The ABC's of Public Information for Water Systems

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Why a Crisis Communications Plan?

Why a Crisis Communications Plan?

No, Seriously…

Over the past thirty years, our country has witnessed a tremendous take-back by the public of power over environmental policy. In the 1970's, people were largely content to leave control in the hands of established authorities, such as the Environmental Protection Agency. In the 1980's, however, the public reasserted its claims over environmental policy making. People became visibly upset, distressed, and even outraged when they felt excluded."

- Vincent T. Covello and Peter M. Sandman in "Risk Communication: Evolution and Revolution"

The A, B, C's of Crisis Communications

A

- Anticipation: Before talking to the media, anticipate likely questions and have answers ready for them.
- Agenda: Prepare an agenda of points we want to make during an interview. Make sure key messages come out during the interview.
- Accessibility: Be accessible to the media, and let them know we're accessible. Make sure senior managers are available, if needed, and let media know of their availability.

The A, B, C's of Crisis Communications

B

- Brevity: Answers should be concise and informative. Stick to the subject of the inquiry. Don't stray from the subject.
- B.S.: Don't. You'll damage your credibility if come across as insincere, or arrogant.
- Bad News: Get the bad news out ourselves, do it quickly and get it over with and behind us. The worse thing to do is prolong a crisis by stalling, so information drips out.

The A, B, C's of Crisis Communications

C

- Consistency: Consistency in message is always important, but it's critical in a crisis. Make sure information is as accurate and up-to-date as possible. Make sure spokesman is briefed by crisis team before talking to the media.
- Command: Grab command of the situation. Set up the crisis team that's small enough to move quickly but big enough to include key information resources or decision-makers.
- Concern and Compassion: We're concerned about our utility's reputation, but we're also concerned about the people who are affected – customers, employees and others. That concern should come across in dealings with the media.

In the First 24 Hours…

- **Checklist of key steps in the first 24 hours:**
  - Gather reliable information to make good decisions. Internal communications must be fast and good.
  - Assemble crisis team, including legal council (if necessary)
  - Take care of affected residents (victims) and families first
  - Don't rush to deny or accept responsibility
  - Respond to media inquiries immediately, even if we don't have all the answers right away. Delays could create perception that we're hiding something. If we don't know, say we don't know, but we're looking into it.
  - Prepare media statement
    - Stick to the facts. Don't speculate or theorize
    - Communicate concern and compassion

Crisis Communications Team

- Mayor or City Manager
- Water Superintendent
- Public Works Director
- City Attorney
- Public Safety (Police/Fire)
- City PIO

Selecting a Spokesperson

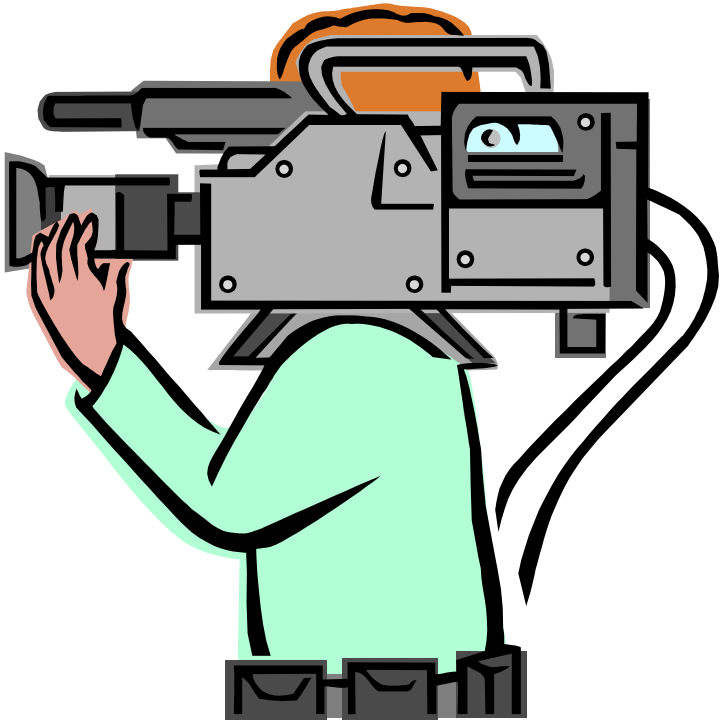
- **What makes a good spokesperson?**

1. Sincere expressions of empathy
2. A willingness to risk saying, “I don’t know, we’re working on it.”
3. Telling the truth
4. Confidence without arrogance
5. Appropriate emotion
6. Modulated voice
7. Direct eye contact
8. Humility or lack of defensiveness

What the Media Expect

- **Disasters or public health emergencies are media events, whether we like it or not. To use the media to effectively communicate messages to the public, it's helpful to know what the news media's expectations are during an emergency.**

1. Equal access to information
2. Honest answers to their questions
3. Timely release of information
4. Rumors squashed quickly
5. A schedule for regular media availabilities
6. Access to subject matter experts
7. Their calls returned



First Message in a Crisis

- **Should contain these six elements in the following order:**

1. Expression of empathy
2. Confirmed facts and action steps
3. What you don’t know about the situation
4. What’s the process
5. Statement of commitment
6. Where people can get more information

Constructing the 7-Part Answer

- **Developed by Dr. Covello, this is an effective tool to respond in almost any situation. You can tailor the template to communicate to various audiences:**

1. **Empathy, caring or commitment statement:** This will always come first.
2. **Three Key Messages:** "Rule of Three's" works best.
3. **Key Message 1 with two supporting facts:** Support with amplifying information.
4. **Key Message 2 with two supporting facts**
5. **Key Message 3 with two supporting facts**
6. **Repeat 3 key messages:** You're dealing with people who are highly stressed. This helps drill your message home.
7. **Future Actions:** Reiterate your commitment to resolving the issue.

During the Emergency…

- Regular updates to media/public
- Consider non-traditional media methods, like Twitter, Facebook, podcasts, website updates, etc.
- It's a 24-hour news cycle these days; citizen-journalists have changed the way the news is delivered and consumed.
- Everyone with a cell phone is a potential "journalist," so be ready.

After Emergency has Passed

- Make sure to notify public/regulators that emergency has passed.
- Explain to your customers/public what steps you have taken to correct the problem or prevent it from happening again.
- Collect and review media coverage of emergency to determine what worked and what didn't.

Other Communications/Outreach Ideas...

NOT EVERYTHING IS AN EMERGENCY. You need to communicate with your customers on a regular basis about their drinking water, price and other related issues.

Simple Outreach Efforts

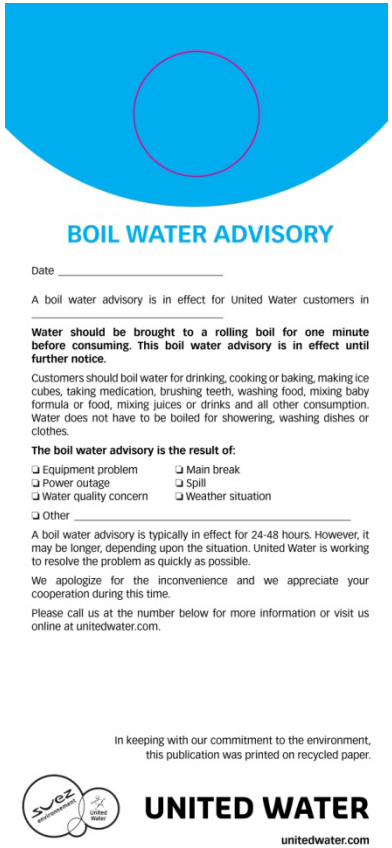
- **BILL INSERTS**
  - Data varies on how many customers actually read inserts
  - Free to distribute; can be produced at minimal cost
  - Directed to customer service initiatives, focused on conservation, etc.

Simple Outreach Efforts

- **BILL INSERTS**

Door Tags / Hangers

- Used to communicate immediate actions: Boil Water Notice, etc.
- Can be maximized with customer service information on the back.



BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Date _____

A boil water advisory is in effect for United Water customers in _____

Water should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute before consuming. This boil water advisory is in effect until further notice.

Customers should boil water for drinking, cooking or baking, making ice cubes, taking medication, brushing teeth, washing food, mixing baby formula or food, mixing juices or drinks and all other consumption. Water does not have to be boiled for showering, washing dishes or clothes.

The boil water advisory is the result of:

- ❑ Equipment problem
- ❑ Power outage
- ❑ Water quality concern
- ❑ Main break
- ❑ Spill
- ❑ Weather situation
- ❑ Other _____

A boil water advisory is typically in effect for 24-48 hours. However, it may be longer, depending upon the situation. United Water is working to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.

We apologize for the inconvenience and we appreciate your cooperation during this time.

Please call us at the number below for more information or visit us online at unitedwater.com.

In keeping with our commitment to the environment, this publication was printed on recycled paper.

UNITED WATER

unitedwater.com

10 DAY SHUTOFF NOTICE

Customer Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Account Number: _____

Date: _____ Amount Due: $ _____

Please be advised that water service to your property will be shut off in 10 days from the date shown above for:

- ❑ Non-payment of bill
- ❑ Returned check
- ❑ Inability to obtain meter readings for ____ consecutive billing periods

Payments can be made by cash, check, credit card (MasterCard/Visa), debit card or electronic check. A fee may apply.

Payment Methods:
- Phone: 888-608-6690
- On line: unitedwater.com

Call our Customer Service Center at the number below for further information or if you need assistance paying your bill.

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UNITED WATER

unitedwater.com

CCR's

- Every one of your customers gets one.
- Excellent medium to convey water quality information AND customer service information.

CCR's

DRINKING WATER QUALITY TABLE

The water quality table shows how the quality of your drinking water in 2010 compared to the standards set by the EPA and the ID DEQ. The tables in this report list minimum and maximum values for substances detected in our sources of supply. These ranges were determined using test results from 2006 through 2010; the most recent testing performed in accordance with all regulations. Each of the regulated contaminants compares to a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) and a Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) established by the EPA and the State of Idaho. We tested for more than 80 substances in the water and detected only those indicated in the Drinking Water Quality Table. Some of the information is technical in nature so we have provided you with definitions at the bottom of page 7 to help you better understand the information contained in this report.

PRIMARY STANDARDS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE SAFETY OF DRINKING WATER. WE TEST FOR 82 SUBSTANCES IN THIS CATEGORY AND DETECTED THESE:

Inorganic Chemicals	MCLG	MCL	Highest Result	Range of Results	Violation	Likely Source
Arsenic ppb (2008)	NA	10	7	ND - 7	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Barium ppm	2	2	0.13	ND - 0.13	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Cadmium ppb (2007)	5	5	0.5	ND - 0.5	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Chromium ppb (2009)	100	100	10	ND - 10	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Fluoride ppm (2008)	4	4	1.3	0.2 - 1.3	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Nitrate as nitrogen ppm	10	10	6.7	ND - 6.7	No	Runoff from fertilizer use
Selenium ppb (2008)	50	50	5	ND - 5	No	Erosion of natural deposits

	MCLG	AL	90th Percentile	Samples > AL	Violation	Likely Source
Copper ppm (2009)	1.3	1.3	0.54	0	No	Corrosion of household plumbing
Lead ppb (2009)	0	15	ND	0	No	Corrosion of household plumbing

Microbiologicals	MCLG	MCL	Highest Result	Range of Results	Violation	Likely Source
Total Coliforms (% positive in monthly samples)	0	<5% positive samples/month	0%	0%	No	Naturally present in the environment
Turbidity, ≤0.3 NTU	NA	TT**	99.9%	NA	No	Soil runoff
Turbidity, ≤1 NTU	NA	TT***	0.61	0.02 - 0.61	No	Soil runoff

Turbidity is the measure of clarity of the water. We monitor it because it is a good indicator of the effectiveness of our filtration system.
**Treatment Technique requires at least 95% of monthly samples to be less than or equal to 0.3 NTU.
***Treatment Technique requires no single measurement greater than 1 NTU.

Radionuclides	MCLG	MCL	Highest Result	Range of Results	Violation	Likely Source
Alpha emitters pCi/L (2008)	0	15	8	-9.1 - 8	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Radium 226 + 228 pCi/L (2008)	0	5	4	-8.2 - 4	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Uranium ppb (2009)	0	30	23	ND - 23	No	Erosion of natural deposits

Organic Chemicals	MCLG	MCL	Highest Annual Average	Range of Results	Violation	Likely Source
Tetrachloroethylene ppb	0	5	4.2	ND - 4.5	No	Discharge from factories and dry cleaners
Trichloroethylene ppb	0	5	0.7	ND - 0.7	No	Discharge from metal degreasing sites and other factories

Disinfection By-products	MCLG	MCL	Highest Annual Average	Range of+ Results	Violation	Likely Source
Total Trihalomethanes ppb	NA	80	16.4	ND - 31.8	No	Disinfection by-product
Total Haloacetic Acids ppb	NA	60	11.1	ND - 29	No	Disinfection by-product
Total Organic Carbon Removal^	NA	TT	1.0	NA	No	Naturally present in the environment

^Finished water Total Organic Carbon is less than 2.0 ppm; therefore no removal is required.
+ Maximum levels are site specific.

Disinfection Residuals	MRDLG	MRDL	Highest Annual Average	Range of Results	Violation	Likely Source
Chlorine Residual ppm	4	4	0.78	0.2 - 1.5	No	Disinfection by-product

QUESTIONS?