Risk Communication

Dr Barbara Butow

APEC Recall Workshop, Manilla
4th – 6th May, 2010

Outline

- Risk communication
- Public perceptions of risk
- Communication strategies and tools
- Communication methods in an incident

Risk Analysis Framework

Risk Assessment
Science based

Risk Management
Policy based

Risk Communication
Interactive exchange of information and opinions concerning risks

---
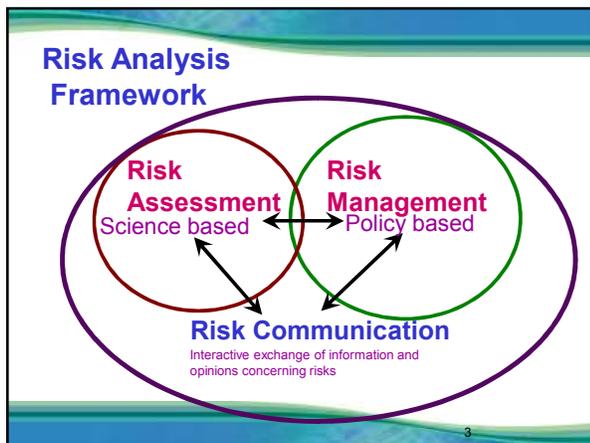
Risk Communication

- Why are we communicating?
- Who is our audience?
- What do our audiences want to know?
- What do we want to get across?
- How will we communicate?
- How will we listen?
- How will we respond?

Risk communication is…

- Important part of both risk assessment and risk management
- active at the start of the process – not an add-on at the end
- everyone's responsibility


Risk communication is…

- two-way process
- understanding people's perception of risk
- opportunities for public involvement in decision making
- timely and accurate information
- internal communication

Risk communication is **not…**

- just about communicating risk;
- simply selling decisions to the public;
- a crisis-related process;
- the sole responsibility of communication specialists.

7

Risk communication **is** about..

- Relationship building – developing a feeling of partnership among stakeholders.
- Consultation – input from stakeholders, including attitudes and motivating factors.
- Maintaining the contact – keeping people in the loop.

8

Information Flow
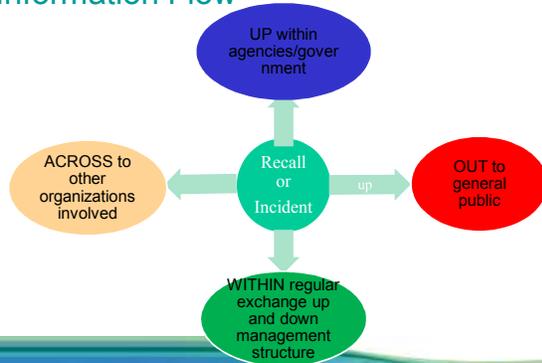
Perceptions of risk

- We all see the world differently (mind sets).
- People of similar backgrounds tend to perceive risk in a similar way.
- Some gender differences.
- People with less control over their lives tend to see greater risk.

10

What we worry about

- Kids crossing the road
- Air travel
- Avian Flu
- Smallpox
- Allergies
- Breast cancer
- Asthma – smog
- Secondary smoke

11

Managing risk or fear?

- actual risk, and the perception of risk, often differ
- We're often managing fear more than we are risk
- "Fear management" can be minimised by good and timely communication

12

Perceptions of risk

Evidence-based perception of risk:

RISK = HAZARD

Consumer perception of risk:

RISK = HAZARD + OUTRAGE

Some outrage factors affecting 'acceptability"

Lower risk	Higher risk
Natural	Man-made
Familiar	Exotic
Control	No control

Trust

- Public confidence in the safety of the food supply.
- Trust in industry and government regulators to ensure safe food.
- Hard to regain trust once it is lost.

15

Trust

- Negative events are more noticeable than positive events.
- Sources of bad news are seen as more credible.
- Media is attracted to bad news.
- Special interest groups are skilful in using media.

16

Communication strategies and tools

17

10 ways to build trust

- Involve people in decisions that directly affect their lives.
- Release information as early as you can.
- Peoples' feelings – don't consider them to be irrelevant, irrational or an over-reaction.
- If you make a mistake, own up!
- If you don't know the answer, say so – it's OK to say "I don't know"

18

10 ways to build trust

- Always follow up.
- Speak in plain language – don't use technical jargon.
- Avoid presenting yourself like a bureaucrat.
- Involve other organisations as soon as possible.
- If one of your people hates talking to the media or stakeholders, choose someone else. Adapted from New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, 1987

19

Communication strategies

Low risk – Low perceived risk **PASSIVE**
    eg. allowed microbial contaminant levels

Low risk – High perceived risk **RESPONSIVE**
    eg. *E. coli*, in yet-to-be-cooked meat

High risk – Low perceived risk **EDUCATIVE**
    eg. (*Campylobacter* in chicken)

High risk – High perceived risk **PROACTIVE**
    eg. *E. coli* O157 H7, in salami

20

Communication action plan

- Build at outset of risk analysis process

- Team comprising government, industry and consumer representation

- Think of how and what want to convey (to whom?)

Communication tools

- Fact sheets, publications, advertising.
- Media releases, backgrounders.
- Telephone advice lines.
- Website, email bulletins.
- Conferences, seminars, meetings.
- Speeches, presentations, talks.
- Exhibitions, displays, launches.
- Education campaigns.
- Media relations.

Communication skills

- Listening.
- Writing (reports and material for lay audiences).
- Public speaking.
- Publishing (hard copy and web).
- PowerPoint presentations.
- Media relations.

Media

- Press, radio and television.
- Establish working relationships and credibility in non-crisis times.
- Know what messages you want to convey.
- Be open and honest… and available.
- Be helpful.
- Understand how the media works.

Risk communication and food safety incidents

Communication elements of your system

- Mechanisms of communication between organisations
- Communication tools required before, during and after a food safety incident (e.g. media releases, fact sheets).
- Responsibility for preparing and releasing communication tools and communicating with media.
- Timeframe and clearance process for communication tools.
- Communication responsibilities when the incident is spread across food, agriculture and health organisations.

Communication methods

- Spokesperson – who it is depends on emphasis
- Press conferences – more for major crises
- Messages developed and updated
- Webpage and fact sheets

Communication methods

- Scripts for enquiry staff
- Use press agencies to disseminate media
- quickly especially out of hours
- Travel advice
- Medical advice on doctors' website in case of symptoms

Communication tools (conventional)

- Have an emergency plan - keep a hard copy!
- Regular internal meetings in incident room
- Use existing networks/structures
- Know everyone before the emergency
- Establish emergency contact list

Communication tools (conventional)

- Have good established media contacts
- Keep a media log (a notebook is fine)
- Use print and electronic media
- Ethnic media
- Scripts for phone enquiry lines

Communication tools (new media)

- mobile phones and Blackberries (always be available)
- website essential – establish specialist web page for the subject and link to other experts
- Email media issues and updates to key stakeholders and influencers
- Use Google news to monitor the issue

Melamine contamination incident – Alert phase

- 12 September National Food Incident Response Protocol triggered

- 17 September INFOSAN Emergency alert reports 6,244 kidney stone cases in China

- 17 September China initiates a widespread recall of infant formula involving 22 producers

Action phase – "holding message"

23 September first Australian media interest

Key messages:

- Taking seriously
- Commenced National Food Incident Response Protocol
- Liaising with states and territories and AQIS and overseas agencies
- Mainstream dairy products, like milk, yoghurt and cheese - none imported since 2007
- Checking for imported foods with minor ingredients

Action phase – "targeted message"

Key messages:

- 24 September withdrawal of white rabbit candy
- Product is being withdrawn
- Don't consume and dispose of out of reach of children and pets
- Would have to consume several bags a bay for many months for any ill effect

FSANZ Media statement: Advisory on White Rabbit Brand Confectionery

24 September 2008

Australian Food Regulators have commenced a formal request today to wholesalers and importers to voluntarily withdraw White Rabbit Brand Candies from shops pending further results of testing for melamine.

Testing in New Zealand released late today has confirmed that this product contains sufficiently high levels of melamine which may, in some individuals, cause health problems such as kidney stones if consumed in high quantities over a long period.

People are advised not to consume these milk-based sweets imported from China. This product is sold in retail packs through Asian retailers, supermarkets and restaurants.

Anyone who has the product should not to consume it. It is unlikely that there could be a problem if consumed in small amounts but people with concerns about the consumption of this product should seek medical advice.

The Australian State and Territory agencies will be working closely with wholesalers and importers to facilitate this voluntary withdrawal.

Australia does not import infant formula products from China and has not imported full-dairy products, such as yoghurt or condensed milk, from China since March 2007

Summary

- What is and is not risk communication
- Perceptions of risk
- Trust
- Communication strategies and tools
- Case study

36