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# Guidelines for Public Information during a Crisis

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# *Civil Emergency Planning*

- Civil Emergency Planning is an important component of NATO's Partnerships
- Recognizes the need to take account of civilian aspects in managing crises
- Recognizes that crisis communications are essential (example from personal experience)



## ***Guidelines***

- Guidelines are provided to assist nations
- Guidelines first developed at a seminar in Budapest in 2004 and approved in 2005
- Focus was communication to the population
- Provide a basic framework for informing the public during the preparation, response and recovery phases of a crisis
- Designed to assist nations in the development or review of public information policies and procedures



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## *Initial Topics*

- The importance of information and communication during a crisis
- Communication during the preparation, response and recovery phases
- Relations with the media
- Cross-border information issues



## **The importance of information and communication during a crisis**

- The importance of crisis communication
  - Confidence / Credibility
  - Citizens need information to act responsibly during times of crisis
  - Public can tolerate errors when they are admitted and explained
- Three dimensions of crisis communication
  - Communication during the actual crisis
  - Communicating how the crisis is being handled
  - Multiple parties portray the crisis image (nations, press, social media)
- Matching information to the needs of the recipient

## Communication during the preparation, response and recovery phases

- Make your preparations before the crisis occurs
  - Establish an organized information service
  - Raise the organizational awareness of the importance of crisis communications
  - Develop internal and external support networks
  - Maintain registers that enable rapid dissemination of information
  - Ensure Communications technology support
  - **Conduct crisis communication training and exercises**



## **Communication during the preparation, response and recovery phases (continued)**

- During the crisis (Response Phase)
  - Basics – Speed, Factual, Regular Updates
  - Understand the media's point of view
  - Press conferences, releases and hotlines
- Post-crisis (Recovery Phase)
  - Different issues – Repair, Reconstruction, Reconstitution
  - May need to continue for months or years
  - Target groups – Public, Press, Relief Organizations
  - Information Service involvement with policy and operational teams
  - Prepare for the recovery phase during response
  - Information for victims and relatives

## **Relations with the media**

- Good relations with media representatives facilitate the task of public information during a crisis
- Establish a Media Relations Unit close to the crisis
- Communicate rapidly and clearly a viewpoint on the crisis, its development, its consequences, decisions made
- Provide routine briefings
- Provide access with representatives of the authority
- Assist officials in communications
- Draw the media's attention to important aspects of the crisis management
- Review media content
- ***Use the Internet as a media channel***





## **Cross-border information issues**

- Crisis situations do not respect national boundaries
- The international dimension can pose challenges for public information
  - Different assessments of the situation
  - Different information policies
  - Different legislation and standards
- Trans-national cooperation
  - Enhance collaboration between authorities
  - Consider shared information platforms
  - Include crisis communications as a part of international exercises

- Guidelines were updated to include
  - Social Media
  - Lessons learned from exercises including communicating in the event of a CBRN-crisis
- Updates approved in 2013

## **Social media**

- Recognize the changing media landscape
- Provides direct access to the audience
- Develop an effective social media strategy
- Understand how factors such as social bonds built between friends, family and close colleagues are important to communications
- Provides the ability for listening and potentially myth-busting
- Understand which platforms appeal to different demographics and which hashtags people are following
- Trust in the messenger is still key

## **Communicating in the event of a CBRN-crisis**

- Similar to other crisis situations, communication must be open, transparent, honest and adapted to the stakeholders
- What makes CBRN-crisis special is the unfamiliarity of the public with the (alleged) effects of the release of certain agents and substances on their health
- An CBRN will create an enormous concern and fright among the public
- Monitor – It starts with listening to the concerns
- Speed – Who needs what information first
- Flexibility – e.g. Dealing with the wounded well

## **Need to understand the evolving nature of threats and risks and communications**

- Natural Disasters
- CBRN
- Communications Means – Social Media
- Prepare to Communicate
- Include Communications in your Training and Exercises