Crisis Communication in Terror Attacks:

A Guide for Chief Executive Law Enforcement Officers

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I. Introduction

If you are a local law enforcement chief executive,[1] this guide is designed to help you communicate with the public about current, imminent, or potential terror attacks. In any of those cases, effective crisis communication is vital. You—the chief—will be called on to discuss how local law enforcement has prepared for or will respond to terror attacks.

Conveying time-critical information to the public during a crisis is the primary goal. However, chiefs also bear a responsibility for public education, media management, crisis management, and overall crisis leadership. Terror attacks (including bioterror events) require different communication approaches than do natural disasters or industrial accidents because they

- elicit especially intense public reactions,
- may overwhelm specialized state and local response capabilities, and
- can contaminate first responders, who may carry the agents back to law enforcement stations, hospitals, or other key locations.[2]

Terror attacks and similar incidents merit the addition of "fear management" to a chief's responsibilities. Why? One observer notes,

> Since 1995, and particularly since the anthrax attacks in 2001, many U.S. government officials and mass media have been increasingly vocal regarding the terrorist threat. They have not, however, properly emphasized the low probability of attack, but instead, have emphasized the potential for catastrophic consequences, as well as America's lack of preparedness to meet this burgeoning threat.[3]

To counteract this fear-inducing media hype, fear management can begin long before an event occurs. Such an approach may help community members lead more normal lives in threatening times.

Usually, after an attack, the local law enforcement agency takes a supporting role and reports to an overall incident commander in another agency. Nevertheless, the press will urge the local chief to give statements on the events, progress, and local agency response. Chiefs in other jurisdictions are often asked to comment on how the crisis will affect their own communities, whether a similar event is expected to occur elsewhere, and what the

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[1] Law enforcement executives include state police superintendents, sheriffs, police chiefs, and public safety directors. Throughout this guide, they will be referred to as chiefs or law enforcement executives.

[2] B. Reynolds, "Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication," training program for the Centers for Disease Control, 2002.

[3] R. Pangi, "After the Attack: The Psychological Consequences of Terrorism," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).

communities should do to prepare for or prevent such events. The information in this guide can help chiefs both inside and outside the jurisdiction that suffered the attack.

How to Use This Guide

This guide begins by outlining critical planning steps that should take place before an event occurs. It includes advice on communicating effectively in case of a terrorist event: how to reach the intended audience, how to deal with the media, and how to manage fear during the acute stages of an event. The guide also recommends steps that you may wish to consider in the aftermath of an attack. Finally, three appendices contain resources to help you prepare to communicate with the public, the media, and other law enforcement agencies after a terrorist event.

II. Preparing for a Crisis

Long before a terror attack, the most important step is to create an "all hazards" plan. The plan, which can be developed at the city, county, or region level, provides guidance on responding to a wide variety of multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction events, from natural disasters to terror attacks.[4] The plan should outline an incident command system that coordinates numerous agencies under a unified command.[5] By developing such a plan, agencies can form or strengthen relationships that will be vital during a crisis. The plan teaches each agency about the roles and responsibilities of its partner agencies and specifies who should be included in crisis communication and decision-making.

Within a law enforcement agency, the chief should be involved in all planning, including deciding how crisis communication will be handled and who will be involved in preparing information for release. As chief, you may wish to teach officers how respond when reporters press them to discuss an incident. All the planning and most of the work regarding crisis communication can actually be performed before an event occurs. Questions that the media may ask can be anticipated, and effective responses can be developed. Appendix C provides an outline of the important elements of such a plan.

Tip:
If possible, develop messages you may need to send out to the public during a crisis, such as evacuation routes or protective measures citizens should take.

Proper planning saves time and reduces confusion and disorder during a crisis. With a plan in place, chiefs have something to tweak well before a crisis occurs. Training and sample press releases can be developed, and spokespersons and resources can be identified.

After an attack, you will be working with other agencies. Consider developing your communications strategy in concert with them to ensure that law enforcement speaks with one voice.

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[4] D. W. Stephens and F. X. Hartmann, "The Policing Challenge," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).

[5] See, for example, John F. Kennedy School of Government, "An Overview of Incident Management Systems," http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=ISP&ctype=paper&item_id=119.

III. Dealing with the Media

It is important for local and state governments to communicate with local and national media sources. The parties should be open to beginning

> intensive discussions about their particular needs and expectations of one another, about how to educate the public and themselves about potential threats and possible future attacks, and about negotiating mutual assistance agreements.[6]

A chief can begin communication by reaching out to local media outlets, especially to reporters who regularly cover the jurisdiction. Such outreach provides an opportunity to teach members of the media how to protect themselves in a crisis. Often, reporters are on or near the scene of dangerous events (as were the reporters embedded with American troops in Iraq). As the chief, you can educate reporters about potentially dangerous situations and offer guidance on when it is too dangerous to report from a particular site. Similarly, the media should educate local and state officials (political leaders, police, and other first responders) about the needs of the media and the time constraints they work under. Understanding the media may help officials avoid the inaccurate "'sound bites' [that] come from political appointees who may know little about the substance of an issue" but who are pressed to make a statement.[7] It is also useful for the chief to provide the names and contact information of local and national experts from whom the media can seek advice.[8]

The Basics

Even if you are a seasoned veteran in dealing with the media, remember these basic rules:[9]

1. Assume that your words are on the record, all the time, even in casual conversation. Likewise, assume that the microphone and the camera are always on. Even if the camera is off, what you say is still on the record. If you want something to be off the record, say so ahead of time, and be sure the reporter agrees that what you say will be off the record.

2. Understand what "background," "off the record," and "not for attribution" mean.[10]

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[6] P. V. D. Emerson, "Utilizing the Mass Media," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).
[7] Emerson, p. 36.
[8] Emerson.
[9] W. Doniel, *Effective Media Skills for Law Enforcement,* St. Petersburg (FL) Regional Community Policing Institute training manual, 2002.
[10] There is some confusion about these terms. In general, "background information" may be used, but the reporter may not attribute it to a particular source. Information that is "not for attribution" must be treated the same way. "Off the record" information given by a source may not be used (either with or without attribution) unless the reporter subsequently develops the same information from another source. Even then, the reporter may not name the first source.

3. Always think before you speak. Try not to provide the media with controversy.

4. Keep a conversational tone during an interview with a reporter.

5. Be presentable. (In other words, ensure that you are sporting combed hair, clean clothes, etc.)

6. Avoid nervous habits like fidgeting or jingling change in your pocket.

7. In a television interview, look at the reporter, not the camera.

8. Try to get to know the reporter on your beat before a crisis occurs. Doing so will lessen any tension in the event of a crisis.

As the chief, you can use the media to communicate the threat, describe how it was assessed, educate the community about the nature of the danger, and define the response. Following a "full disclosure" policy with the media (within reasonable boundaries) leads to informative, sufficiently detailed reporting. Such reporting, in turn, provides law enforcement with several benefits:[11]

- Members of the public will be less likely to converge on the scene of the crisis to look for family members or volunteer help, inadvertently hindering official response efforts.

- "Telecommunications convergence" (the swamping of emergency numbers with non-emergency requests) may be avoided. More non-emergency calls may be preempted if information is provided to the public before they ask for it, and if the media mention which areas are not directly affected by the event (thus alleviating family concern for relatives near but not directly in the crisis location).

Tips:
- **If you think a reporter is trying to slant a story, ask him or her what the slant is.**
- **Ask the reporter what topics will be covered in the interview.**
- **If you are holding your first interview, tell the reporter. He or she should work with you to ease your anxiety.**

Adapted from Doniel, 2002.

In a crisis, you will need a place in which to meet with reporters. That place should be away from the department and away from the crisis scene. The site should be able to accommodate a large group of reporters[12] and should provide ample parking for satellite trucks. The media location should have a professional appearance, be well organized, and be supplied with such resources as blackboards or dry-erase boards where speakers' names can be posted (to ensure proper spelling).

Before you begin speaking, have staff create press releases and fact sheets that spell out the details of the crisis. This written matter should be handed out to reporters before you enter the room. That way, reporters will be less likely to shuffle the papers while you are speaking and can concentrate on you.

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[11] Pangi.
[12] Doniel.

Aggressive Reporting in Crises

The media—especially national reporters—tend to respond aggressively to crises. That aggression can create a powerful news opportunity for an agency, but as chief you may need to manage it carefully. Take care not to come across as hostile or defensive. Public perception of the department will be based on the attitude that you and your public information officer (PIO) display on camera.[13]

Tip:
If possible, hold the press conference at an hour that gives reporters enough time to work on their pieces and still meet their deadlines. Different deadlines apply to different media (local, regional, national, international, print, radio, and TV).

Be prepared for the following types of questions:[14]

- Who is in charge?
- How are the injured receiving help?
- Is the attack being contained?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning this might happen?
- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What do the data, information, or results mean?
- What bad things aren't you telling us?

Dealing with Bad News

The way in which bad news is delivered is crucial. According to one observer:

> Disasters and problems rarely kill an organization unless you let them. It is your own attitudes, negative communications, and poor planning that keep the spotlight on you and cause you real damage.[15]

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[13] Doniel.
[14] Reynolds, p. 132.

If bad news is to come out, release it to the media as early as possible. Also, to help the department retain its credibility, tell it like it is. To balance the bad news, tell the public what you are doing to fix the problem, and show that you are working on it.[16]

Realize that there may be an adversarial relationship between the media and your department. Reporters may ask questions that you do not want to answer, and some may deliberately seek to provoke you. Do not get mad and play into their hands.[17] When dealing with the media, remain calm and focused.

Whenever possible, identify peer groups that will speak for your organization. These could be national law enforcement organizations, such as the Police Executive Research Forum, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, Fraternal Order of Police, and others. You may also be able to call on local or regional organizations, such as the Chicago Police Women's Association or Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association. Be sure to provide your peer organizations with any necessary information about your agency or the controversy so that they may support you in the media. Also, publicly thank those who publicly support your department.

The PIO: An Essential Resource[18]

If a department has a public information officer (PIO), it is likely that he or she fields most media questions and spends a good deal of time with reporters. After a terror attack, the PIO's knowledge and experience can be invaluable. Although you, as chief, should be the primary spokesperson in a crisis, use the PIO often to free your time for other duties.

Before you address the media, the PIO should tell you what is likely to take place, how to handle reporters, and what questions may be asked. The PIO should also help you prepare and display visual aids, such as charts and graphs.

The PIO should help you in these ways, as well:

- Take the lead in releasing formal statements to the media.
- Prepare press releases.
- Organize press conferences.
- Set up interviews.

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[15] G. Buck, *Preparing for Terrorism: An Emergency Services Guide* (Canada: Delmar Publishers, 2002).
[16] Doniel.
[17] Doniel.
[18] This section is based on materials from a course offered at the RCPI at St. Petersburg College (FL). We would like to thank Bill Doniel (Deputy Chief, Retired, St. Petersburg Police Department, and RCPI adjunct instructor) for providing information on the importance and role of the PIO during a crisis.

Because the PIO's role is so important, he or she must have a backup, and during crises several non-sworn police personnel should be reassigned to the PIO and trained to work the press phones. A department's public information office should be staffed 24/7 during a crisis.

Tip:
Set up a separate phone bank to handle calls from the public, and assign someone to coordinate volunteers.

Also, remember that other agencies within the incident command system have their own PIOs. The various PIOs should know one another and be able to communicate during a crisis. It may even be useful to establish a joint operations center for PIOs, especially if the several departments and jurisdictions lie near each other.[19]

[19] We would like to thank Chief Bob Harrison from Vacaville, California, for providing guidance on the coordination of public information officers.

IV. Nine Steps of Crisis Communication

Crisis communication can be divided into nine steps, as follows:[20]

<u>Information-Gathering and Action-Oriented Steps</u>

1. Verify the situation.
2. Conduct notifications.
3. Conduct crisis assessment.
4. Organize assignments.

<u>Communication-Oriented Steps</u>

5. Prepare information and obtain approvals.
6. Release information to the media and the public through arranged channels.
7. Conduct public education.
8. Monitor events.
9. Obtain feedback and conduct crisis evaluation.

These steps provide a broad framework for communications after a major incident, such as a terror attack. The first four steps are basic responses common to almost all events involving law enforcement. They may even be outlined already in your agency's incident command system (ICS)[21] or emergency response plan (ERP). The first four steps may not even rightly be the task of a chief. For example, you might not personally notify other agencies but might instead direct staff to make those calls. Similarly, the situation may be assessed, not by you, but by department experts who have specialized training (e.g., hazmat-certified officers).

Beginning with Step 5, however, the cycle evolves from information-gathering and action-oriented steps to communication-oriented steps. Communication is arguably the most important tool when dealing with a multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction, high-profile event. Under such circumstances, you yourself (as opposed to other high-ranking officials or a PIO) probably will be the spokesperson for the law enforcement agency throughout the course of the event.

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[20] This nine-step scheme is adapted from B. Reynolds, *Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication* (2002). Appendix A describes the book's steps more fully. The book is used in a course on crisis communication offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[21] See John F. Kennedy School of Government, "An Overview of Incident Management Systems" at http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=ISP&ctype=paper&item_id=119.

Information-Gathering and Action-Oriented Steps

1. Verify the situation.

To the extent possible, gather all the facts about the event that is taking place or has already taken place. Ensure that the facts are accurate and that they were received from reliable sources. For example, first responders may encounter victims of a biological or chemical attack but may not attribute the injuries to terrorism. In other words, victims' symptoms or injuries may be misdiagnosed at first. Calling upon medical or other experts who can recognize a biological or chemical attack is key to verifying the situation.

If you lack information, use "affirmative language" to focus your audience's attention on your department's actions.[22] For example, you can say, "Those responsible for this attack have not yet been identified, but this is how we are proceeding."

In some instances, especially after a chemical or biological attack, the information you have may be highly technical and complex. Be prepared to discuss the ramifications of this type of incident with the public at a level that the public understands, or have a subject matter expert on hand. Ready access to this kind of information is critical. A department could establish an electronic library of reliable websites (from, for example, the Centers for Disease Control, Federal Emergency Management Agency, etc.) where chiefs and other personnel can access information on anthrax, sarin, dirty bombs, and other weapons. Such sites typically provide information in an understandable format. You can also direct the public to those sites so they can inform themselves about the hazards of such weapons.

2. Conduct notifications.

Identify individuals who should be notified and the procedures by which to notify them. It is vital that lines of communication exist before a crisis occurs. Agencies likely to be involved in the response to a chemical or biological attack (e.g., health or environmental organizations) should share contact information with other agencies. Agency contact individuals should be available at all times.

These procedures may already be outlined in an ICS or ERP. If no formal document exists, every effort should be made to outline a procedure before a major event occurs.

Take note of all the local, state, and federal agencies that may be needed to respond to a variety of incidents. For example, do you have the numbers of adjacent jurisdictions' law enforcement agencies, health agencies, political officials, and school representatives? Create a list before a crisis erupts.

3. Conduct crisis assessment.

In most circumstances, a local agency will be the first to respond to a major incident, including a terror attack. Thus, the local agency will be the first to assess the situation.

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[22] J. J. Burke, "How Leaders Can Confidently Step Up to a Reporter's Mike," presentation given at the Johns Hopkins Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies Summit: The Public As an Asset, Not a Problem: A Summit on Leadership During Bioterrorism, 2003.

The assessment should also identify the roles of local law enforcement and other agencies and organizations.

It is also important to assess, as early as possible, the extent to which private entities in the community are affected. Minimizing interruptions in business and the economy is essential. Many critical resources—communications, utilities, and medical services—are owned or operated by private businesses. As chief, you should include the private sector in pre-crisis planning and treat it as a key partner in crisis communication.[23]

As chief, you may wish to create a public–private commission composed of public sector officials and private sector representatives (business leaders) who would recommend ways to "establish and maintain private-sector involvement in domestic preparedness programs."[24] This can be done using a low-key approach, such as soliciting help from chambers of commerce.

4. Organize assignments.

Assignments will already have been made if local agencies have set up an ICS. However, once an event is under way, the chief and other agency heads will have to identify specific needs and allocate resources relevant to the particular incident. As chief, you or one of your representatives should keep in close contact with the incident commander.

A special challenge involves "two-hat" first responders—those who hold a full- or part-time position with one first responder agency but also carry a part-time or volunteer position with another such agency.[25] A critical planning step is to identify two-hat responders and collaborate with other agencies regarding staffing levels.

Also consider the logistics of communicating with other agencies. Communications interoperability is a well-known challenge for emergency responders. Moreover, on September 11, 2001, cell phones and radios were inoperable due to the high volume of traffic on the airwaves. Partnering with the local media may help to increase communications resources since they typically have technical experts and sophisticated mobile telecommunications systems that could be useful in a crisis.[26]

Working with other agency heads, you should identify other resources that may be needed, such as funding, contractors, or subject matter experts. One way to do so is through "operational teams" consisting of representatives from a wide range of public and private entities, such as public health agencies, environmental agencies, police and

[23] We would like to thank Terry Sult (anti-terrorism coordinator with the Charlotte–Mecklenburg Police Department) for suggesting a discussion of the importance of corporate entities and other private community partners during a crisis.
[24] J. N. Kayyem and P. E. Chang, "Engaging the Private Sector," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002), pp. 24-25.
[25] R. F. Denlinger and K. Gonzenbach, "The 'Two-Hat Syndrome': Determining Response Capabilities and Mutual Aid Limitations," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).
[26] Stephens and Hartmann.

fire departments, the National Guard, medical organizations, and academia.[27] These representatives should be brought together before a crisis occurs to identify problems in crisis management and help develop multi-agency, integrated responses to those problems. The same team can also help during an actual crisis, providing problem-solving consultants to operational managers and public officials who will likely be inundated with the immediate needs of the situation.[28]

This type of approach could be especially helpful for smaller jurisdictions, which may not have access to extensive resources. Regional collaborations could minimize the gaps felt by agencies in smaller jurisdictions.[29]

Given the dynamic nature of a terror attack, you should be prepared to respond to potential changes in events or circumstances at a moment's notice. The importance of having good communication cannot be overstated. It is vital that you draft and sign memoranda of understanding and mutual aid agreements in advance.

Finally, do not forget about the public. You may find yourself inundated with volunteers. Before that happens, assign someone within the agency to take responsibility for organizing volunteers during a crisis. During planning efforts, identify tasks that are suitable for volunteers. People will be looking for something to do, even if it is as humble as delivering meals to those who are homebound or donating blood.

Communication-Oriented Steps

While the preceding steps in crisis response focus predominantly on information gathering and action steps, the following steps focus on the communication measures that will be critical in any crisis.

5. Prepare information and obtain approvals.

Gathering accurate information about the events unfolding may sound intuitive, but during a crisis, trying to manage and make sense of vast amounts of information can be difficult. You may want to assign personnel to document what has occurred and what is still occurring so that you can stay up to date on all relevant information.

Also, determine how your agency will respond to that information. Does the department have policies or procedures in place for such an event? If not, what will be the agency's position on what has happened, what should be done to mitigate harm, and what follow-up is necessary? In developing answers to those questions, make sure to obtain any nec-

[27] R. Timperi, "Local and State Public Health Planning," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).
[28] Timperi.
[29] A. M. Howitt, "Promoting Regional Collaboration," in *Beyond the Beltway: Focusing on Hometown Security* (Cambridge, MA: Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).

essary approvals from partners or other agencies involved in the crisis. Do not make promises that the department cannot keep.[30]

6. Release information to the media and the public through arranged channels.

Even if a single, overall incident command structure is in place, many agencies will be involved in the response and follow-up phases of a crisis. When releasing information to the media and the public, agencies should provide a unified, consistent message. Failure to do so could cause embarrassment to the chief and could impede the cooperative effort needed to respond to such incidents.[31]

To ensure clear, uniform communication, the incident commander and his or her staff should consider establishing a joint information center that would include representatives from all relevant agencies. The center should hold regular briefings so that agency roles are clear and media questions are answered appropriately.[32] For example, in a joint information center, health officials may be able to educate others about their next steps to secure the health and safety of the community. Using a joint information center keeps all agencies up-to-date on the current state of knowledge and helps them coordinate their next steps with those of other responding agencies.

Use press releases, press reports, backgrounders, and other materials that are already in template form. Creating those materials from templates is faster than creating them from scratch and helps agencies get vital information out to the public quickly. See Appendix B for descriptions of such materials.

When releasing information, present a short, concise message and avoid using filler. Create positive action steps like "take the stairs," instead of "do not take the elevator."[33]

It may also be effective to communicate with the public via non-traditional means, such as e-mail, fax, the Internet, random or directed mass phone messages, 311 non-emergency numbers, and even local government cable television channels.[34]

In some cases, the media may be on-scene before any government agency has had a chance to make a formal media release. As chief, you should not feel pressured into making an early release. Instead, you may want the PIO to give the public preliminary information and state when you will make a formal statement.[35]

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[30] Reynolds.
[31] The authors thank Bruce Buckley of the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) for commenting on the potential ramifications of failing to communicate a consistent message.
[32] We would like to thank Major Tom Dailey, critical incident commanding officer with the Kansas City (MO) Police Department, for his comments on the importance of organizing multiple agencies before releasing information to the public.
[33] Reynolds.
[34] Stephens and Hartmann.
[35] Doniel.

7. Conduct public education.

You may or may not have the pulse of the community at a time of crisis. It is important to learn the public's perception of the current crisis and find out what they need to know. You may need to tell citizens how to follow officer directions or what they can do if they are near the scene. Use terms the public can understand. For example, instead of using law enforcement terms like "perpetrator" or "ascertained," say "We have not determined the motive behind the event." Also, if necessary, have subject matter experts on hand to answer questions so you will not have to answer for them.[36]

8. Monitor events.

The chief or a designated official should constantly monitor the media and the Internet and keep in close communication with others responding to the event. As chief, you need to be aware of breaking news. In some situations, the media may have more information than the officials who are leading the crisis response. As information becomes available, it should be verified and passed to department officials.

9. Obtain feedback and conduct crisis evaluation.

After the event has subsided (but before it is completely over), the chief or other responsible officials from the police department should obtain feedback from others involved in the crisis response to identify areas in need of improvement. Some of these may be corrected immediately—by, for example, clarifying appropriate channels for releasing news.

After the event, an after-action report would help resolve problems encountered during the event and prepare agencies for similar events in the future. The following are some after-action objectives for a chief:[37]

- Honestly examine department problems and mishaps, and then reinforce what worked during the recovery and response efforts.
- Promote—both inside and outside the agency—the organization's activities and capabilities. For example, point out that the department was able to respond to an incident quickly because it was well-equipped and trained for such events.
- Persuade the public to support public policy and resource allocation that will help the department better respond to future events.

[36] Doniel.
[37] Reynolds, p. 7.

V. Collecting and Disseminating Information

This section expands on crisis communication issues for chiefs.

Playing Catch-up

As noted above, sometimes the media will already be on-scene when a terrorist attack or similar event occurs. That situation puts the chief and other agency heads in the precarious position of playing "catch-up." Because everyone will be busy, updates may be delayed. Thus, you may have little time before the media begin to inundate you with questions. As chief, you cannot NOT communicate. Failure to communicate will not make the reporters go away.[38] If you do not have sufficient information, say "I don't know," followed by a positive statement, like "I will try to find the answer and get back with you."[39]

An example of communicating even when there is no time for press conferences occurred in New York on September 11, 2001. During the first critical hours after the planes hit the World Trade Center towers, Mayor Giuliani had little time to hold press conferences or even gather enough information to make a formal statement to the press. Moreover, communications channels (e.g., radios and cell phones) were difficult to use as there was a large number of people using the airwaves. However, the mayor felt he had to communicate with the public and the media, so he held what he termed "walking press conferences" where he spoke to the media as he walked through the city.[40]

In such a situation, you should be cautious about making specific statements about the extent of damage, number of casualties, or motive behind the event. At an early stage of a crisis, it is unlikely that you or other officials will know specific, verifiable details of the event.[41] Being lured into giving too much detailed information too soon can be a dangerous trap for chiefs who are inexperienced in dealing with savvy, aggressive national media.

Communicating Frequently and Effectively

In a crisis, the public expects frequent communication. Provide people with the information you currently have and know to be true. Also, to the extent possible, offer updates as you obtain additional information. Doing so may discourage "concerned family, the 'worried well,' and curious outsiders [from entering] the stricken area to seek information first-hand" and may reduce fear.[42]

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[38] Doniel.
[39] Doniel.
[40] R. W. Giuliani, *Leadership* (New York: Hyperion, 2002).
[41] We would like to thank Ron Sloan (Chief, Arvada, CO, Police Department) for providing thoughtful feedback on the importance of knowing what to do immediately following an event, based on his experiences with the Columbine High School shootings.
[42] Pangi.

Experts, professionals, and others not associated with your agency will comment publicly on the crisis and sometimes contradict or misinterpret your messages. Be sure to clarify your points when you are speaking with the press, and consider disseminating press releases or fact sheets to counterbalance the incorrect information. In an emergency, it is your job to convey such a clear message that the media is unlikely to misinterpret it.[43]

Organizing the Information

In a formal ICS, some individuals are assigned to collect and consolidate the massive amount of information that streams into emergency response agencies (e.g., tips, calls requesting help, or calls reporting other emergencies). However, it is difficult to analyze and respond to so many reports and requests. If an ICS in not in place, you and other agency heads may have to organize the information stream—at least until federal resources arrive. Make a plan to staff a team to handle that task.

Thinking Diversity

As chief, you serve an audience with varying backgrounds, knowledge, and education levels. The following are some particular audiences to keep in mind when structuring your communication effort:[44]

- Persons directly affected by the event
- Persons outside the affected area
- First responders and their families
- Victims and their families
- Government leaders at local, state, and federal levels (including Congress)
- The larger, national community
- International communities, in the event of a significant or large-scale event

To make your message understandable to a wide audience, use familiar frames of reference to explain how much, how big, etc. For example, if you say the containment area extends the length of 15 football fields, people will understand you better than if you say the containment area is 1,500 yards long.

To some extent, you can control the public's focus by providing pictures, charts, or other visual aids.[45] Make sure any displays are large and clear, not cluttered. Provide the media with a written explanation of the image if they anticipate using it in their newspapers or television clips. The explanation will reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

[43] Burke.
[44] Reynolds, p. 35.
[45] Burke.

Building Trust and Credibility with the Public

During a crisis, acknowledge the public's uncertainty and fear. Do not focus on allaying panic, as panic is much less common than is generally thought.[46] Rather, emphasize that a process is in place for addressing an event like the current crisis.

It is also wise not to over-reassure the public by minimizing the damage. If an estimate on loss of life needs to be adjusted later, it is better to adjust down than up.[47]

Tip:
Work with the PIO if you are releasing sensitive information in a formal statement. The PIO has been trained in how to present such information to the public and will be able to provide guidance.

[46] P. Sandman, "Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication," originally published in Emergency Risk Communication CDCynergy, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003. Available at www.psandman.com.
[47] Sandman.

VI. After the Event

After a crisis subsides, it is still important to keep the public involved and informed.[48] People will be asking themselves many questions:

- How could this happen?
- Has this happened before?
- How can I prevent this from happening again?
- Will I be all right in the long term—will I recover?

As the chief, you can provide background information to help people better understand their risks.

It is also important to gain understanding and support from other agencies and the public for your department's response and recovery plans. Listen to stakeholders and public feedback, answer outstanding questions, and correct any misinformation.

Dealing with a Distraught Public

For some time after a crisis, various members of the public may experience the following emotions and symptoms:

Fear	Grief
Withdrawal	Anger
Numbness	Despair
Denial	Sadness
Flashbacks	Hopelessness and helplessness

Some may even demand unneeded treatment, engage in disorganized group behavior, commit bribery or fraud, or engage in substance abuse.

Fortunately, both fear and calm are contagious. If those communicating with the public are calm, that condition can spread quickly.

Preparing for Critical Evaluation

As the crisis resolves, public and media interest generally declines. However, you may need to respond to media scrutiny of how the event was handled. Be prepared to answer questions about command and control, tactical decisions, and other topics. As the chief, you should be prepared to be criticized about the handling of the situation.

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[48] This section draws on Reynolds, p. 65.

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Appendix A: Nine Steps of Crisis Intervention: Key Questions and Tasks

This section presents the nine steps of crisis intervention in condensed form.[49]

Step 1: Verify situation.

- Get the facts.
- Obtain information from additional sources to put the event in perspective.
- Ascertain the information source and determine credibility. Did the information come from a formal source? Did the information come from an informal channel, such as a nongovernmental partner? Is this a rumor (e.g., an e-mail chain)?
- Review and critically judge all information.
- Determine whether the information is consistent with other sources.
- Determine whether the characterization of the event is plausible.
- Clarify information through subject matter experts.
- Attempt to verify the event's magnitude.
- Begin to identify staffing and resource needs to meet the expected media and public interest.
- Determine who should be notified of this potential crisis.

Step 2: Conduct notifications.

Conduct notifications as required through the incident command system.

Step 3: Conduct crisis assessment (activate crisis plan).

Throughout the event, continue to gather information; try to determine the severity of the situation and the potential impact on communication operations, resources, and staffing. This requires swift and active research.

- Determine the organization, office, or individual in charge of managing the crisis. Ensure that direct and frequent contact with the office in charge is possible.
- Continue to gather and check the facts. What happened? What was done to keep the situation from happening? What can be done to keep it from getting worse?

[49] Adapted from Reynolds.

- Determine what your organization is doing to end the crisis. Is there an investigation? Who is involved in it?

- Determine what other agencies and organizations are doing to solve the crisis.

- Determine who is being affected by this crisis. What are their perceptions? What do they want and need to know?

- Determine what the public should be doing.

- Activate media and Internet monitoring. Determine what is being said about the event. Is the information accurate?

Step 4: Organize assignments.

Initial Organizational Questions

- Who is managing the event, programmatically and scientifically?

- How should communication interface with the program staff in charge of managing the crisis? Are there meetings that communication staff should attend?

- Are all crisis communication teams operational (media, public, partner, stakeholder, support)?

- What are your current priorities?

- What resources are needed? Is staffing sufficient?

- Who is your spokesperson for this event?

- Do you need subject matter experts (SMEs) as additional spokespersons?

- Should communication operate 10, 12, 20, or 24 hours a day?

- Should communication operate 5, 6, or 7 days a week?

- Will communication staff be expected to travel?

- Are supplemental funds needed?

- Is contractor support needed?

- How consistent is information across sources?

Ongoing Organizational Questions

- What do investigators say about the potential for a worsening of the crisis?

- Could events result in more intense public or media interest?
- What rumors or points of conflict have been identified?
- How should your organization respond to these issues? Is its response working?
- Should the organization continue to be a source of information to the media about this crisis, or would some issues be addressed more appropriately by other government entities?
- Are the teams operating with approximately equal intensity? How could you improve efficiency? Would reassignments help?
- Are resources sufficient?
- Should your organization reset times for daily updates to the media (e.g., set a time for a media update via Web and broadcast fax) or cancel the regular updates?
- Are daily or weekly SME briefings appropriate to reduce the demand for one-on-one interviews with SMEs?
- Should detailed persons be extended or returned to normal duties?
- Are supplemental funds needed to meet public or media demand for information?
- What is the organization learning from the public and media that could be useful to other agencies?

Partner Involvement Questions

- Are partner organizations unduly concerned about their own reputations?
- Which partners are or should be involved in this crisis?
- How do partners wish to get involved in your response?
- Have traditional partners been given updates?
- Who are your traditional partners?
  - Other agencies
  - Volunteer organizations
  - Associations
  - Private sector

Step 5: Prepare information and obtain approvals.

This function includes all message and material development, the approval process, and the coordination of information within your organization.

Message Development Questions

- Who are your audiences? Who has been affected by this event? Who is upset or concerned? Who needs to be alerted to this situation?
- What are those audiences' perceptions and information needs?
- What do the media want to know?
- How should you show empathy?
- What are the facts? What happened?
- What is your policy on this issue?
- What are you doing about this issue? How are you solving the problem?
- What can you do to keep this from happening again?
- What other agencies or third parties are involved? What are they saying?
- What should the public be doing?
- What public information is available?
- When will more information be available?

Approval Process

The approval process is unique to each organization.

Step 6: Release information to the media, public, and partners through arranged channels.

When talking to the media:

- Provide only information that has been approved by the appropriate managers. Do not speculate.
- Repeat the facts about the event.
- Describe the data collection and investigation process.
- Describe what your organization is doing about the crisis.

- Describe what other organizations are doing.
- Explain what the public should be doing.
- Describe how to obtain more information about the situation.

Step 7: Conduct public education.

Once the crisis has subsided, the organization may need to carry out additional public education activities:

- What are the public's perceptions and information needs related to this crisis?
- Does the public understand your messages on this issue? Are they taking appropriate actions?
- Should you also educate audiences that were not involved in the crisis?
- Should you use this event to highlight any related public health messages?
- Should any Web sites be updated as a result of this crisis?
- Should any of the crisis materials be institutionalized?
- Would a series of "canned" articles be useful after a crisis has occurred?

Step 8: Monitor events.

Crisis monitoring protocols include:

- Media monitoring
- Internet monitoring
- Ongoing exchanges of information between your organization and others
- Ongoing communication with SMEs and partners
- Monitoring of public opinion data and other research

Step 9: Obtain feedback and conduct crisis evaluation.

As soon as is feasible following a crisis, conduct an evaluation of the organization's response.

- Compile and analyze comments and criticisms from the customer base.
- Compile and analyze media coverage.
- Conduct an "after action" to capture lessons learned.

- Develop a “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats” (SWOT) report on the crisis communication operation.
- Report results of content analysis and SWOT to leadership.
- Share results within your organization.
- Consider whether journal articles could be developed from the analyses.
- Determine need for changes to the crisis communication plan.
- Determine need to improve policies and processes.
- Institutionalize changes with appropriate training.
- Revise crisis plan policies and procedures based on lessons learned.

Appendix B: Media Tools

Press Releases

Start with the basic information first. Some media representatives may not have basic knowledge about the event (e.g., a basic understanding of VX, sarin, etc.) or the consequences of that event (e.g., health implications).

Press releases should fit on one page and should include the who, what, when, where, why, and how of an event.

Press Statements

Typically, press statements are not news but may present official positions or perspectives of the law enforcement agency. They are only a few paragraphs long and are attributed to a high-ranking official in the organization. Statements may be used as a means for an official to be quoted as having responded to an issue without the need for a media opportunity; to offer words of encouragement to victims, responders, or others; or to counter a contrary view about an important subject matter. Use press statements sparingly.

Fact Sheets and Backgrounders

Both may be attached to press releases and may run several pages in length. Fact sheets should be in bullet form, beginning with broad information and moving to specific information about a particular subject. Backgrounders are in paragraph format and provide history and other more detailed information that cannot be put in bullet format. These should be prepared before an incident.

Visuals, Video Press Releases, and B-Roll

Consider taping 10- to 20-second sound bites that will be easy for the media to use and that will stand alone. Video press releases could be too time-consuming to produce. B-roll (silent background video) is easy to produce and easy for the media to incorporate. B-roll may also be prepared in advance and should include an index describing what is shown. Video releases and B-roll must be professionally produced.

Appendix C: Emergency Risk and Crisis Communication Plan

An emergency risk and crisis communication plan should include the following elements:[50]

- Signed endorsement from your city manager, mayor, or other official
- Designated line and staff responsibilities for the public information teams
- Internal information verification and clearance/approval procedures
- Agreements on information release authorities (who releases what/when/how)
- Regional and local media contact list (including after-hours news desks)
- Procedures to coordinate with other response teams
- Designated spokespersons for public health issues and third-party validators in an emergency
- Contact numbers for emergency response information partners (e.g., governor's public affairs officer, local FBI public information special agent in charge, local or regional department of agriculture or veterinarian public information officers, Red Cross, and other nongovernmental organizations)
- Agreements/procedures to join the joint information center of the emergency operations center (if activated)
- Procedures to secure needed resources (space, equipment, people) to operate the public information and media operation during a public health emergency 24 hours a day/7 days a week, if needed
- Information-dissemination means (e.g., e-mail listservs, broadcast fax, door-to-door leaflets, press releases) for communicating with the public, stakeholders, and partners during a crisis

[50] Adapted from Reynolds.