

## **DHHS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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<b>Section III:</b>	<b>Communications</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Media Training Manual</b>
<b>Chapter:</b>	<b>Crisis Communication</b>
<b>Current Effective Date:</b>	<b>8/1/02</b>
<b>Revision History:</b>	<b>8/1/02</b>
<b>Original Effective Date:</b>	<b>10/1/97</b>

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### **Not the Norm:**

Under normal circumstances, we encourage the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) employees to talk freely with reporters about areas of their expertise. That's not the case in a crisis. Coordination of communication--ensuring that we are giving out correct information with one voice--is essential during a crisis.

### **What is a Crisis?**

The dictionary defines a crisis as an unstable condition, in which an abrupt or decisive change is impending, or a crucial or decisive point or situation. We immediately recognize certain events as crises. Hurricanes and tornadoes are certainly crises. But, crisis can be on a smaller scale, as well. A leaking underground storage tank that is contaminating a community's drinking water is certainly a crisis for the people involved. Outbreaks of disease like rubella or e-coli and pfiesteria-related fish kills are also crises. Specific crisis communication plans may be developed for particular events

### **How Do We Communicate During a Crisis?**

During a crisis, we revert to our crisis---or emergency---communication plan. The basic element of this plan is coordination of information. It is essential that we make sure that everyone is speaking with one voice and giving out information that is absolutely correct. For that reason, all requests for media information need to come to one point--the DHHS Office of Communications. Communications staff will determine who needs to respond and what information is available. Regular news releases will be issued. Where appropriate, media briefings will be held to give reporters access to high-level officials and field staff.

### **How Do We Prepare For a Crisis?**

The DHHS Office of Communication will maintain a regular listing of emergency numbers, including after-hours numbers for members of the media and DHHS staff. You may prepare specific notification lists and priorities for a particular issue. In this chapter you will find such a list for fish kills/pfiesteria events.

Public affairs can work with individual offices to develop crisis communication plans for specific problems. That way, you'll have something to follow during a time when there is a lot breaking loose. You might develop draft news releases that you can use during crises. In this chapter, you will find a notification policy and draft release for a Hepatitis A exposure as an example.

## **How Do We Learn From Our Experiences?**

After the crisis has passed, hold a post-mortem to determine what worked and what didn't. Use this analysis to determine future communications in similar circumstances.

*For questions or clarification on any of the information contained in this policy, please contact [The Office of Public Affairs](#). For general questions about department-wide policies and procedures, contact the [DHHS Policy Coordinator](#)*