



# DON RAB/TRC Training Workshop

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## **Risk Communication**

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## Risk Communication

# The Navy Environmental Health Center Environmental Programs

- Medical command located in Norfolk, Virginia
- Environmental Programs Directorate provides public health consultation services for the Navy/Marine Corps environmental programs
- Navy/Marine Corps Risk Communication center of expertise
- NEHC = our acronym





Risk Communication

# Risk Communication...

## *What is it?*



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Risk Communication is the **two-way** communication of information concerning a risk or perceived risk to individuals or groups—including a community.





## Risk Communication

# Risk Communication... Three Primary Goals

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- Increase knowledge and understanding
- Enhance trust and credibility
- Resolve conflict



## Risk Communication

# Risk Communication...

## *Why is it Difficult?*

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- Lack of trust of information sources
- Information is not conveyed in terms that are understandable
- Lack of scientific understanding
- Perception, whether accurate or not, equals reality
- Increasing public concern and fear of safety, health, and environmental risks
- Increasing media influence



## Risk Communication

# Risk Communication...

## 7 Cardinal Rules

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- Accept and involve the public as a legitimate partner
- Plan carefully and evaluate your performance
- Listen to the audience
- Be honest, frank, and open
- Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources
- Meet the needs of the media
- Speak clearly and with compassion



## Risk Communication

# Risk Communication... Today's Focus

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- Trust – it is importance for maintaining open and effective communication
- Addressing concerns and tough technical issues – how to do it effectively
- Spreading the word – how to provide information to large groups of people



## Risk Communication



# Trust

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- Essential for stable relationships
- Vital to establish and maintain cooperation
- Built by individuals, not organizations
- Actions speak louder than words
- Long-term commitment



## Risk Communication



# What Factors Determine Trust?

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- Empathy & caring (most important!)
- Dedication & commitment
- Honesty & openness
- Competence & expertise



## Risk Communication

# Trust and Credibility Ranking 1998 Survey Results

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**Most**



**Least**

- Local citizens and/or citizen advisory panels who are perceived to be neutral, respected, and well-informed about the issue
- Non-management employees
- Nurses, physicians and other health professionals
- Safety/emergency response professionals (fire chief)
- Professors/Educators (from respected local institutions)
- Non-profit voluntary health organizations
- Professional societies
- Media
- Environmental groups
- Industry officials
- Federal government officials
- Environmental consultants from “for-profit” firms

May 18, 2001

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# Credibility Transference

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“A lower credibility source takes on the credibility of the highest credible source that agrees with its position on an issue.”



## Risk Communication



# Empathy and Caring

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- Know the audience
- Address key concerns
- Watch body language
- Communicate early and often
- Listen



# Active Listening

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- Ability to hear words and emotions (feelings) and feed back accurately to the speaker both their words and their feelings
- In the early stages of listening, the feedback of emotions/feelings is usually more important than the feedback of words/facts



## Risk Communication

# Active Listening Is More than Just the Words...

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- Paraphrase
- Feeling words
- Body language
- Voice
- Emotions behind the words



# Paraphrasing

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- Restate the content or feeling to show understanding
  - Doing this doesn't mean you agree!
  - This demonstrates that you are actively listening
- Provide encouragement by getting more information



## Risk Communication



# Feeling Words

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- Using feeling words helps get more information
- Provides encouragement by discussing the speaker's feelings



## Risk Communication



# Voice

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- Verbals that are non-verbals
- Be aware of:
  - Changes in pitch
  - Changes in speed
  - Hesitation



# Word Emphasis

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- Which word is emphasized?
  - May influence the meaning of the message!
- For Example
  - What does, “Oh, it’s you!” mean?
  - What does, “What a weekend I had!” mean?



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# Body Language to Demonstrate Active Listening

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- Lean in – some
- Eye contact
- Square up
- Open
- Distance
- No distracting motion
- Some movement energy



## Risk Communication

# How Do We Show We Are Honest & Open?

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- Admit mistakes early
- If you don't know the answer, find someone who does
- Prepare messages that are understandable



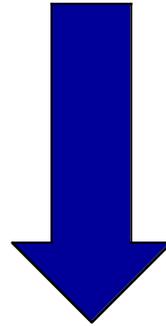
Risk Communication

# When Should We Release Information?

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**Early & often**



## Risk Communication



# Why?

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- People are entitled to information that affects their lives
- Sets the pace for problem solving
- Loss of trust and credibility if the story leaks anyway
- More control of accuracy of information
- Increase public trust



Risk Communication

# How Do We Demonstrate Competence & Expertise?

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- Be prepared
- Provide biographical information
- Dress professionally



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# How Do We Show We Are Dedicated & Committed?

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- Come early/stay late
- Keep your promises!
- Be available
- Listen!!!



## Risk Communication

# Addressing Concerns...

## *Why is it Often Hard to Do?*

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People who are upset have difficulty hearing and processing information.





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# Addressing Concerns... Effective Responses

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- Get to the point
- Are easy to understand
- Repeat your conclusion or the most important information



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# Getting to the Point... Perception = Reality



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People who are upset have perceptions of risk that are often very different than those of technical experts.





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# Getting to the Point... Risk Perception Factors

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- Trust
- Benefit
- Control (Voluntary)
- Fairness (Share)



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# Getting to the Point... Risk Comparisons

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- Avoid if possible
- Compare only similar risks
- Only use to put numbers in perspective



## Risk Communication

# Easy to Understand... Keep it Short and Simple

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- Vocabulary should be easy to understand by all community members
- Avoid technical terms or “jargon” and the use of acronyms
- Avoid lengthy, run-on sentences
- Layer your information



## Risk Communication

# Easy to understand... Examples of Jargon

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- Remediation
- Toxicologist
- Industrial Hygienist
- RI/FS
- $10^{-6}$
- RCRA
- IRP
- Plume
- CDC
- TCE



## Risk Communication

# Easy to understand... Layering Information

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- Provide the simplest answer or explanation first
- Provide additional details as needed to meet individual needs



## Risk Communication



# Executive Summaries

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- Most frequently read part of document
- Prepared to be easily understood by all community members
- Clear & concise



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# Example...

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“Following revegetation, any disturbed areas will be reoccupied by a like assemblage of alien avian and mammalian species.”

OR

“After the plants grow back, the birds and animals will return. ”



## Risk Communication

# Repeat Your Conclusion... *The Triple T (TTT) Model*

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**T**ell them what you are going to tell them.

**T**ell them.

**T**ell them what you told them.



## Risk Communication

# Spreading the Word... Tools to Use

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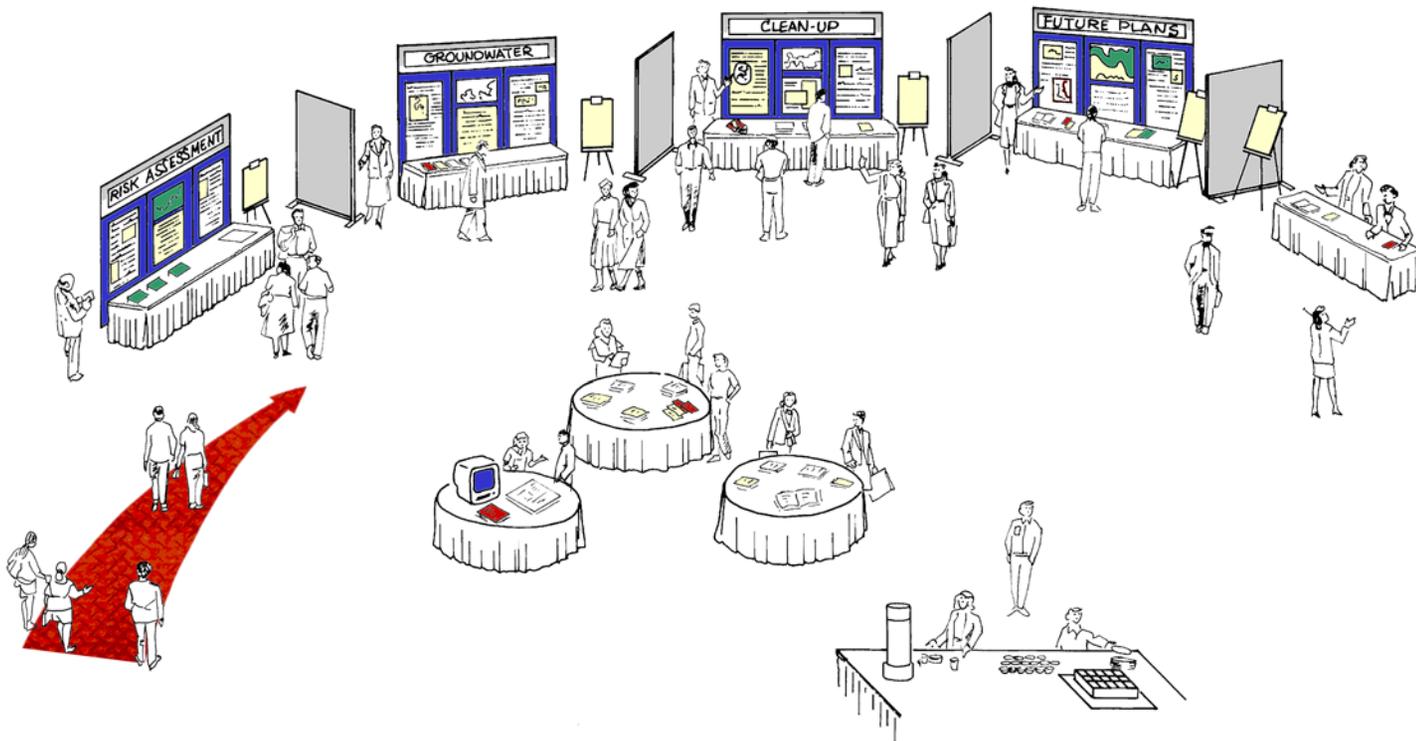
- Telephone calls
- E-mail
- Open house public meetings
- Tours
- Speaker bureaus
- Newsletters
- Press releases
- Workshops
- Web sites
- Citizen advisory boards
- Fact sheets



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# Spreading the Word... Open House Public Meetings

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## Risk Communication

# NEHC Environmental Programs Directorate

## Examples of Services...

- Assist with open house public meeting
- Informational posters
- Fact Sheets
- Risk communication review of written materials
- Public health training for RABs (variety of topics)
- Assist with community relations plans
- Meeting planning
- Message development





Risk Communication



# For Assistance Contact...

*The Navy Environmental Health Center  
Environmental Programs Directorate*

2510 Walmer Avenue  
Norfolk, VA 23513  
Telephone (757) 462-5548  
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*Or visit our website at...*

***[www-nehc.med.navy.mil](http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil)***

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# NEHC Environmental Programs Directorate

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