

Vital new resource

Dr Tim Tinker, Director of Booz Allen Hamilton's Center of Excellence for Risk and Crisis Communications, describes a new publication that will prove to be an invaluable reference and guidance tool

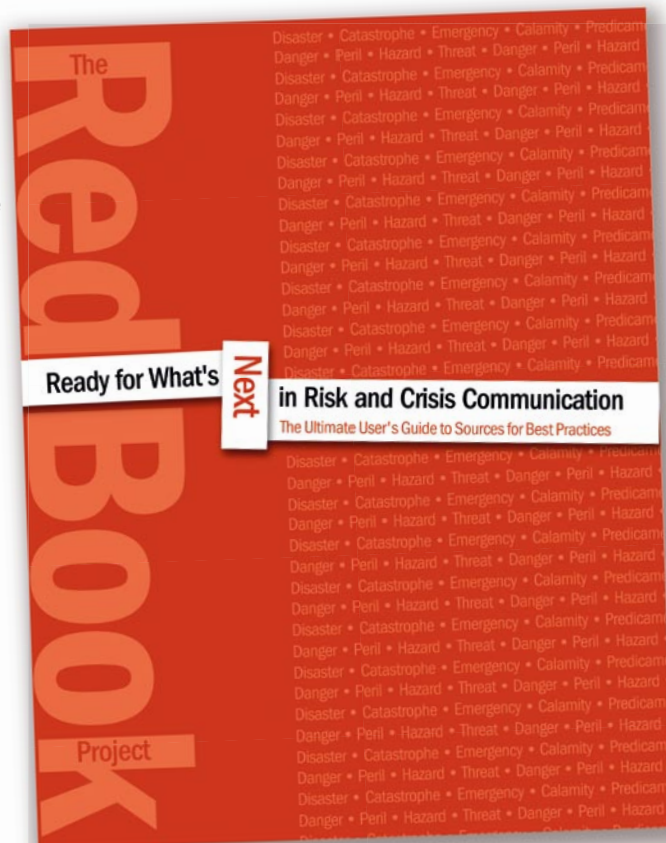
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EFFECTIVE CRISIS AND EMERGENCY communication is essential for minimising losses and major disruptions from significant or extreme risk events. Lessons learned from incidents such as Hurricane Katrina in the United States; the recent multi-site terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India; the 2003 SARS outbreak; co-ordinated bombings of the Madrid and London transportation systems in 2004 and 2005, respectively; and the great Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 illustrate how optimal risk response and recovery are jeopardised when communication strategies fail to reflect proven principles of best practices, are based on narrow or outdated assumptions, or leave unaddressed the new communication challenges presented by emerging risks and developing communication technologies that redefine relationships between the public, media, emergency management personnel and risk managers during an unfolding crisis.

For a variety of risk circumstances, there is no shortage of advice about designing, planning and implementing communication strategies. But a major challenge for those who seek to benefit from and tap into this wealth of knowledge lies in sorting through the choices: The sources are many and diverse, may not be easily identified and vary greatly in quality.

This user's guide to sources for best practice in risk and crisis communication began with two ideas. First, effective and timely response to a significant threat or extreme risk event demands sound communication strategies that are informed by recent developments in understanding successful communication in crisis situations. Second, although recognition of the essential role of strategic crisis and risk communication in risk management has led to a proliferation of 'best practice' sources, little guidance is available about which sources among hundreds reflect the most contemporary and highest quality information. What is missing is a comprehensive and up-to-date guide to and evaluation of sources for best practice in risk and crisis communication.

The Ultimate User's Guide to Sources for Best Practices attempts to fill that gap by providing a roadmap to the highest quality guidance on



The handbook is an invaluable resource for all those who might be called upon to communicate to a variety of audiences in a crisis situation

best practice in risk and crisis communication.

Based on extensive research and analysis, and the insights of leading experts in the field of risk and crisis communication, *The Ultimate User's Guide to Sources for Best Practices* identifies critical resources for information about best practice in crisis and risk communication. Sources were prioritised if guidance was strongly supported by up-to-date scientific evidence, consistent with lessons learned from communication successes and failures during recent significant crisis incidents, contained practical advice and reflected the cumulative experiences of those who have managed these events in the past (ie leaders, emergency management personnel, risk communicators and public health officials).

The guide offers an inventory of high-quality sources from several countries for topic-specific communications such as terrorist acts, natural disasters, disease outbreaks and food or water

safety incidents, but also identifies the best resources for general proven principles of effective risk and crisis communication that apply in any crisis or emergency situation.

In addition, the user's guide points to quality resources that can be used to update communication strategies for specific populations including leaders, first responders, military personnel and their families, culturally diverse populations, journalists and government leaders.

A special section of the user's guide considers new and emerging ways of communicating about an emergency or crisis situation (eg social media, real-time accounts of ongoing events) and how new technological capabilities may be integrated into risk and crisis communication plans. The guide highlights several recent resources that detail how to reshape and expand how official risk and crisis communication occurs, and anticipate emerging difficulties in controlling message content, rumours, inaccurate information and trust in risk or crisis communicators.

Some of the current practices considered the best for effective crisis and risk communication may be refined as events, technologies and evidence dictate, and new or emerging risks present opportunities for learning.

VALUABLE FEATURE

One valuable feature of this user's guide is an additional section that identifies high quality sources frequently updated with the latest information about risk and crisis communication best practice, lessons learned, emerging issues, and effective response and recovery during critical times and under difficult circumstances.

The Ultimate User's Guide to Sources for Best Practices is an easy-to-use resource that allows the user to navigate through an expansive, large and rapidly growing knowledge base, and to quickly select the best guidance available to update risk and crisis communication strategies. CRJ

■ *Supplies of the guide are limited, so reserve a free copy by emailing Dr Tim Tinker, Director of Booz Allen Hamilton's Centre of Excellence for Risk and Crisis Communications (tinker_timothy@bah.com)*