

**LIBERTY COUNTY**

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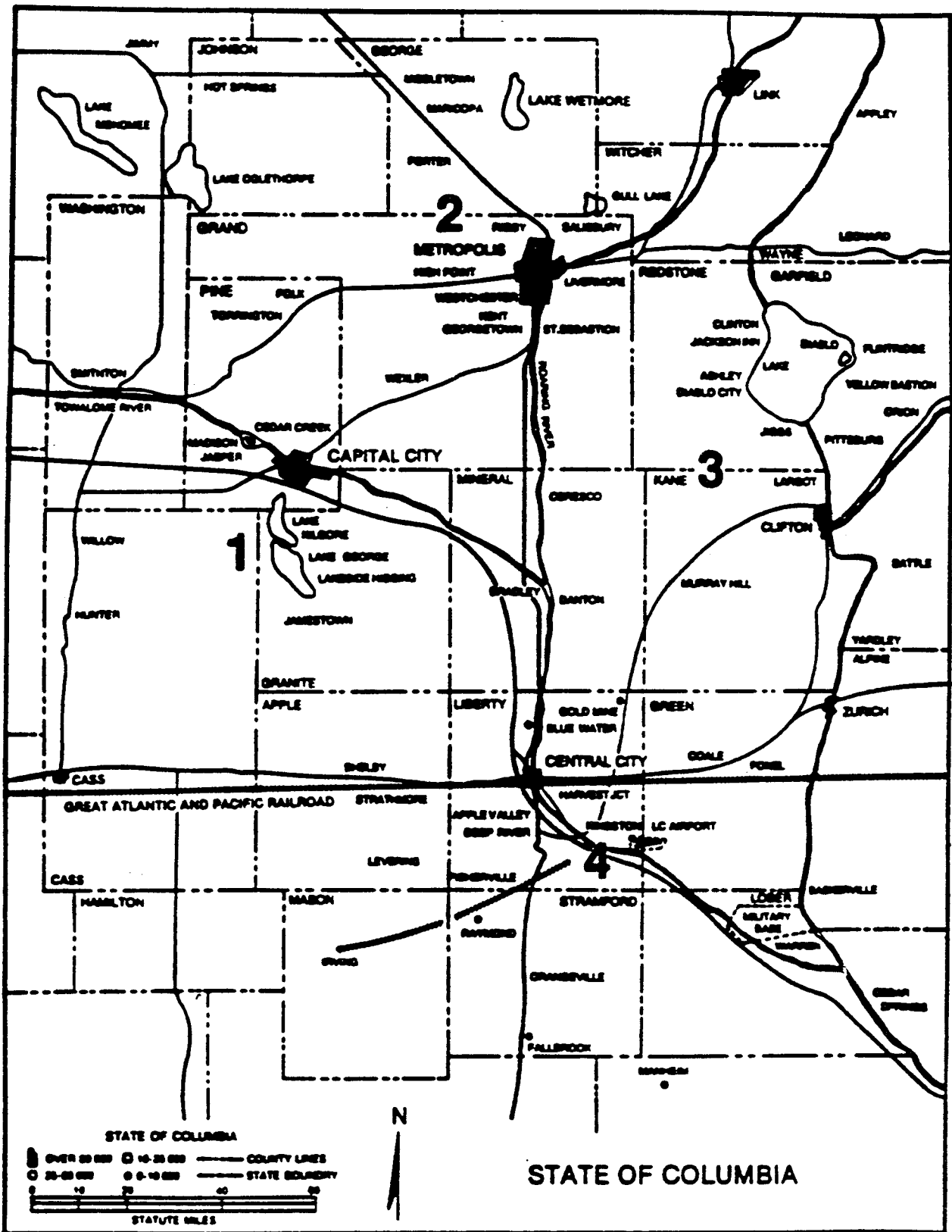
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# LIBERTY COUNTY

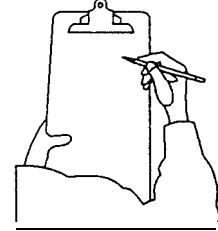
# STATE OF COLUMBIA



NOTES

POLICY ANALYSIS EXERCISE

After watching the videotape and reading the case study, you should respond to the items listed below and identify to what extent they are relevant to this event by noting specific policy-related examples that reflect your understanding of the concepts presented in the first three units. After completing the exercise, you will be asked to share your answers with others in your group. Each group will summarize its conclusions.



- 1. What was Central City’s public policy during the emergency?

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- 2. What policy decisions were made that seemed to be correct?

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- 3. What policy decisions were made that seemed to be incorrect?

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4. What policy decisions were not made that could have been?

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5. What can the public officials of Central City do to increase their ability to establish and execute public policy in emergency management?

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**NOTES**

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UNIT SUMMARY

After completing this unit, your instructor will summarize the main ideas and concepts that were presented and discussed. List any comments or questions you might have, along with any notes you have taken.

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# UNIT VI

## Communicating Public Policy



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## SECTION VI

### COMMUNICATING PUBLIC POLICY

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*After completing this unit, you will know how to develop and disseminate a statement which describes public policy formulated under simulated emergency conditions, and, in a simulated news conference, demonstrate the ability to reassure the community that an emergency situation is being dealt with effectively. Your instructor will summarize the first reading and describe the media's role in emergencies and how that role interacts with public policy. You will participate in an exercise requiring the development of a media statement in a news conference dealing with a high-stress emergency. Everything you have learned in this course should be applied in completing the exercise. Space is provided for taking notes.*

## UNIT. VI: COMMUNICATING PUBLIC POLICY

### POLICY ANALYSIS UNDER EMERGENCY CONDITIONS

#### The Public's Proprietary Interest in Emergencies

Policy analysis in the traditional management of affairs is a limited process. The very nature of the analytical method requires a measure of detached isolation from forces viewed as disruptive--forces such as petty political pressures or the incessant second guessing of outsiders. The outsider causing the greatest concern to most policymakers is, of course, the press. It is the media that ask embarrassing questions, arouse the public, and positively or negatively portray a proposed policy, with little or no control exercised by policymakers. Under normal circumstances, policy analysis and the role of the media are two distinct and separate topics. To understand their altered relationship during times of crisis, you must understand their separation during periods of calm.



Whether in the commercial sector where preserving market interests is paramount or in the public sector where protecting the government or keeping political control appear vital, policy almost always is examined under some form of constraint. It is not a communal effort. Employees, customers, or voters are not asked to participate. Either an individual leader or a close-knit group (quite often **not** the managers or those with designated titles of responsibility) makes policy. The work of reviewing potential problems, critically examining strengths and weaknesses, and candidly discussing alternatives routinely is done in seclusion, under conditions in which people are not afraid to express opinions and to examine very unpopular choices. They have become accustomed to working under circumstances they control and in forums they understand, such as city councils, political parties, and corporate boards of directors.

The public is neither asked nor expected to become involved in the details of governmental or commercial policy analysis. Emergencies--real or perceived--change all that. The public suddenly claims a proprietary right to almost every aspect of public policy. **Once a life-threatening situation develops, public policy becomes public property.** The degree to which that happens is beyond the understanding or control of most local public or private leaders. Not that it should always become a totally public matter; what should or should not be does not matter. The public assumes that it has a proprietary interest and acts accordingly. Obviously, many policies must be made outside the public arena, such as those concerning national security and proprietary financial matters, but, like it or not, anything viewed as a threat to the public becomes public domain. The media--the public's representatives--exercise that proprietary interest by questioning every aspect of a policy, how it was made, who made it, and how it is being (or will be) implemented. Along the way, the media will comment freely on how they view the efficacy of that policy, whether it will help people in a crisis or make the crisis worse.

Policymakers face the glare of public scrutiny; their alternatives are limited and their mistakes magnified. Traditional means of arriving at a policy and then testing it are thrown out. The emergency is now or it is imminent; action is necessary. The press (the public) is watching and commenting, and, in so doing, is participating in shaping policy. Once it is realized that the public believes it has almost unlimited rights to know and react to an emergency policy, then the role of the media becomes clearer. And, the policymaker has new options.

An example that illustrates the altered relationship between traditional policy analysis and the media during a disaster is a toxic chemical spill.

*Example* A major chemical company has operated a plant seven miles outside a city for several years without incident. Other than the sizable payroll it contributes to the local economy, city officials have had little interest in the facility. Recently, unknown to the general public, the plant has become heavily involved in manufacturing and packaging an agricultural pesticide. The policies regarding plant security, containment of the pesticide, and shipment of the highly toxic agent were not a public matter. Decisions were made by the company president and director of security. There was concern about possible sabotage, so the shipment routes were not publicized. In fact, other than complying with minimal State standards, company officials have had little contact with city or county authorities. About 2 a.m., a chemical company truck was involved in an accident, tipped over, and exploded. To the amazement of the fire department and most of the town residents, the tanker had been on a routine trip through the heart of the city. But this time there was a major toxic spill--deadly pesticide escaped from an unknown number of canisters. The rest of the scenario is unimportant. The point to be made is that the policies of three governmental entities--the State, county, and city--and those of the privately owned chemical company will be immediately examined by the media. "Who decided to allow trucks carrying nerve gas to drive through the city? Why didn't city officials know? Does the fire department have special protective clothing to wear?"



New policies will need to be developed to respond to an emergency that was not thought possible. If the gas is indeed as dangerous as some speculate, a vast number of city residents might have to be evacuated. To where? The hospital is downwind of the accident site. What about movement of patients? What about treatment of those overcome by

gas? The problems mount and the press is there relaying messages from officials, giving instructions to the public, providing reports of possible deaths, and commenting on why the fire department cannot respond. Throughout the emergency, the press is more than an observer and relay of messages; it is a participant in shaping the policies of both government and a private enterprise. After the initial disaster has abated, there will be prolonged discussions about recovery and prevention of future incidents. Policies developed concerning who will pay for the cleanup, damage settlements, and ongoing costs of caring for displaced citizens will be grist for the public mill. The debate will begin in city council and in county government about new regulations on the chemical plant and its shipment procedures. The Federal government will become involved and the issue might become a national one--with the national media.

In this and in most emergencies, the public, through the media, will exercise its proprietary rights, ask questions, demand answers, and feel free to comment--rightly or wrongly--on every aspect. Political or private industry leaders who believe they do not have to respond to this phenomenon face a rude awakening. When record snowfalls paralyzed Chicago and the newly installed mayor could not or would not react to the emergency, he lost his mayoral seat in the next election. Corporate leaders who do not react to the sudden public claims to have a voice in the company's private policies find themselves subject to media and government attack. Regulations are proposed and punitive actions are initiated because an emergency was not anticipated or, once underway, was not handled with the public's rights in mind. To view the press as being only a conduit through which official pronouncements are passed in times of crisis is to misunderstand the role of the media's or the public's proprietary interest in emergencies.

Policy analysis assumes the gathering of facts, the assessing of weaknesses as well as strengths, the consideration of wide-ranging options, and, ultimately, making hard--sometimes unpopular--decisions. Throughout the process, anticipated reactions are explored, and if a proposed policy is found to create more problems than it solves, it can be scrapped. An example would be the use of force in response to unrest. Quick, massive intervention might be one way to quell urban riots and restore order. However, the policy of using force could backfire and cause even more violence. Under normal conditions, policymakers could analyze such issues as the total police resources at hand, the potential reaction, and a variety of other factors. The same applies to preparing for a possible toxic chemical spill. However, once an emergency is underway or is imminent (such as a hurricane approaching a city), the rules of analysis change because of the pervasive presence of the media.

## POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND THE MEDIA

Some of the elements involved in the interaction between policy development and the media are described below.

### **Limited Alternatives**

During an emergency, even the possibility that an alternative is being considered can pose serious problems. In a civil unrest scenario, the use of force might be an alternative. So city officials contact the governor and ask that the National Guard be placed on alert. That piece of information, released to the public either through official channels or by an individual guard, could elicit unanticipated responses from those participating in the riot. It could escalate their resistance, quell the riots, or cause some to flee the area. In the toxic spill scenario, the media's learning that mortuary facilities were being placed on alert could indicate that a large number of fatalities were anticipated. If the government spokesperson called upon the public not to panic because "the threat was not that serious," while, at the same time, others in government were gearing up for a large number of fatalities, credibility would be challenged. Greater problems of public confidence could be created. Doing nothing or giving the appearance of doing nothing--even if that is the only alternative--can be construed by the media as a failure of government, a collapse of authority. Therefore, alternatives in policy analysis during emergencies are limited when the media become involved.

### Unintended Messages

Generally, the comings and goings at city hall are of little interest. But, during a crisis, a multitude of camera crews line up outside and the arrival of important individuals takes on significance. During nonworking hours, the sight of the mayor, chief of police, fire chief, civil defense director, and others rushing into city hall means trouble. Something is happening and unless the media are addressed in a timely manner, speculation rather than fact will be presented to an anxiously wondering public. Once speculation begins, leaders are forced into a reactive mode. Their energies are diverted to response rather than to leadership. Worse, the public could begin reacting to unfounded speculation in ways that create even more problems for authorities. Therefore, through unintended messages during crisis periods, officials can create situations that must be factored into their policy analysis.

A footnote to this unintended message section--when authorities appear before the media to refute a rumor, the mere fact that such action is taken gives credence to the rumor. Many people think, "If there was not something to it, why would officials go to such lengths to deny it?" Therefore, reactions to unintended messages become

extremely important. That factor also must be considered when analyzing policy during an emergency.

### **Blunders**

When a leader makes a blunder during normal affairs, the worst he or she usually can expect is to be lampooned by critics. Misstatements usually go unnoticed or are deemed unimportant. But during an emergency, when TV cameras show a police chief standing before a smoking skyline, every word, every facial expression, every inflection of the voice takes on added meaning. A “slip of the lip”—an unintended loose comment about the character of those involved in the emergency, their ethnic or racial backgrounds, etc.—can do more than sink the government’s chances of dealing with crises. It can exacerbate the situation by indicating a lack of sensitivity, by overstating the emergency, or by prematurely releasing information best held until later. Any number of mannerisms, word choices, even the timbre of the voice, will have an effect during a crisis since the presentation of an emergency message is equally as important as the content. The ability of government or private industry spokespersons to answer questions clearly is critical. In analyzing a policy toward release of information, leaders must consider not only formally prepared texts, but also the character of the individual who will deliver the message and the preparation time that person has to respond to a wide range of possible questions. Therefore, the shaping of response policy must include the effect of media.

Another footnote—most governments in mid-size to small jurisdictions, as well as the management of most companies, are used to dealing with the local press—a weekly newspaper, a couple of radio stations, and possibly a television station. A comfortable, or at least understandable, relationship has been reached. But when a crisis befalls an area, when it grows to become a regional or national event, the “outside reporters” from major news organizations arrive on the scene. They play by different rules; their questions may trespass into areas that local reporters traditionally regard as off limits. The “slip of the lip” under such circumstances increases the possibility of a public relations disaster. Policy analysis for responding to potential local emergencies must include the likelihood that it easily could become the focus of statewide or nationwide news attention. That attention can attract elements that create additional hazards, such as an influx of demonstrators, looters, the curious, or other undesirables.

### **Defining the Media**

Mention the term media to a local leader and the response will include newspapers, television, and radio. Mention public announcements in a disaster and the same leader will answer that important messages will be distributed through those traditional media channels. However, there are numerous emergencies, such as a major storm knocking



out electric power or causing flooding, that seriously disrupt traditional forms of public communications. In reviewing policies, decisionmakers should consider alternate means of distributing messages and prepare for quick access to news facilities outside the immediate disaster area or supplemental **communications** networks. Ham radio operators can relay prepared statements to commercial radio and television. If the local media outlets are closed by an emergency and cannot distribute information, there could be a time lag when using alternate forms, such as the volunteer radio transmitter or distant news facilities. That time lag itself will shape both the formulation and implementation of policy. Therefore, policy analysis should include as broad a definition of media as possible with consideration given to using nontraditional information sources.

#### Subtle Messages

Leaders, public and private, have absolutely no control over how their information is presented to the general public. The position of a story in a paper--front page banner spread or a one-column article buried on the obituary page--says almost as much for the importance of the topic as do the words in the article. Television and radio magnify the "medium over the message" syndrome even more. The voice and personality of the announcer, the time allotted to a particular news item, and the attention-grabbing lead-in to the message (for example, playing music, announcing that a message is an important news bulletin, or interrupting regular programming) all have an effect. Splicing TV film footage creates impressions that might or might not be entirely wrong. Any thorough policy analysis has to allow for the possibility of a wide range of problems being created, not just reported, by the media. This statement is not intended to castigate professional journalism or imply that willful distortion is intended, but rather to emphasize that no matter how messages are relayed to the public, there will be omissions, additions, and changes. It cannot be helped, but the effects can be mitigated.

#### Time Pressures

The analysis process itself requires breaking issues into components, studying them, and manipulating possible alternatives. That takes time. When an emergency is imminent or in progress, there is little or no time. Adding to time-compaction pressures are the demands of the media representatives who are attempting to comply with their own deadlines. Radio and television demand immediate response; the greater the emergency, the greater the urgency in putting something on the air. The possibilities for error are magnified. Even the print media have deadline schedules, as do the wire services and other news gathering organizations. While leaders are attempting to gather facts and make assessments, the press is pushing. To news people pursuing a disaster, there is no time; information is demanded immediately and, if officials **cannot** provide it, then it will be gathered from unofficial sources. Another element of traditional policy

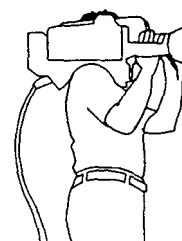
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analysis is muted or removed entirely. Therefore, the structure of the analytical process is changed. Steps are omitted. Decisions are made with partial facts and without full appreciation of ramifications. Further, because of the media-imposed time factors, a decision, once made and announced, is very difficult to reverse.

Recall the toxic spill incident discussed earlier. If the escaping gas is believed to be toxic, city officials might order an immediate evacuation. Radio and television pick up the mayor speaking from city hall saying, "Everyone must leave the city immediately." Within minutes, people will begin to act. If it is learned that the escaping chemical is not nerve gas, but rather an inert substance, new orders to remain in the city will lead to some confusion, if not to major disorder. The time to evaluate the seriousness of an emergency and to weigh various courses of action is removed by the incessant demands for **news**. Preparing a comprehensive policy analysis before an-actual emergency must take a time-compression factor into account.

### Media Attention

During certain emergencies, the presence of television cameras may be the catalyst that expands a crisis. There are some who argue that the arrival of camera crews at a scene may even create an emergency. People naturally gather around bright lights; they respond to the presence of microphones. The knowledge that millions of viewers will hear your pronouncements is a temptation few can resist. Similarly, reporting the occurrence of a spectacular conflagration is sure to draw a crowd. A crowd that hinders movement of emergency equipment can create its own crisis, requiring more resources for control. It is sufficient, therefore, to say that if the media are interested in a subject, the topic immediately takes on added significance. As a result, the media quite often make the event. That fact should temper all policy analysis activities during an actual or perceived emergency.



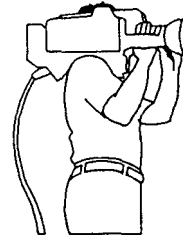
### SUMMARY

In summary, an emergency--real or anticipated--is public property; it stimulates immediate reaction. The concern is translated into a public proprietary interest in all aspects of that emergency. Whether the public has such proprietary rights or not is unimportant. The public believes it does and acts accordingly. It is that right to know what is affecting the lives of the public that is the basis for the media's reaction to crisis situations. The press changes modes. It intensifies its demands on government, expands its coverage into areas that may have been previously neglected and, in the process, becomes part of the problem as well as a potential resource to find solutions. Total policy analysis must, from the earliest stages, include the media. To believe that

addressing the public through the media is a final outcome of policy planning is to ignore the media's effect. The press, both conventional and alternative, plays significant roles in the overall dynamics of a crisis. **To** turn potential disaster into survival, to avoid as many emergencies as possible, and to limit the adverse effect of an ongoing crisis, the media must be included in all phases of comprehensive policy analysis for emergencies.

## NOTES

## MEDIA EXERCISE



By now, you have developed some critical skills in analyzing policies established before emergencies and have examined the unique pressures surrounding policymaking during emergencies. Now you must confront one of the most important elements in implementing emergency policy during periods of crisis--working with the media. To further your appreciation of the potential problems and anticipated benefits of proper media relations during disasters, the following exercise has been developed from real-**world information**. While no actual geographical names are used, and some of the events are combinations of past crises, the case study is a sound example of an emergency likely to occur.

### GOALS

The goals of the case study exercise are as follows:

- To instill in participants an understanding of the tremendous importance of media/public roles in emergency management and policy development;
- To assist participants in obtaining a greater awareness of positive ways to communicate to the public through the media during times of crises; and
- To help participants in preparing for emergency communications by sound preparation techniques.

### EXERCISE

Each of the four groups will be assigned specific tasks. Two groups, together with a facilitator, will adjourn to a private area, preferably a separate room, to prepare for a press conference. The conference, designed to duplicate a live television presentation, will be videotaped. Each group will select a spokesperson and begin preparing a two-minute statement. Participants also will brief the spokesperson on what questions to anticipate from the press during the three-minute question-and-answer session immediately following the issuance of the statement. The third group will receive directions on how to serve as reporters, and the fourth group will be instructed on how to critique the press conference.

**One** emergency scenario will be used. Once both groups have videotaped their respective press conferences, the participants will reassemble in the main classroom. The two conferences will be screened and critiqued. There will be class discussion during which you will be asked to make suggestions for improved communications during times of disaster or impending disaster.

Because emergencies usually require officials to make repeated public announcements, both spokespersons will be given the opportunity to make a second videotape, if there is enough time to complete the second taping. The group can elect either to have the same spokesperson or to choose another person from the group. In either instance, lessons learned from watching the first-round videotaped press conferences and the ensuing class discussion should be incorporated into the second effort. Every attempt must be made to focus on the positive aspects of the first statement and answers, while avoiding the mistakes. Please note that during the second press conference there is a great likelihood new questions will be raised by the reporter.

The second press conference tapes will be aired before the assembled participants. The instructor will make a few observations and compare the two performances and will review the basic points necessary for delivering public information immediately before and during an emergency.

### **Tip List For Media Appearance in Times of Crisis**

When any public official, from the president of the United States to the part-time mayor of the smallest village, appears before the news media in time of crisis, there are basic issues that he or she must understand. Foremost is the need to deliver information to the public that will help citizens cope with an emergency, *not* make the emergency worse. The natural tendency of most political leaders is to immediately frame statements with an eye toward protecting their positions. That means avoiding anything embarrassing, such as admitting that police and firefighters are ill equipped or poorly trained. When a disaster is imminent, political instincts must be subordinated to the need to face problems honestly so that the public can have the best chance for survival. *Therefore, above all else, the first rule in media relations during emergencies is honesty.* That does not mean public officials are obliged to cast everything in the worst possible light and forecast defeat. Truth can be preserved while control is maintained in the face of serious problems. Today's crisis communication receives overwhelming coverage through television--at least in the initial steps. Listed below are some tips on how to deal with television.

- Television is an emotional medium, not an intellectual one.

- Viewers often will forget the content of your message but remember your style--how you looked, how you behaved, and quality of your voice.
- The way you are perceived on the television screen frequently is quite different from the way you are accepted in person. Remember that when preparing to appear before camera.
- Look straight ahead; do not look up for guidance or down to hide.
- Do not be glib or attempt to add a light touch. When you are talking about a nuclear plant accident, a dam bursting, or impending hurricane, you are talking about people's lives and property. They are not laughing.
- Do not panic. If you lose control, how can you expect the person on the street to maintain control?
- Avoid jargon. Using technical terminology, such as military or police idioms, confuses the public or leads them to think you are trying to hide something.
- Watch out for emotional buzz words. The wrong ethnic label, an inappropriate term, such as catastrophic or holocaust, or disparaging characterizations of groups or individuals involved in an emergency can create mini-crises all their own.
- Do not win a battle at the price of losing a war. In short, do not fight with inquiring reporters on camera; you might win the first round but you will lose in the long run.
- Be clear and to the point. Do not beat around the bush; provide sufficient details so citizens can help themselves.
- Start any emergency statement with a direct and calmly expressed sentence about what is happening or what is expected to happen. Immediately follow that with a description of what authorities have done in response.

**Example**     **"The** National Weather Service has told us to expect severe storms to arrive in the area within the next three hours. Flooding and possible wind damage are anticipated. Officials, supported by a large number of volunteers, now are moving residents from designated areas. Shelters have been established and emergency supplies are being moved into our area."

- Do not make it worse than it is, but do not try to make it better either. Stick to the facts and do not speculate.
- If you cannot control your anger or keep your voice in check during times of stress, try to have someone act as spokesperson for most of the media presentation. Then, remain available for answering questions that the spokesperson cannot.
- Emphasize the positive actions authorities are taking to alleviate the situation.
- Do not talk down to the public; they will know it and resent it.
- Do not ever say, "No comment." To a mass audience you are saying three possible things by such a statement: "I don't know," "I know, but I'm hiding the information," or "Go ask someone else." That someone else could say something a lot worse than what you might be forced to reveal.

#### **SUMMARY**

All participants will appreciate the far-reaching effects of public/media relations in both the short- and long-term ability to react to and recover from emergencies. The manner in which the press is approached and the message delivered to the public is just as important--if not more so--than the context of the message.

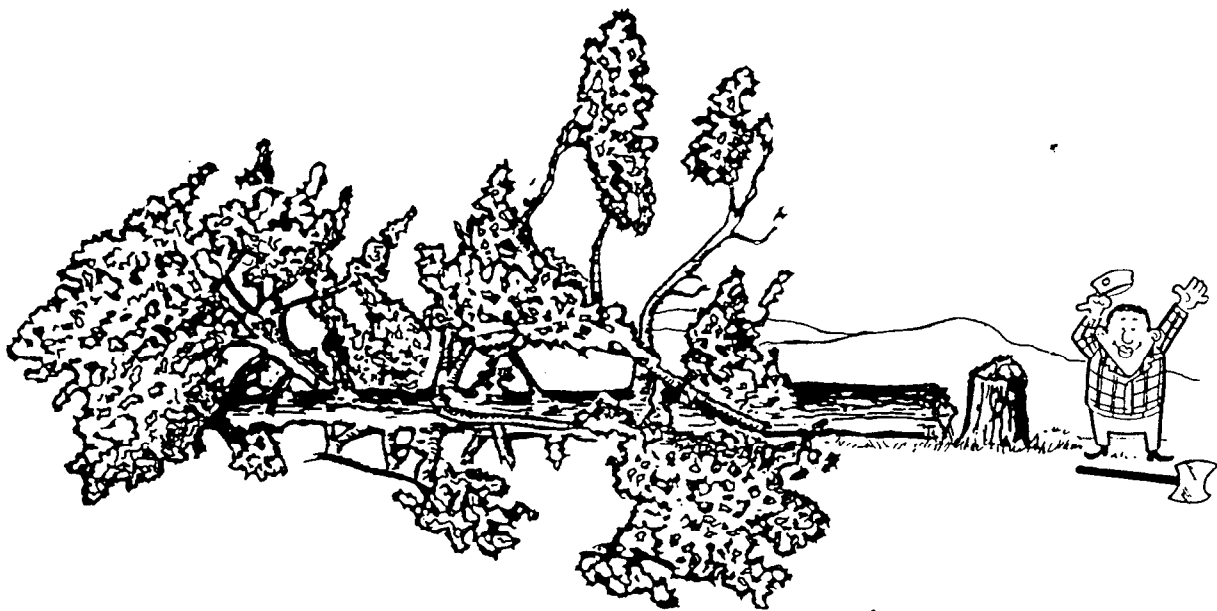
## UNIT SUMMARY

After **completing** this unit, your instructor will summarize the main ideas and concepts that were presented and discussed. List any comments or questions you might have, along with any notes you have taken.

## NOTES

# UNIT VII

## Summary and Conclusion



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## UNIT VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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*After completing this unit, you will recognize the main ideas and concepts which were presented, in the course.*

*Your instructor will ask you to participate in an exercise which requires you to share ideas and concepts from the course. After closing remarks, your instructor will distribute course evaluation forms for you to complete and submit.*

*NOTES*

**APPENDIX A**

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