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LESSON LEARNED

Managing Public Information During a High-Profile Incident

SUMMARY

Media coverage of a high-profile incident can contribute to the spread of misinformation, thus hindering emergency response and recovery activities. Public information officers (PIOs) can minimize such problems through planning, organization, and quick and consistent communications.

DESCRIPTION

Almost immediately following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, media inundated the area surrounding the incident site. While public information officials had existing plans for communicating with the media, the scope of the incident and the sheer volume of media personnel quickly overwhelmed the provisions in the initial plans.

Officials had a difficult time coordinating information and communicating consistent messages to the media. As a result, unconfirmed requests for support were conveyed to the media and broadcast to the public, leading to unneeded donations and volunteers crowding the scene. Amidst this confusion, public information officers (PIOs) failed to provide timely and consistent instructions to off-duty personnel about whether to stay put or report to the scene.

Four days after the incident, PIOs established a Joint Information Center (JIC) in Oklahoma City to coordinate public information. Officials in Oklahoma City found that the integrated JIC was able to effectively communicate important information to the public about injured and deceased persons, recovery efforts, and potential needs.

CITATIONS

National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. *Oklahoma City, 7 Years Later: Lessons for Other Communities*. April 19, 2002.

(<http://www.mipt.org/pdf/MIPT-OKC7YearsLater.pdf>)

Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management. *After-Action Report: Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building Bombing*. July 1996.

(<http://www.ok.gov/oem/docs/Bombing%20After%20Action%20Report.pdf>)

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