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LESSON LEARNED

Crisis Communications: Monitoring Media Coverage

SUMMARY

After a major emergency, misleading or inaccurate news reports about the response or investigation are common. Public information officials (PIOs) should regularly monitor media reports and work to correct any inaccuracies.

DESCRIPTION

During the anthrax attacks of 2001, the news media often turned to individuals outside of government to speculate on the nature of the attacks and the status of the ongoing investigation. Many of these individuals knew few specifics about the investigation and often exaggerated their expertise, leading to inaccurate reporting that exacerbated public confusion and concern.

The Office of Communication at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began to monitor the media regularly for misleading or erroneous reports. CDC officials addressed inaccurate stories and, if available, responded with correct information. News organizations relaying flawed information were contacted and asked to present the countervailing facts or publish corrections.

Monitoring media coverage helps PIOs keep track of information reaching the public. In doing so, PIOs can respond to misleading and potentially confusing reports and ensure that correct information is eventually released.

CITATION

Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, "What Should We Know? Whom Do We Tell?" Project Report, December 2002.

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Interview with Barbara Reynolds, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 July, 2004.

Christine E. Prue, Cheryl Lackey, Lisa Swenarski, and Judy M. Gantt, "Communication Monitoring: Shaping CDC's Emergency Risk Communication Efforts," *Journal of Health Communication* (Taylor and Francis, Inc.: 2003), pp 35-49.

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~cih/journal/>

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