Planning For Emergencies

Todd Heidgerken
Tualatin Valley Water District

Overview

- Communications
- Preparing for emergencies
- Identifying opportunities & understanding your "culture"
- Identifying spokespersons
- Importance of coordination
- Creating and meeting expectations

For communications to be truly effective, each person must assume responsibility for understanding

Message Consists Of:

- __7__% Words
- __38__% Tone of Voice
- __55__ % Body Language

Clear Only If Known

What's it to you?

- What is an "overwhelming" majority? (%)
- How long is "recently?" (amount of time)
- How many are "several" people? (number)
- How long is "awhile?" (amount of time)
- Who is "older?" (age)

Don’t assume you know!

Customers often have different perceptions

Why you should prepare

- Avoid being caught off guard
- Anticipate questions
- Distribute information quickly
- Figure out what you don’t know
- Gives you a chance to practice

Video – Port of San Diego WMDs

Preparing

Detail likely emergencies

- System Issues (boil water notices)
- Storms (typical events that cause problem)
- Extreme weather events
- Earthquakes

Preparing

Beg, borrow and steal

(It's OK)

Preparing

Create talking points and templates in advance

- Brainstorm anticipated questions……and answers
- Multiple locations: have both electronic and hard copies
- Practice using your talking points: helps when dealing with the media

Preparing

Video – Charlie Brooker on reporting the news

Preparing

Incident Command System (ICS)

- Training courses
- Have forms and documents ready (both hard and electronic copies)

Preparing

- Have contacts for other agencies and those you need to keep informed
- Make sure someone is in charge of keeping elected officials informed
- Coordination is key!

Preparing

Have other types of information ready to go

- Web pages (ghost pages if necessary)
- Door hangers, handouts, brochures, sandwich boards
- Maps of affected areas (Google Maps)
- Youtube videos (create your own, link to others)

Preparing

Have backup plans

- No electricity, internet, phone
- Thomas guides (alternate routes to affected areas)

Preparing

Practice, Practice, Practice!

- Media training
- ICS training
- Public speaking/toastmasters
- Talk to media during non-emergencies (example: prepping for cold weather)
- Participate in multi-agency exercises

REMEMBER:

When stressed and upset, people have difficulty hearing, understanding and remembering more than three messages at a time

Understanding your culture

Don’t make an emergency the first time…

…someone hears from you

…you try a new communication method

…you have someone speak on behalf of your organization

…you plan for an emergency

Your basic communications shouldn't be new

Stick with what you know

- Press releases
- Web site
- Social media
- Community interaction/face to face

But sometimes you may need to be flexible

- You may have restrictions
- Be ready to go where the "action" is
- Be creative (as necessary)
- Press conferences

Use appropriate communications

- Tech savvy
  - Electronic communications
  - Social networks
- Neighborhood groups
  - Blogs
  - Newsletters (if timely)
  - Door to door
  - Signage

Seven rules for communications

- Accept and involve public
- Plan carefully and evaluate efforts
- Listen to public concerns
- Be honest, frank and open
- Coordinate and collaborate
- Work with media
- Speak clearly and with compassion

Source: Joe Jimenez, 2005 AWWA ACE Presentation

Identifying the right spokesperson(s)

Having the right spokesperson can deliver messages that are sincere, believable and authentic

What will people trust?

- _50_ % Empathy/Caring
- 15-20 % Dedication/Commitment
- 15-20 % Competency/Expertise
- 15-20 % Honesty/Openness

What ranks highest in high-concern situations?

Empathy
and Caring
(50%)

What ranks highest in low-concern situations?

Competence and Expertise (80-85%)

"I know nothing about the subject, but I'm happy to give you my expert opinion."

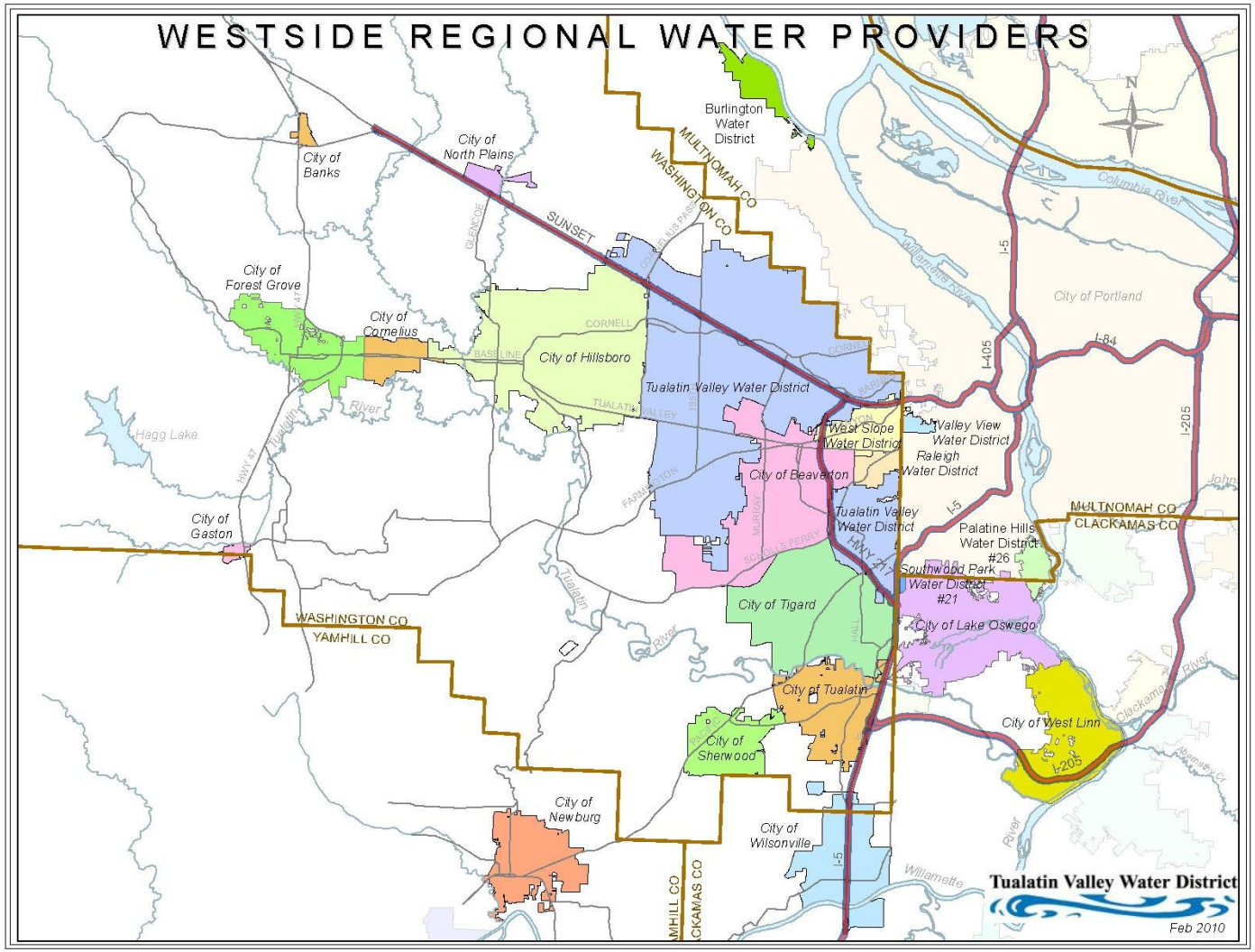
Other spokesperson qualities

- Calm under pressure
- Follows through
- OK with saying “I don’t know”
- Knows enough to sound credible
- Experienced with being in front of an audience
- Can direct information and stay on message

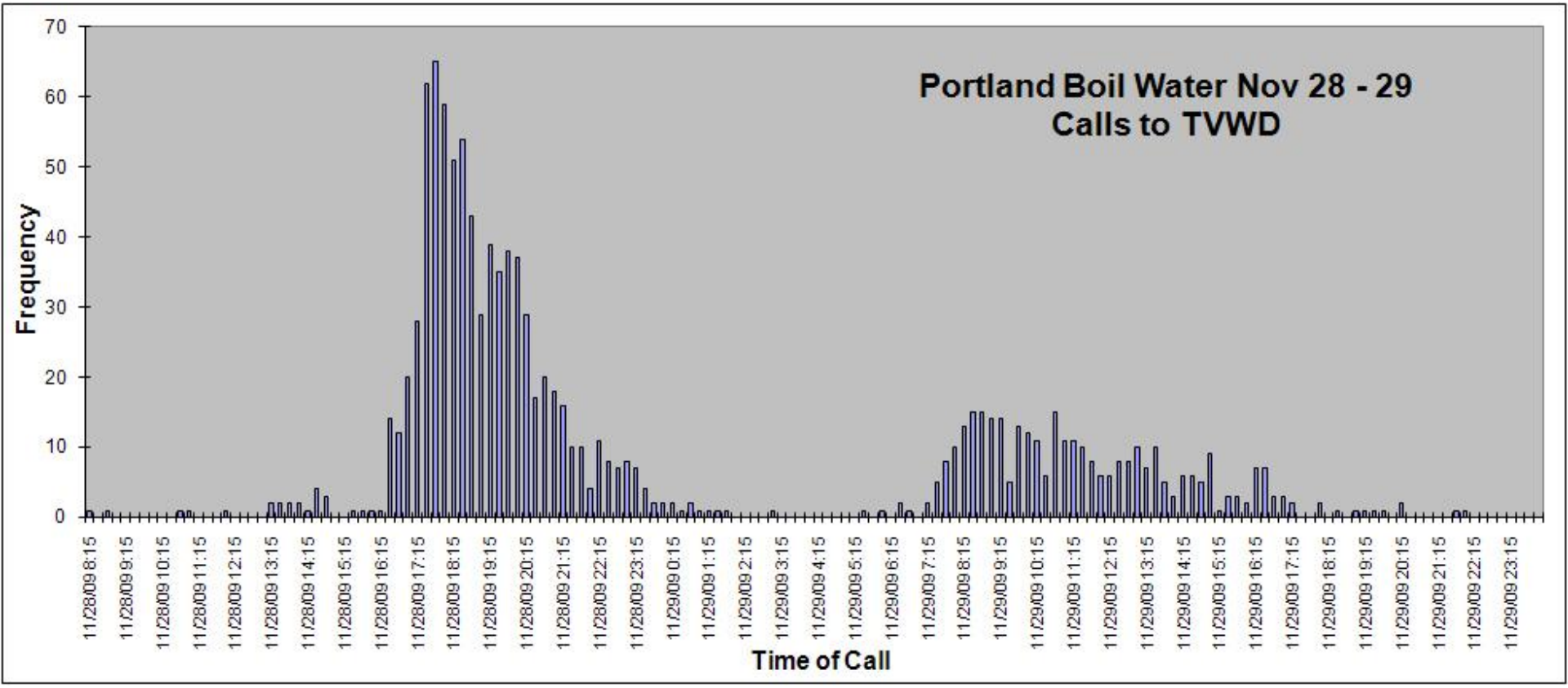
Coordination is key

- Media markets are usually shared
- Others can help disseminate the "correct" messages
- Others have resources you don't
- Provides consistent messages
- May have information you don't
- May be involved in the decisions

Boil water notice example



Boil water notice call volume



Can’t do it all on your own

- Have contact list of other government and non-government partners
- Strength in numbers
- Ask for help
- Provide help

Expectations for utilities

- Be honest
- Under promise and over deliver
- If you're unsure, don't say it
- Inform where and when information can be found
- Provide deadlines (if possible) but be sure to meet them
- Be respectful of needs

Expectations for audiences

- Detail what people can/should do
- Detail what people shouldn't do
- Expected actions
- Keep focused on messages and issues at hand

A good news conference

Video – E. coli event

Questions?

Todd Heidgerken

Manager, Office of Community and Intergovernmental Relations

Tualatin Valley Water District

(503) 848-3013

toddh@tvwd.org