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LESSON LEARNED

Crisis Communications: Organizing Teleconferences

SUMMARY

Following a major emergency, public information officers (PIOs) may consider organizing teleconferences to supplement regular in-person press briefings and interviews. Teleconferences offer the media additional interaction with government experts and officials without requiring the time and logistics necessary to meet each other in person.

DESCRIPTION

During the 2001 anthrax attacks, journalists inundated the Public Affairs Office of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) with requests for interviews with experts and government officials. HHS personnel involved with incident management had to transfer time from operational responsibilities to conduct public interviews. Despite these efforts, reporters were still frustrated with the limited amount of time HHS personnel had available to meet with the media.

The HHS Public Affairs Office began organizing teleconferences in order to create additional opportunities for media representatives to meet with officials. These teleconferences allowed officials to offer personal interviews without requiring travel or other time-intensive logistics.

Organizing teleconferences can help reduce the amount of time experts and officials spend working with the media during a major emergency. Teleconferences support the response effort by providing the public with up-to-date information, yet government officials do not transfer their valuable time from emergency response tasks to media briefings.

CITATION

Kevin Keane, HHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, interview by Nolan Walters of the National Press Foundation, 2002.

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