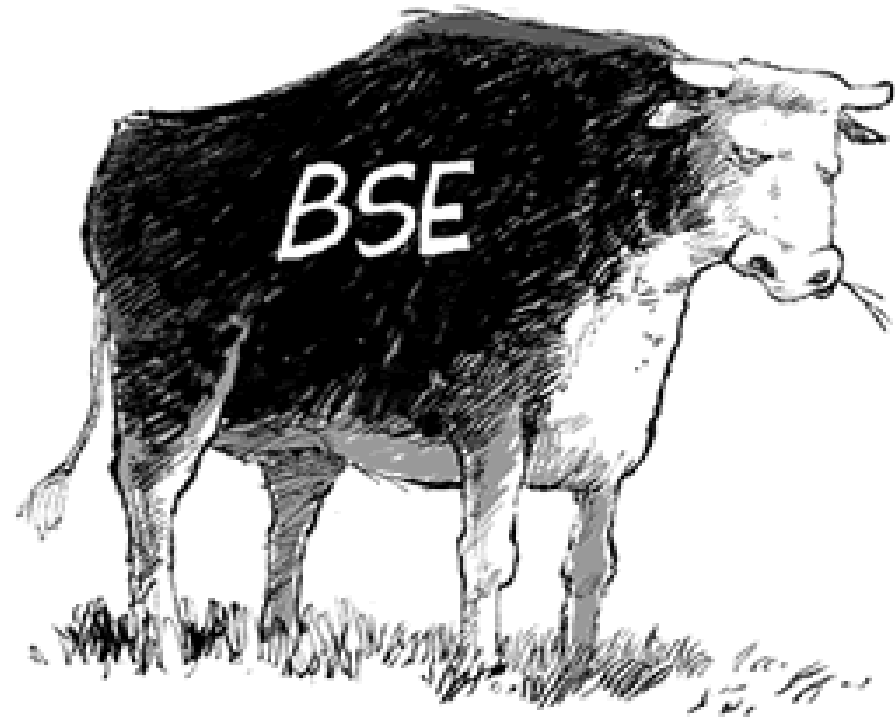
Risk is a volatile subject!

- “RISK...” sets the stage for emotional issues which capture headlines
- Growing disconnect between consumers and scientists interpretation of risk...
 - Public opinion swayed by potential consequences and their values
 - Scientists tend to focus more on the hazard and its probability (numbers)

REALITY CHECK...



THIS KILLED 42,643 AMERICANS IN 2003



THIS HAS KILLED 0

BSE as the Scientist sees it...

Insights from Peter Sandman

Basic truth of risk communication:

The risks that **upset** people are completely different than the risks that **kill** people

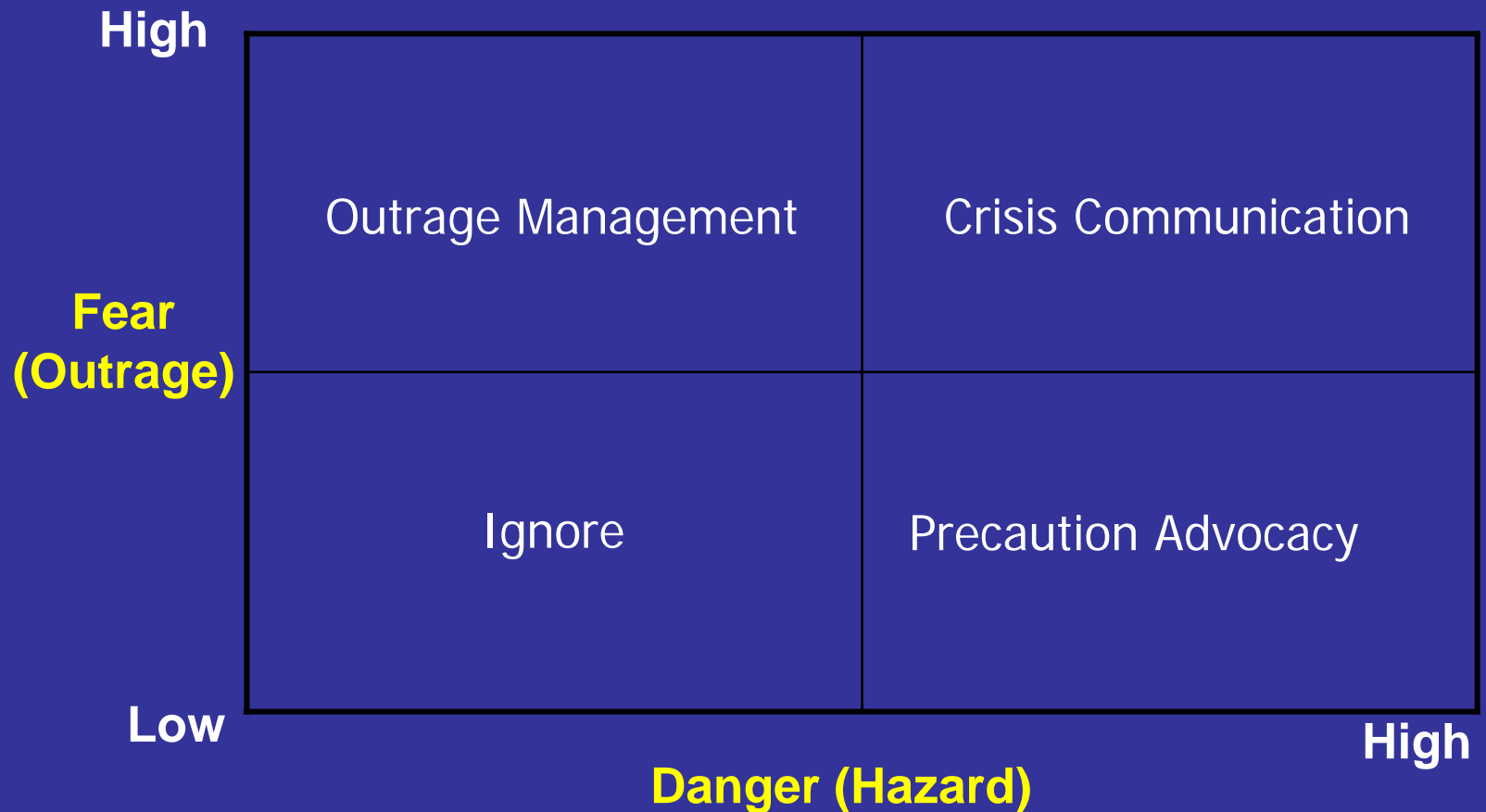
Insights from Peter Sandman

Risk = Hazard + Outrage

Or, if you prefer,

- Risk = Danger + Fear
- People's reaction to risk involves both objective and subjective components

Risk communication encompasses a variety of approaches



**Outrage
Management**

**Crisis/Emergency
Communications**

**Precaution Advocacy
(Health Education/
Issue Management)**

**Public
Relations**

**Smoking....seat belts....
.....alcohol.....obesity...
.....radon....etc.**

Outrage

Hazard

**Outrage
Management**

**Crisis/Emergency
Communications**

**Precaution Advocacy objective
Increase fear for a real hazard
(to motivate preventive action)**

**Precaution Advocacy
(Health Education/
Issue Management)**

**Smoking....seat belts....
.....alcohol.....obesity...
.....radon....etc.**

**Public
Relations**

Outrage

Hazard

Outrage Management

Vaccinations....food irradiation...
...nuclear power....etc.

Crisis/Emergency Communications

Public Relations

Precaution
Advocacy
(Health Education/
Issue Management)

↑
Outrage

Hazard →

Outrage Management

Vaccinations....food irradiation...
...nuclear power....etc.

Crisis/Emergency Communications

Outrage Management Objective
Reduce outrage as the hazard is low
So people don't take unnecessary precautions

Outrage

Issue Management)

Hazard



**Outrage
Management**

**Crisis/Emergency
Communications**

**SARS.....pandemic flu...
.....bioterrorism....etc.**

**Public
Relations**

**Precaution
Advocacy
(Health Education/
Issue Management)**

Outrage

Hazard

**Outrage
Management**

**Crisis/Emergency
Communications**

SARS.....pandemic flu...
.....bioterrorism....etc.

Crisis/Emergency Risk Communications
Acknowledge hazard, validate concern
Give people ways to respond

Relations

**(Health Education/
Issue Management)**

Outrage

Hazard

Outrage Management

Vaccinations....food irradiation...
...nuclear power....etc.

Crisis/Emergency Communications

SARS.....pandemic flu...
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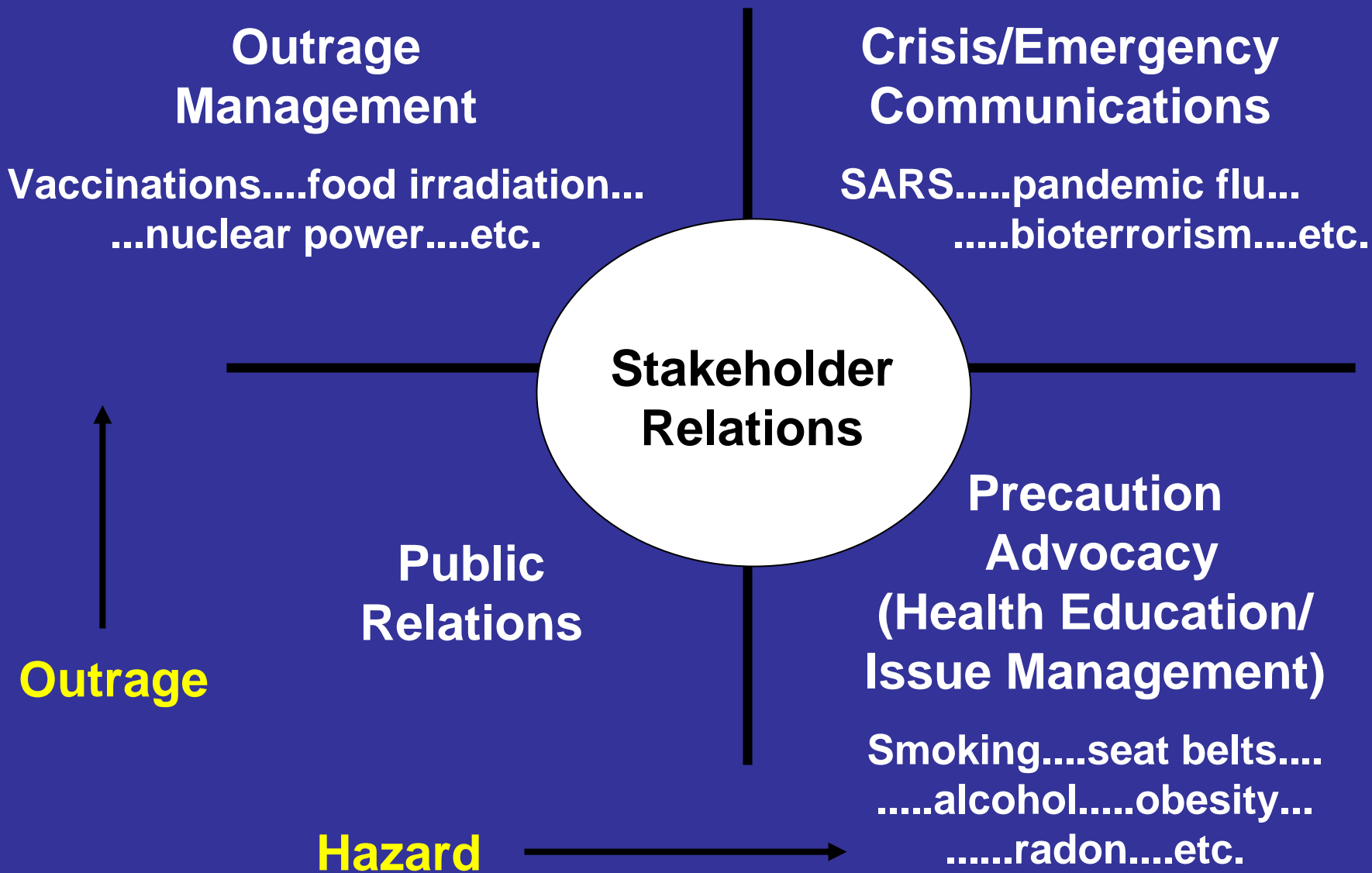
Public Relations

Precaution Advocacy (Health Education/ Issue Management)

Smoking....seat belts....
.....alcohol.....obesity...
.....radon....etc.

↑
Outrage

Hazard →



Preparing for catastrophic foodborne illness focuses on crisis communication

High	Outrage Management	Crisis/Emergency Risk Communication
Fear (Outrage)	Ignore	Precaution Advocacy
Low		
	Danger (Hazard)	High

The Goal:

- tailor communication so it takes into account emotional response to event
- prevent negative behavior that hampers response or *causes more harm*
- encourage constructive responses to crisis

Communications Planning (the basics)

WHO

says WHAT

WHEN

to WHOM

through WHAT CHANNEL

with WHAT EFFECT

Note: all unidirectional – we tell ‘them’

Elements of a risk communications plan

- Message – information content
- Logistics/media and communicator
- Audience assessment
- Audience involvement
- Metamessaging – non-verbal factors
- Self-assessment

Risk and crisis communication works throughout the lifecycle of a Crisis

- pre-crisis (planning phase)
- initial phase (the critical first 48 hrs.)
- maintenance phase (expansion of response)
- resolution phase (the “educable moment”)
- evaluation (“lessons learned”)

Best Practices in Risk Communication

1. Risk and crisis communication is an ongoing process
2. Conduct pre-event (pre-crisis) planning
3. Foster partnerships with public
4. Listen to public's concern and understand audience
5. Demonstrate honesty, candor and openness
5. Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources
7. Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible
8. Communicate with compassion, concern and empathy
9. Accept uncertainty and ambiguity
10. Provide messages of self-efficacy

1 Risk communication and crisis communication is an ongoing process

- Risk communication is a key component of the risk analysis process
- Risk analysis tools support rational decision-making in the face of uncertainty
- Therefore risk communication adds substance to the policy-making as well as helps consider the impact and implication of policy decisions

Risk Communication is part of the Risk Analysis Paradigm

- Everything we do involves risk
- Zero risk is unachievable
- Options exist for managing every risk
- Effectively managing risk involves
 - Hazard identification
 - Risk Assessment
 - Risk Communication

Participation critical to acceptance of risk analysis

- Effective risk management requires that all potentially affected parties are engaged in hazard identification, risk assessment and risk management processes
- Successful risk communication builds credibility and shared responsibility for risk management policies through involvement

#2 Conduct pre-crisis (pre-event) planning

- Identify risks, determine risk management strategies
- Pre-established decisions (initial response)
 - Walk through likely scenarios
- Practice and vicarious learning
- Reduction of uncertainty
 - “Forewarned is forearmed”
- Update regularly

#3 Partnerships with the Public

- Build positive relationships before crisis
 - Ask for active involvement
- Importance of public cooperation
 - Increases “buy-in”
- PublicS – not one general public
 - Producers/processers/retail/food service
 - Multiple cultures – minorities and new Americans

Risk Communication is active public involvement dealing with risks

- Includes educational initiatives to increase public understanding of issues
- Includes welcoming public questions, suggestions, and criticism
- Includes public engagement identifying hazards, assessing risks and evaluating management options

#4 Listen to Public Concerns

- The importance of input and feedback
 - “Seek first to understand”
- Accept legitimacy of public concerns
 - It’s their feeling, not yours!
- Dynamic nature of public perception
 - Never static, always waxing or waning
- Build a reservoir of good will
 - “Emotional bank account”

#5 Honesty, Openness, Frankness

- Honesty builds Credibility
- Share information and ask publics to share the risk
- Acknowledge Uncertain Contexts and provide Equivocal Responses
 - Don't be afraid to speculate
- Myth of public panic
 - Not substantiated by experience

#6 Collaborate and Coordinate with Credible Source

- Link messages to higher authorities
- Demonstrate consensus among relevant agencies (requires hard work!)
- Multiple subject matter experts
- Leverage resources
 - Don't need to reinvent the wheel

#7 Meet the Needs of the Media and Remain Accessible

- Media is NOT the enemy!
- Media is the channel to the greatest number of people and publics in the shortest period of time
 - It's where most people get their news
- Accessibility as expression of concern
 - Inaccessible = unfeeling (or cover-up?)
- Invest in media Training

#8 Compassion, Concern and Empathy

- Emotions are normal
 - Humanize the Response
 - Show concern, anger, frustration
- Natural Tendency of Technical Experts to be unemotional
- Meta-Messages speak louder than words
 - Expression of Empathy

#9 Accept Uncertainty and Ambiguity

- Crisis and risk are inherently uncertainty
 - Acknowledge what is known and not known
 - Share efforts underway to answer remaining questions
- Waiting for “all” the information creates an information vacuum
 - Others less informed will fill the vacuum

#10 Messages of Self-Efficacy

- American culture characterized by independent spirit and self-determination
 - Give people something to do
- Ability to act reasserts personal control
- The importance of meaningful actions
 - Can rank actions “must, can, might also..”

Crisis Communication and the Psychology of Crisis

- “Terrorism is the ability to disrupt numerous aspects of individual and community functioning. Attending to the psychological needs of the population is a crucial part of the recovery from a terrorism event, and preparedness and response present a challenge to the nation.”

Source: The National Institute of Medicine, 2003.

Crisis Communication and The Impact of Crisis

- “Public confidence in the safety of agriculture and food processing and packaging systems represents a key part of sustaining the economic viability of these sectors.”

Mel Bernstein, DHS, 2005

And economics affect public health...