UK Resilience

COMMUNICATING RISK

Managing risk is increasingly central to the business of Government. An essential part of this is risk communication - communication in terms of openness and transparency, understanding and engaging stakeholders, as well as providing balanced information to allow the public make decisions on how to deal with risk.

So, if you are;

involved in policy planning and development, policy implementation or operational planning,

information staff in communications directorates, or involved in providing information to the public,

responsible for risk management and business continuity planning,

these guidelines are for you.

You can access the tool-kit by clicking any of the icons below

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1) Introduction - Why this toolkit could be useful to you

"The handling of risks to the public has become more challenging in recent years, as information sources multiply and public expectations change"
(Risk; improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty. Cabinet Office Strategy Unit)

A crisis is like a tidal wave. Everything you have been used to at work is turned upside down, control has been lost, and the world - particularly the media - is screaming at you.

This is what happens when policy risks become live issues - when they turn into crisis - and you are caught unawares.

"A common feature of disasters is that in hindsight they could have been avoided. For many of them occur either where there is a high risk, not just in recognised hazardous industries, or a historical precedent. Each disaster, no matter in what industry, ought to be an occasion for a reassessment of risks elsewhere, not a self-congratulatory sigh of relief that it has happened to somebody else. A disaster is essentially the failure of a system, a terrible example to others that their own system needs thorough examination."
(Peter Young. Disasters and the Media)

It doesn't have to be this way. Risk can generally be identified, planned for, and dealt with effectively if it does turn to crisis.

Good communication is key. Communication, in terms of engaging with those with an interest in your policy, and having communication plans ready to deal with difficulties.

That is one reason why we have put out this guidance - a simple toolkit - to help you plan communication strategies, develop your understanding of risk, improve your knowledge of its likely effects, and give you the confidence to deal with a crisis when things go wrong.

A second reason is that good communication is an essential part of good policy making in its broadest sense - including implementation and operational planning. Openness and inclusiveness, the principles that underpin good communication, are important principles in modern democratic societies. Many of the techniques described here are recognised as relevant to good risk management as well.

The guidelines are not intended to give definitive information on every aspect of risk communication. What they do attempt to do is to bring together in one place a wealth of experience from recent incidents and best practice from a range of eminent and authoritative sources. For those who need more in-depth information, there are links to those sources.

The aim of the guidelines, quite simply, is to give you tools to secure some certainty in a complex and uncertain world.

How to find your way round the guidelines

The guidelines are divided into six main sections. The first four of these are intended to give you background briefing on understanding risk, the importance of communication, and how the public and the media view risk.

The fifth and sixth sections are designed as a tool kit to help you plan and design your communication strategy, both as part of policy development, and deal with difficult situations when they arise

There are further sections dealing with aspects of risk communication.

2. What is risk and why is communication about risk important?

Objectives of this section are

To create an understanding of the nature of risk and the types of risk faced by the public

To set out the role of communication in improving risk handling To explain the role of departments in the overall drive to improve standards

2.1 What is risk?

> "Consumers typically see 'risk' as a situation that is likely to be unusual - that has significant potential for damage"
> *(Running Risks. National Consumer Council)*

Risk to most means the chance of something unpleasant happening, such as injury or loss - and therefore something to be avoided. But it has another face - that of opportunity. Improving public services requires innovation - seizing new opportunities and managing the risks involved. This guidance is mainly concerned with communication about the first category of risks.

Many experts define risk as the probability of an unintended event, and the science of risk assessment traditionally involves estimating the probabilities and consequences of these events[1] . Within Government, however, risk is often associated with uncertainty, in many cases as involving conflicting perceptions and viewpoints. Public perceptions about risks can often play an important part as expert views in the debate about new technologies such as GM crops. The Office of Government Commerce defines risk as:

> "uncertainty of outcome, whether positive opportunity or negative threat, of actions and events. It is the combination of likelihood and impact, including perceived importance."
> *(OGC, Management of Risk: Guidance for Practitioners)*

Most areas of Government policy involve handling risks to the public. Some risks take on more significance in different contexts, or when viewed from different perspectives. It is impossible to eliminate all risks, and so the difficult decisions are to decide what is acceptable. Identifying and recognising a potential threat means being able to do something about it, or being better prepared to deal with an incident when it occurs.

2.2 What types of risks do the public face?

Understanding how risk affects the public can help Departments to identify risks that might otherwise be missed. In order to do so, it may be helpful to think of risk in five different ways:

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[1]The RAMP guide (see suggested reading list, annex e) includes a useful definition of risk in the context of risk assessments.

◆ In terms of activities that can be a source of risk, e.g. playing sport or travelling by car;

◆ In terms of hazards, e.g. a live electric wire or a disease-causing organism;

◆ In terms of events that could happen as a result of a risky activity or exposure to a hazard, e.g. an accident or becoming ill;

◆ In terms of the consequences of an event, e.g. injury, ill health or financial loss. Some consequences may be indirect, e.g. the effects of flood risk on local property prices.

◆ In terms of the values people attach to these potential consequences. These are likely to be dependent on the context, e.g. other options available and the potential for offsetting benefits, and the perspective of the viewer.

Examples of risk events

◆ Natural events, e.g. flooding, cold weather

◆ Accidents, e.g. road accident, chemical spill

◆ Disease or infection

◆ Political unrest, e.g. war, terrorism, industrial action

◆ Crime, e.g. violence, theft, fraud

◆ Economic events, e.g. recession

◆ Pollution or habitat destruction

Examples of possible consequences of risk events

◆ Death

◆ Injury

◆ Ill health

◆ Loss of or damage to property

◆ Financial loss

◆ Loss of livelihood or earning potential

◆ Inconvenience / loss of time

◆ Damage to environment

◆ Emotional distress

The presence of certain types of risks can cause serious public concern, particularly where there is uncertainty about the outcome.

Public concern can itself cause problems for Government. If not addressed promptly and effectively, public concerns can escalate into crises. **Chapter 3** provides pointers to identifying what risks are likely to cause concern.

2.3 Why is good communication important in dealing with risk?

Openness and inclusiveness, the principles that underpin effective communication, are key democratic principles, and are important in their own right. The Government has made clear its commitment to these principles, for example in the Freedom of Information Act and the Principles of Good Regulation.

> Definition of communication;
>
> "Building relationships with others, listening and understanding them, and conveying thoughts and messages clearly and congruently; expressing things coherently and simply, in ways that others can understand, and showing genuine knowledge, interest and concern; bringing these aspects together to make change happen"
> *(Government Information and Communication Service)*

Provided it is genuinely a two-way process, communication with the public can also help Departments to handle risk more effectively:

- It can help to **prevent crises** from developing;

- It can lead to **better decisions** about how to handle risks;

- It can help ensure **smoother implementation** of policies to tackle risks;

- It can help to **empower and reassure** the public;

- Over time, it can help to **build trust** in Government and in the information it provides

Preventing crises
Early discussions with stakeholders and the public can help to inform Departments of potential areas of public concern early on. This can enable them to take early action to address those concerns, before they turn into crises. This can be particularly valuable where there are public concerns about risks associated with new technologies, e.g. GM crops.

Better decisions
Engaging a wide range of stakeholders and the public in risk decisions can help ensure that decisions take account of a wide range of views and experience. It can also help Departments to spot aspects of a risk that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. This can be particularly important where action taken to tackle a risk could have a knock-on effect on others.

Widespread engagement of stakeholders also requires Departments to open their decision processes to public scrutiny. This creates a powerful incentive to base decisions on sound evidence and analysis, which in turn can lead to better, more focused decisions.

> "The main purpose of consultation is to improve decision-making by ensuring that decisions are soundly based on evidence, that they take account of the views and experience of those affected by them, that innovative and creative options are considered and that new arrangements are workable." *Code of Practice on Written Consultation; Cabinet Office*

Smoother implementation
A key feature of risk management - and of policy making - is the need to deal with different and often conflicting perspectives

Engaging stakeholders and the public at an early stage in decisions about risks can help ensure that decisions better reflect public values and can reduce the scope for misunderstanding, disagreement and resentment later on. This can make it easier to implement measures to address risks, particularly where these require the public to take action.

> "If policy is not communicated or marketed sufficiently, buy in from key stakeholders may be lacking and outcomes may be reduced as those at whom the policy is directed are not aware of it or resist the policy.
>
> For example, the Department of Social Security failed to publicise a change in the law about the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) and gave misleading information to the public for more than a decade"
> *(Modern Policy Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money. NAO)*

Empowering and reassuring the public
Providing clear and accurate information about the nature of risks can help people to make realistic assessments of the risks they face, and where appropriate, to make informed judgements on how to handle risks themselves. This can in turn help to foster a climate of greater empowerment and reassurance, and reduce the risk of rumours and scares.

> Rumour flies in the absence of news. Therefore, we must give the people the most accurate possible news, promptly and completely.
> *(US Office of War Information, 1942)*

Building trust
Over time, communication with stakeholders can help to reduce suspicion, and build trust in the information Government provides. While scepticism of institutions is a feature of most developed countries, there is nonetheless much that Departments can do to build confidence in the information they provide. Open communication can help by bringing people inside the tent, and by enabling them to see for themselves that decisions have been made on the best available evidence and with the public interest in mind.

2.4 Why has communicating about risk become more important?

Communicating about risks to the public is becoming an increasingly important issue for Government. There are a number of reasons for this:

- The nature of some risks has become far more complex and uncertain. The pace of scientific and technological development has led to new concerns about "manufactured" risks, which are often difficult to prove or disprove. As the world has become more interconnected and interdependent, people's exposure to previously remote risks has increased.

- Public attitudes towards risk, and towards Government, have changed. Growing scepticism of institutions, increasing concern about some risks, and greater ease of access to information from a wide range of sources all place Departments under greater public scrutiny. This means that they have to work much harder, and operate far more transparently, to maintain public confidence in the information they provide.

◈ The Government has made clear its commitment to better policy-making, including more evidence-based and inclusive decisions. In addition, the Freedom of Information Act will require Government to operate in a far more open way than before. These initiatives have important implications for the way that Departments communicate about risk.

◈ A number of recent cases have illustrated the limitations of traditional approaches to handling and communicating about risks. The BSE crisis, Foot and Mouth Disease and the public concern over GM crops have all highlighted the need for a more evidence-based, open and participative approach to managing risks to the public.

The Strategy Unit report *Risk; improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty, 2002*, provides further information about recent challenges Government has had to face in communicating about risks, and is a useful source of further advice.

2.5 What principles does the Government want Departments to adopt?

The Strategy Unit report sets out the Government's objectives for improving the way it handles and communicates about risks with the public. The objectives most relevant to risk communication are:

◈ More openness about the nature of risks, particularly in cases of uncertainty;

◈ More transparency about the processes it has used to reach its decisions; and

◈ More participative decision processes, involving stakeholders and the wider public at an earlier stage.

As a first step, the Government has published five principles that it expects Departments to follow. These are:

◈ Openness and transparency - both about their understanding of the nature of risks to the public and about the process they are following in handling them;

◈ Engagement - Departments will be expected to involve a wide range of representative groups and the public from an early stage in the decision process;

◈ Proportionality - action should be proportionate to the level of protection needed, consistent with other action, and targeted to the risk;

◈ Evidence - Departments should ensure that all relevant factors, including public concerns and values, have been taken into account;

◈ Responsibility and choice - where possible, people who willingly take risks should also accept the consequences and people who have risks imposed on them should have a say in how those risks are managed.

2.6 How can Departments put these principles into practice?

The main ways in which Departments can put these principles into practice are:

- **Providing wider access to information about risks;**
- **Integrating communication more closely into core decision processes;**
- **Gearing up to respond more quickly to crises;**
- **Improving the reliability of information;**
- **Supporting responsibility and choice;**
- **Changing working practices, raising awareness and building skills.**

Further advice on each of these headings can be found by clicking the relevant link above.

Providing wider access to information about risks

The principles require Departments to make a wide range of information available about risk issues (as they will be required to do under the **Freedom of Information Act**).

This does not necessarily mean putting out more information, as more information doesn't necessarily lead to better communication. It has been argued that this may cause confusion unless the information can be sorted and assessed, adding to uncertainty rather than trust. It may be better to enable people to check the information they receive, so that they can satisfy themselves that decisions have been taken in the public interest and on the best available evidence.

> "We can place trust beyond face-to-face relationships when we can check the information and undertakings others offer."
> *(Onora O'Neill, Reith Lecture: Trust and Transparency, 2002)*

In practice, this means being able to make available, on demand, the facts, assumptions, sources of information and criteria that have been used to inform decisions, and being prepared to explain and justify them to a sceptical audience. It may also mean being prepared to explain the reasons for decisions that may not appear to be in the public interest, particularly in cases where information needs to be kept private or where decisions appear to depart from existing practice. This will be important where new policies pose a potential risk to members of the public as well as when Government is dealing with risks externally.

> "The Food Standards Agency provides open access on its website to the research that has informed its decisions, and its Board sets the standard for openness by meeting and making policy decisions in public.
> *(Strategy Unit report on Risk)*

It also means being prepared to explain how it proposes to handle a risk.

Integrating communication more closely into core decision processes

Departments should take a proactive and inclusive approach to consultation and stakeholder involvement on decisions about risks.

Departments will need to integrate communication into their decision processes, both when developing policies to tackle risks and when dealing with potential risks arising from mainstream policy decisions.

The policy development process needs to be structured to enable two-way communication to take place at the start, before solutions have been formulated and proposed. **Section 5.3** of the toolkit describes how to build communication successfully into the policy development and risk management processes.

The approach may also involve using market research techniques to identify potential public concerns about risks or policy proposals, and by inviting widespread public involvement from an early stage in the decision process while initial questions about the nature of potential risks are being asked. It may also require targeted initiatives to engage and involve marginalised groups, where they are affected by a potential risk and where their views are unlikely to be obtained through conventional consultation.

There is extensive guidance available to Departments on techniques available for involving stakeholders and the public in the policy process. **Section 5.3, Step 3** of this toolkit describes the basic steps of engaging stakeholders. More detailed guidance is also available through the **Cabinet Office Policy Hub**.

Gearing up to respond more quickly to crises

Departments need to be capable of acting quickly to provide clear and accurate information in the event of a crisis or scare. This requires regular monitoring of public concerns as part of their normal planning and risk assessment processes, and ensuring that contingency plans and business continuity plans address communication needs.

Departments also need to be capable of gearing up rapidly to handle increased demands for information in crisis situations. **The Government Information and Communication Service's Operations Centre** (see annex b) can be a valuable source of advice and support in these situations, and Departments can help themselves by strengthening their links with this unit. The **UK Resilience** website can also help Departments to anticipate and handle crises by ensuring that a base of knowledge is already available.

Section 5 contains advice on building effective communicating strategies.

Section 6 contains advice on communicating effectively in crisis situations.

Supporting responsibility and choice

Departments need to ensure that they communicate clearly any decisions to transfer risks to other bodies or individuals and that, where they provide advice to help members of the public with choices, the risks and potential benefits of each option are also communicated clearly.

In some cases, providing information to inform choice can help people to manage risks more

effectively themselves and can help to create a climate of empowerment and reassurance. Where options are being considered to tackle risks to the public, Departments may want to consider whether providing information to support individual choice may be more effective than more direct forms of intervention such as regulation.

Improving the reliability of information

A number of recent reports, including *Better Policy-Making*, have highlighted the need for decisions to be based on more reliable information and analysis. **The Policy Hub** contains advice on how to improve the quality of evidence and analysis in policy making.

Providing reliable information to the public is also of critical importance to effective risk communication. In particular, it is important to avoid providing categorical assurances where facts are uncertain or unknown. Inaccurate information, whether provided deliberately or in good faith, can severely undermine the Government's credibility, as the BSE case has shown. Where uncertainty exists, there is no harm in admitting it, provided a clear indication is given of the steps being taken to resolve or reduce that uncertainty.

In parallel with steps to improve transparency, Departments may also need to take steps to improve the quality of the information and analysis they provide.
Steps might include:

- Inviting external reviews (for example by external experts) of information provided direct to the public where this touches on complex or technical issues;

- Making clear what sources of information have been used and, where there is dispute about the nature of the risk, referring to any conflicting sources of information as well so that people can judge issues for themselves;

- Making more use of information provided by trusted impartial sources, such as independent agencies or leading academics;

- Taking steps to improve communication between experts and generalists within Departments, for example through workshops or joint training, to reduce the risk that technical information is misrepresented.

Changing working practices, raising awareness and improving skills

Departments may need to consider:

- Closer joint working between policy and communications staff, in some cases involving joint teams, to identify potential stakeholder needs and to plan communication strategies at the start of the policy process;

- Introducing more deliberative approaches to policy development, in which policy is developed in partnership with a range of key stakeholders;

- More structured processes for developing policies, possibly along project management lines [3], to enable communication and engagement to be planned from the start;

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[3]This was suggested by the 1999 Cabinet Office report, Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century, and forms the basis of the OGC's Successful Delivery Toolkit.

◆ Developing expertise in specific techniques of stakeholder management, consultation and market research among policy development and communication specialists;

◆ More systematic documentation of key decisions, supported by active knowledge management within policy teams;

◆ Action, for instance training, to raise awareness and understanding of the principles, and of their contribution to better policy making;

3. Understanding how the public reacts to risk.

Objective of this section

To create an understanding of how the public perceive and view risk and their expectations of Government in handling crises

3.1 Why is it important to understand how the public views risk?

"Public reactions to risk sometimes seem bizarre, at least when compared with scientific estimates … However, such reactions are not totally unpredictable, or even necessarily unreasonable."
(Communicating about Risks to Public Health, Department of Health)

Understanding how people view risk is often as important as understanding the risk itself. Individuals sometimes have a very different perspective from experts. This is not always because of a different interpretation of the facts. In some cases, their views can be based on entirely different assumptions and values.

Communication which sets out to change or influence beliefs without recognising the rational basis of those beliefs, or tries to divert attention away from people's real concerns, will almost certainly fail. A 'we know best' attitude is often a formula for disaster.

The main issue is whether a risk is acceptable to the public. If a policy imposes risks that people are not prepared to accept, then it is likely to be unpopular, difficult and costly to implement. If public concerns about a risk are not identified and aired early on, then these may escalate into a crisis as happened with the poll tax. On the other hand, if people are indifferent to a risk because they feel that it does not affect them individually, then it may require considerable time and effort to motivate them to take action to tackle it. These issues are explored further in **section 3.3**

There has been a considerable amount of research into what influences people's judgements about "acceptable risk", and about how public attitudes towards risk vary. This section, which draw from the **Department of Health guide, Communicating about Risks to Public Health**, provide two simple frameworks for understanding how people view risks.

For a more thorough understanding of how people perceive risk, it is worth referring to the Department of Health guide itself which can be accessed through the link above.

3.2 How do people form judgements about risks?

"Perceptions of risks are heightened if the consumer has no choice about dealing with risk, has no control, or the decision is a 'one-off' (for example MMR vaccination). The outcome can contribute to a heightened sense of risk if it is irreversible or potentially devastating, is felt immediately, and affects other people"
("Running Risks", National Consumer Council)

People tend not to judge risks on technical assessments of probability and consequence alone. People's judgements of risks tend to be multi-dimensional, taking account of a range of contextual factors. These contextual factors fall into two broad categories:

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Judgements about the source or sources of information about the risk (e.g. whether they trust the person giving the information, whether they are getting confused or conflicting messages). There is a great deal of evidence that Governments tend to enjoy less public credibility than other bodies such as Oxfam or Amnesty International. This has important implications for Departments in communicating about risk, and these are explored in **Sections 5** and **Section 6**.

Ethical and value judgements (e.g. about whether the risk is voluntary or imposed, whether there are offsetting benefits, and how the risks and benefits are distributed). These factors have a critical influence on whether people judge risks to be acceptable, and are discussed in more detail below.

People's assessments of the probability of risks tend to be subjective. The key issue is "what does this mean for me and my family" rather than the incidence across the population as a whole. People are also more likely to believe in risks that seem intuitively plausible, even where expert assessments have found no evidence of a causal link.

The Department of Health guide **Communicating about Risks to Public Health** provides more detailed advice on this, and on the biases that may influence people's perceptions.

People can "frame" the same information in different ways, leading them to reach a very different conclusion in each case. "Framing" can depend on the way information is presented (e.g. whether a bottle is half-full or half-empty), and on people's underlying assumptions and values. A framework for understanding how different people can approach risk is given in the following sections.

Recent research into "social amplification" has attempted to explain how certain events, such as the Three-Mile Island accident in 1979, have taken on a much wider significance in people's minds. The process has been likened to the effect of dropping a stone into a pond, and suggests that public concerns about certain risks may be amplified by previous, sometimes unconnected events.

3.3 What factors are likely to increase public concern about risks?

There has been extensive research into understanding what factors are most likely to trigger public concern about risks, and there are some well-established rules of thumb. These are summarised in the list of "Fright Factors" below. While some factors are likely to be more significant than others in certain circumstances, the list as a whole can help Departments to predict whether a risk is likely to cause public concern.

Fright Factors
Risk is likely to become worrying (and less acceptable) for the public when it is perceived:
to be involuntary (e.g. exposure to pollution) rather than voluntary (e.g. dangerous sports or smoking)
as inequitably distributed (some benefit while others suffer the consequences)
as inescapable by taking personal precautions i.e. there is no control
to arise from an unfamiliar or novel source (e.g. genetically modified organisms)
to result from man-made (e.g. pesticides, nuclear power stations) rather than natural sources
to cause hidden and irreversible damage, e.g. through onset of illness many years after exposure (e.g. to ionising radiation)

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- ◇   to pose some particular danger to small children or pregnant women or more generally to future generations

- ◇   to threaten a form of death, or illness/injury (e.g. cancer) arousing particular dread

- ◇   to damage identifiable rather than anonymous victims

- ◇   to be poorly understood by science

- ◇   as subject to contradictory statements from responsible sources (or, even worse, from the same source)

  (Communicating about Risks to Public Health, Department of Health)

3.4 How do attitudes towards risk vary?

There are a number of frameworks for understanding how attitudes to risk vary across society. One framework uses Cultural Theory [4] to identify four basic attitudes or "world views":

Fatalists tend to see life as capricious and attempts at control as futile. They may not knowingly accept risks, but will accept what is in store for them.	**Hierarchists** want well-established rules and procedures to regulate risks. They tend to see nature as "robust within limits".
Individualists see personal choice and initiative as paramount. They tend to see risks as presenting opportunities - except those that threaten freedom of choice and action within free markets.	**Egalitarians** tend to see the balance of nature as fragile and strongly fear risks to the environment, the collective good and future generations. They tend to distrust expertise and demand public participation in decisions. They react strongly against any "Government knows best" approach.

Although in practice, people are likely to conform to different types in different circumstances, this framework provides a simple tool for identifying the range of possible reactions to a risk and for selecting approaches to addressing them. It can also help Departments to anticipate and resolve conflicting views, for example between individualists and egalitarians.

The table below suggests the main difficulties that Departments may face in communicating with each of the four "world views" and suggests how these may be addressed. While there is no easy way of reconciling opposing views, it may be possible to build a degree of consensus and mutual trust by encouraging dialogue with other "world views".

Fatalists Potential problem:		**Hierarchists** Potential problem:	
◇	Hard to engage in dialogue	◇	More likely to rely on technical assessments than "social" factors Potential solution
◇	Difficult to persuade to act to tackle risks to society as a whole		
Potential solution:		Potential solution:	
◇	Active consultation to obtain views	◇	Involvement in dialogue with other "world views"
◇	Emphasis on individual benefits of action to tackle risks	◇	Provide with empirical evidence

Individualists Potential problem:		Egalitarians Potential problem:	
◆	More likely view attempts to regulate risks as unnecessarily intrusive	◆	More likely to demand regulation to tackle risks
◆	Difficult to persuade to act to tackle risks to society as a whole	◆	Likely to distrust "establishment" view
Potential solution:		Potential solution:	
◆	Involvement in dialogue with other "world views"	◆	Involvement in dialogue with other "world views"
◆	Clear evidence to support chosen course of action	◆	Open and inclusive debate, involving trusted independent sources
◆	Emphasis on individual benefits of action to tackle risks	◆	Clear evidence to support chosen course of action
◆	Information and advice to support choice	◆	Polling and other evidence to show breadth of support for chosen course of action

3.5 What things do people expect from Government when it communicates with them about risk?

What consumers want:
· Government to provide a lead but to let people make up their own minds
· greater consumer input in the decision-making processes, and more meaningful consultation
· greater openness and honesty, including better communication where facts are uncertain
· increased dialogue between Government and the consumer
· Government to find new ways to listen to consumers
(Running Risks; National Consumer Council)

People are likely to want different things from Government at different stages of the risk management process, and the public's needs may be different from from those of other stakeholders such as non-Government organisations (NGOs). However it is possible to identify some "core" communication needs, which are summarised under the headings below.

Information	◆	Information about the nature of the risk, i.e. its likelihood and potential consequences
	◆	Information about the reliability of risk assessments, including information on where the facts are uncertain or disputed, or where assessments are based on assumptions or opinions
	◆	Information about who is responsible for managing the risk
	◆	Information about the choices and options open to them to control their exposure to the risk or mitigate the consequences
Assurance	◆	Assurance that advice and decisions are based on robust information and analysis, and that action is being taken to reduce uncertainty
	◆	Assurance that the necessary procedures are in place to manage the risk
	◆	Assurance that those responsible for assessing and managing the risk are exercising leadership, acting competently and in the public interest
Involvement	◆	An opportunity to be involved in the process of assessing the risk and in deciding what action to take

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[4] This has its origins in work by Mary Douglas and others in the early 1980s. For a more detailed discussion see **Taking account of Societal Concerns about risk**.

While these needs are likely to be common to most types of risk, some will be more important than others in different circumstances. The main factor is likely to be the role people perceive Government to be taking in relation to the risk, as the table below shows.

Government's perceived role	Primary communication need	Secondary communication needs
Advisory	Information	Assurance Involvement
Protective	Assurance	Information Involvement
Redistributive	Involvement	Information Assurance

- Where Government acts in an **advisory** role people are most likely to want clear and accurate information to help them decide what action to take. They will also need assurance that the information is based on the best available evidence and is free from bias. People may place less emphasis on being involved in the decision process if they are confident that it is robust and fair.

- Where Government acts to **protect** the public from risks people are most likely to want assurance that Government is taking effective action to address it. Clear and accurate information will also be important where people need to take action. People may place less emphasis on knowing the precise nature of the risk, or to be involved the decision process, if they are confident that it is under control.

- Where Government acts to **redistribute** risks and benefits between sections of society, for example in planning decisions, this will often involve imposing risks on people. In such circumstances, people are more likely to want to be involved in the decision process to ensure that their interests are safeguarded. They will also need information to help them understand the risk and to inform their representations, and will want assurance that the decision process is fair.

Departments should aim to meet all three core communication needs as a matter of good governance. However, where one need is likely to be of primary importance to the public, it may be necessary to pay particular attention to addressing this in the communication strategy.

In addition, some issues are likely to become more important at different stages in the risk management process. These are discussed in the section on **"When to communicate about risk"**. Advice on identifying and involving stakeholders is contained in the section **"How to create a risk communication strategy"**

In some cases, there may be good reasons why it is not possible to address all three core communication needs. For example, it may not be possible to disclose the precise nature of a terrorist threat without exposing the public to greater risk. The Freedom of Information Act recognises the need for non-disclosure of information in these circumstances, and provides clear rules for exemption. In these circumstances, people are more likely to want assurances that Government is taking effective action to control the risk and is acting in the public interest, and these are likely to become the most important communication priority.

4. Understanding how the media reacts to risk

Objectives of this section To describe the media's role in reporting risk, and the factors that contribute to issues attracting media attention. To outline the role of pressure groups in amplifying media interest.

4.1 Why is understanding the media's role important?

It is through the media that most people first hear of a major incident. In fact, most of what they ever learn about it will probably come through TV, radio or newspapers. The media, therefore, is a major contributor to shaping the public's view on risk.

Research, however, shows that public attitudes towards the media are often ambivalent - a blend of attraction and repellence. While many people really value the information, opinion and the entertainment that the media gives them, they are also very wary of the power they feel it has over them. This particularly applies to national newspapers.

> "The press are scaremongers. They need to sell their papers and they know what they print sells. They encourage panic because it sells newspapers."
> *(Crisis Communication Research. November 2000. Cabinet Office)*

At the back of their minds is the feeling that the media is a powerful "selling machine" that uses sensationalism and spin to sell to or attract the public.

They feel that newspapers have been responsible for sometimes whipping up hysteria and creating unnecessary panic, and that they have a tendency to focus on a particular topic for a period ("flavour of the month"), at the cost of other issues, which they then drop suddenly after a short while.

This scepticism is less applicable to television, which is seen as less biased and balanced, and more trusted as a source of factual and accurate information, particularly through its documentaries, and news programmes, and some soaps. Nor does it apply to radio or to the regional and local media, which is seen as a representative of, and is trusted by, its community.

> "The regional media during the [FMD] epidemic fulfilled a special role. They were always on hand, pressing the local agenda on what they saw as a London-imposed national agenda"
> *(Foot and Mouth Disease 2001; Lessons to be Learned Inquiry. Dr Ian Anderson. July 2002)*

The important lessons from this are:

- Recognition that the media is extremely influential in people's lives, and a main provider of information on which individuals base their risk decisions. For example its exaggerated reporting of fuel shortages in the autumn of 2000 helped to cause panic buying in some areas, with serious consequences. It cannot be ignored and it will not go away.

- Understanding how the public react to it. The degree of cynicism the public have for some of the media means the effects of sensationalist reporting are not inevitable. The public will not necessarily believe what they read. The key point is trust; if the public trust the medium, they are likely to treat the messages they receive from it as factually correct.

◈ Not seeing the "media" as a single entity, with a single purpose. It is widely diverse with thousands of varying elements with different functions and audiences. Each sees risk in a different way. For example, a national newspaper with a political or campaigning agenda covers risk in a different way to a local radio station. So, while it may be difficult to get straight reporting of a story in a national tabloid, it may be perfectly possible to do so through a television discussion programme. Overall, it offers huge communication opportunities.

All this argues strongly for a policy of working with the media, not treating it as the enemy. Understanding its different parts, what its approach to risk is, developing good relationships, helping these gain an insight into the nature and scale of your risk, and being as open and frank as possible, represents as good an insurance policy as you will find for when there are difficulties.

4.2 How do the news media react to risk?

Major risk incidents contain the very essence of hard news. They often;

◈ Involve ordinary people with whom everyone can identify, who have become the victims of extraordinary and horrible events. Few stories have such a powerful draw for the reader, listener and viewer - and therefore the media;

◈ Represent threat to a lot of people, primarily to the most vulnerable and perhaps valuable (mainly perceived to be children, pregnant women and the elderly)

◈ Have major, perhaps fatal, long term consequences.

The **direct effects** of many of these incidents are fairly predictable. For example, the direct effects of a major rail accident, such as Paddington, were on the victims, their families, rail services and other passengers.

Potentially more damaging, but equally important to foresee, is the impact of any **indirect effects**. In the case of Paddington this was the accumulation of a number of accidents being amplified by the media, and others, into a fundamental crisis of confidence in the safety of the rail network, the competence of its management and the overall authority and responsibility of the Government.

Sometimes, the indirect effects of an event far exceed the direct ones. For example although no one died at Three Mile Island, the nuclear malfunction there had huge indirect effects on the industry world-wide.

> "Risk communication can itself have its own indirect effects. If a health warning is issued on a prominent variety of cheese or wine, rival producers may benefit at first. But this will be cut short as they find that consumers also - unfairly - shun their products. They may be forced to close or lay off staff, with further indirect effects. Then there may be expensive attempts to restore confidence, political recriminations - perhaps international in scope - and so on."
> *(Communicating about Risks to Public Health. Department of Health)*

By themselves the direct or indirect effects may not cause a major story. But if one or more of the **Fright Factors** comes into play, media interest is likely to be increased. This in turn will amplify the issue, and reports of the public's reactions to the original risk will feed the indirect effects. The whole issue is then likely to take off if one or more of the following triggers is pulled:

	Media Triggers - A risk issue is more likely to become a major story if the following apply
◈	Assignation of **blame** or suspicion of **blame**
◈	Alleged **secrets** and **'cover ups'**
◈	**"human interest"** through heroes, villains, victims, dupes etc
◈	links to **existing high-profile issues or personalities**
◈	**conflict** (between experts or experts versus the public)
◈	**signal value**; story as a sign of further problems (What next?)
◈	**many people at risk**, even if at low levels (it could be you)
◈	strong **visual impact** (e.g. pictures of suffering)
◈	links to **sex and/or crime**
◈	**reference back to other reportage** (a story because it's a story")
	(Communicating about Risks to Public Health, Department of Health)

The triggers can therefore be indicators of impending difficulties. The following chart shows how they can be applied to three well-known examples. It is important to remember, however that situations can change quickly. For example, while GM foods had no strong visual impact, GM crops did (protestors dressed in protective clothing, making chemical and germ warfare connections, as they destroyed crops). This emphasises the importance keeping a close watch on situations to identify where the next triggers might cause a story to run.

Media Triggers	Rail Accidents	Genetically Modified Foods	Rehousing of convicted sex offenders
questions of **blame**	✔	✔	▭
alleged secrets and **'cover ups'**	✔	✔	✔
"human interest" through heroes, villains, victims, dupes etc	✔	✔	✔
links to **existing high-profile issues or personalities**	✔	✔	▭
conflict (between experts or experts versus the public)	✔	✔	✔
signal value; story as a sign of further problems ("What next?")	✔	✔	✔
many people at risk, even if at low levels ("It could be you")	▭	▭	✔
strong **visual impact** (e.g. pictures of suffering)	✔	▭	▭
links to **sex and/or crime**	▭	▭	✔
reference back to other reportage (a "story because it's a story")	✔	✔	✔

Once a story is established, the very fact that there is interest in the topic makes another story. This leads to "snowballs" as media compete for coverage. Stories also sometimes have an incubation period; interest can erupt some time after the actual event, catching out the unwary.

4.3 The role of representative groups and the media

Pressure groups, professional bodies and other representative groups often play a major role in shaping the coverage of risk issues. They understand the need for proactive information, for simplicity of message and the timetables that rule publication. They are flexible, always available to the media and have the capacity for providing eye-catching stories speedily and effectively. They are experts at making a case.

In some areas they are regarded as a vital channel for information because they control access to risk groups. They often find the individuals who provide the personal stories demanded by the tabloid press.

> A study in 2001 found that 60 percent of the population believed that charities were more trustworthy than Government
> *(Risk: improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty. Strategy Unit)*

To some degree representative groups fill the gap left by declining public trust in some institutions - including Government - and science. They have substantial credibility with the public and they have a viewpoint that needs to be listened to and understood. This has two implications for Government -

◆   they should be regarded as a key stakeholder and involved wherever possible,

◆   at a time of crisis, speedy responses will need to be made to their statements and activities.

Pressure groups and the media both face considerable pressure on their time, both from their client groups and from different parts of Government. It is worth being sensitive to these pressures where possible, co-ordinating approaches with other parts of your Department.

A balanced responsiveness is needed to ensure that views of organised and vocal interest groups does not lead to less attention being paid to the interests of other less vociferous stakeholders.

COMMUNICATING RISK - TOOL-KIT

Objective

To set out a step by step approach to developing risk communication strategies, both to support the development of policy, and to deal with contingencies if and when they arise.

Introduction

Risk communication strategies have two elements;

1.   A risk communication plan to support both the development and maintenance of the policy. The steps to achieving this are set out in in **Section 5**
2.   A communication plan for dealing with incidents or crises if and when they occur. The elements of this are described in **Section 6**.

Knowledge and experience gained from 1 will greatly boost your ability to deal with 2. Both are **equally important**.

5. How communication can help prevent risk becoming crises

This Section sets out

❖ **Risk communication strategy: what it is and why you need one**

❖ **When to communicate about risk**

❖ **Seven steps to creating a risk communication strategy**

5.1 Risk communication strategy: what it is and why you need one

The function of a communication strategy is to help you -

❖ manage the risk

❖ map out your way ahead, have a clear idea of where you want to go - what you want to achieve - and how to get there

❖ anticipate future problems so that you can either deal with them or be prepared for them

❖ identify who you need to communicate with, involve, consult with

❖ define what you need to find out and what you want to say to them

❖ decide how you want to reach your audience, your channels of communication

❖ identify the resources needed and manage those resources

❖ provide you with a framework for measuring your progress and reviewing and evaluating its effectiveness.

5.2 When to communicate about risk

It is widely acknowledged that, for communication with the public to be successful, communication needs to take place throughout the risk management process. The Strategy Unit report puts it at the heart of the process (see Figure 1 below), and suggests that it should be an ongoing activity.

Figure 1: risk management process (after Strategy Unit)

What does this mean in practice?

It is often helpful to view the risk management process as a series of distinct stages, as communication is likely to have a different purpose and focus during each stage. The table below illustrates the likely focus and role of risk communication during each of the four stages of risk management outlined in Figure 1.

Stage 1 - identifying risks	This stage is likely to involve putting out feelers to pick up areas of potential public concern, possibly through focus groups, attitude surveys or ongoing consultation with stakeholders. The focus is likely to be on getting information from the public - both about potential risks that need to be assessed and about sections of the public who might be concerned.
Stage 2 - assessing risks	Having identified issues of potential concern and sections of the public who are likely to be affected, communication at this stage will aim to find a common view of whether the risks are acceptable, and what action needs to be taken to mitigate them. The focus at this stage is likely to be on active deliberation, to facilitate the exchange of information and brokering discussions between different stakeholder groups. This stage of the process is likely to be particularly important where Government plays a redistributive role (**see section 3.5 for definitions**), which may impose risks on certain sections of the population. Where issues are contentious, the debate will need to go beyond technical discussions of the probability and impact of risks, and explore issues such as the distribution of risks and benefits, the availability of choice, and people's willingness to accept the risks. Discussions can also be used to challenge and test core assumptions held by experts.
Stage 3 - addressing risks	At this stage in the process, the focus is likely to be on providing information to the public. The aim will depend mainly on the role Government takes in relation to the risk (**see section 3.5 for definitions**):

- Where Government plays an advisory role (advising the public on whether a product or activity is safe), the focus is likely to be on providing information;

- Where Government plays a protective role (for example, counter-terrorism), the focus is likely to be on providing assurance about the effectiveness and legitimacy of the measures taken;

- Where Government plays a redistributive role (for example, licensing a new technology), the focus is likely to be on explaining and justifying its decisions, and outlining any action it is taking to mitigate or compensate for the increased risk.

Stage 4 - reviewing and reporting risks

At this stage of the process, the focus is likely to shift towards getting information from the public. The aim will be to seek their views about whether risk management processes are working and whether risks remain under control.

Techniques relevant to stage 1 of the process, such as focus groups and attitude surveys, are also likely to be relevant here, as well as follow-up consultations with stakeholders involved in earlier discussions.

These are illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2 below. The arrows represent the main direction of communication during each stage of the process.
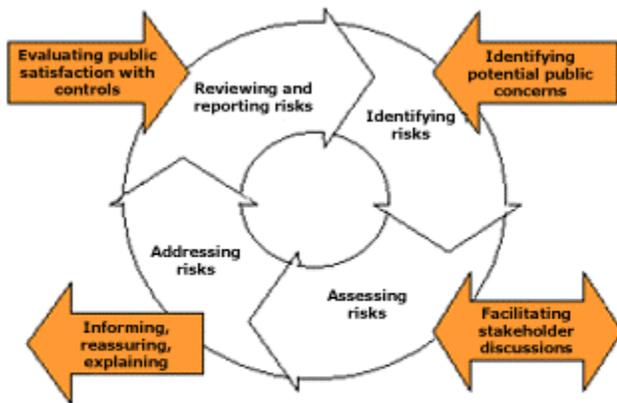
Figure 2: role of communication during the risk management process

The same framework can also be used to identify when and how to communicate with the public about risks that may arise as a result of Government policies, e.g. risks arising from the adoption of new technologies or from changes to the benefits system.

Building in communication strategies helps the management of change in the real world go smoothly by;
· Planning stakeholders into the policy process from the outset
· Basing policy on awareness of the political and wider context
· Targeting different audiences using a range of media; and
· Involving all those affected by policy presentation - including deliverers and implementers
(Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for money. National Audit Office)

Figure 3 below provides a simplified illustration of a typical policy development process. While in practice, policy development is rarely as straightforward as this, and a number of phases may take place in parallel, it may nonetheless be possible to identify specific points during the process that are likely to require a specific approach to communication.
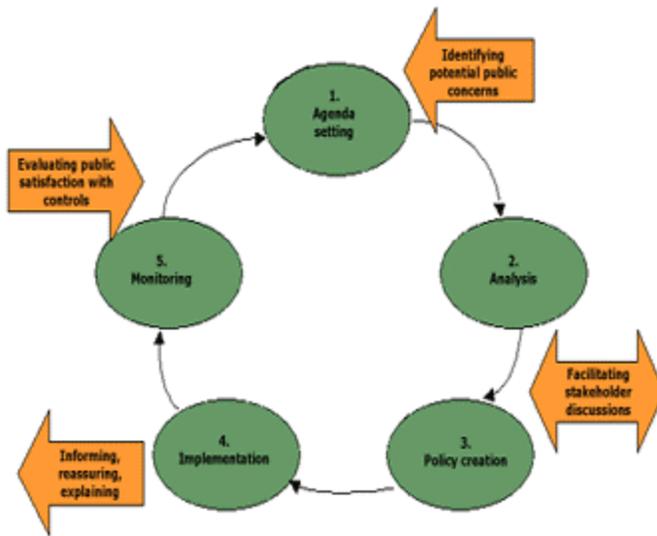
In the process illustrated above, the following approaches may be relevant:

- Taking soundings to identify potential public concerns during the agenda setting process (stage 1), while issues are being identified and explored;

- Facilitating stakeholder discussions during the analysis and policy creation phases (stages 2 and 3), while options are being evaluated and developed;

- Informing, reassuring and explaining while policies are being implemented (stage 4);

- Checking stakeholder satisfaction with risk control measures while policies are being monitored and evaluated (stage 5).

5.3 Seven steps to creating a risk communication strategy

The following are **Seven Steps** to help you design your strategy, put it into effect, and to evaluate and maintain it.

Step One	**Establish a team/network**
Step Two	**Decide what you want to achieve**
Step Three	**Get to know who the stakeholders are**
Step Four	**Decide what form of consultation to use**
Step Five	**Engage and involve your stakeholders**
Step Six	**Monitoring and evaluating your strategy**
Step Seven	**Maintaining the policy communication strategy**

These map broadly onto the process in **figure 3 in Section 5.2**.

- **Steps 1 - 4** should take place before risks are assessed, or options analysed.

- **Step 5** should take place while risks are being assessed, or policy created and implemented.

- **Step 6 and 7** should take place while risks are being reviewed or policies monitored.

Step one:

Establish a team/network

Communication planning is not a solitary pursuit. The best results are gained from ideas-sharing, discussion, debate.

During major crises, where policy makers and communication specialists would need to work closely together for the duration of the crisis you need to bring together people who can provide you with

- an understanding of internal departmental cultures and structures in order to identify blind spots in thinking brought about by custom, institutional remit etc; and who can bring a Government-wide perspective to bear

- an understanding of the relationships with the media, the role of the media in relation to risk, and who have a good grasp of communication techniques generally

- the context and history of the risk which might have a bearing on the current situation; for example public perception of new food safety issue is very likely to be influenced by previous food safety issues, even though they may appear to be very different (salmonella to GM foods)

Form a network of colleagues from the policy section, information specialists, special advisers, those involved in risk improvement or business continuity, and from any relevant outside bodies.

Share the responsibility with them.

You will gain from their ideas, knowledge and experience.

They will have ownership of the policy, a better understanding of it and be in a better position to "sell" it for you.

All will be able to contribute more if things go wrong and the risks turn to crises.

Step Two:

Decide what you want to achieve

The first step in any communication planning is to decide what it is you want to achieve, to set your aims and objectives. This is crucial. You need to know where you are going, a clear sense of direction, an agenda for action, and you need to decide this before you start.

If you fail to do this you probably won't achieve what you thought you wanted to achieve, you might well find difficulties arising that you had not anticipated, and you might even have a full blown crisis on your hands.

At the beginning of policy, and as part of the risk analysis, therefore, do a rigorous assessment of the policy's communication needs - a communications audit. This will help you

- identify the overall communication needs of the policy

- clarify the objectives of the risk communication

- begin to map out the route ahead

- spot the issues that could go critical

- focus your action

Think through -

The issue

- Is the risk potentially controversial? Is there an opposing point of view?

- Are there uncertainties about the issue? If so, have I developed acceptable, easily understandable methods of describing the uncertainties? Do I have a clear idea of what is being done to resolve them? Is there a problem other than the hazard itself - e.g. is there a public confidence issue?

Public perception

- Is there likely to be a scare or public disinterest?

- Is there an existing "template" or set of relevant past experiences/ history (e.g. a history of food scares) which the public will use to place this issue in context)

- Is this new information that is likely to startle or confuse people because it is incongruous with their accepted knowledge and experience?

- Is it likely to trigger a widespread public reaction? Will it impact on a large number of people? Is blame likely to be assigned? Is it likely to be an emotive issue?

The role of communication

- What do I really want a communication strategy to achieve?

- Who has an interest in the policy (the stakeholders)?

- Why and how will they be affected?

- Do I need to gain a better understanding of their interests and concerns?

◈   How will I engage with, and involve, interested parties?

◈   How do I maintain this relationship?

◈   Do I need to monitor public mood generally?

◈   What can I learn from past experience?

◈   What nature of a communication handling strategy will be needed if risk turns to crisis

"Risk policy that has not been subjected to a rigorous audit to ensure that all aspects of communication have been taken into account of cannot usually be saved by good communication techniques late in the day." (Communicating about Risks to Health; Dept of Health)

In setting aims and objectives, you need to be clear about -

◈ the Government's overall objectives,

◈ your department's or organisation's objectives,

◈ the objectives specific to your policy area,

◈ the objectives of any wider pre-existing communications strategy

Your strategy **must** be aligned with all of these objectives, or, if not, be consciously misaligned; not misaligned by accident or negligence.

So, having worked your way through all these factors you should have come to some conclusions on what your main aims and objectives should be.

One of your aims might be to do with maintaining public confidence - protection of the public or helping the public protect themselves.

To help you achieve these, two objectives might be to

◈ identify the likely risks in the policy, and to help you take sound management decisions.

◈ develop a clear idea of public perception of the policy and its risks and to make sure you are prepared for any difficulties.

There could be other **objectives**; the following is a checklist to help you clarify what these might be

◈ To alert you to any concerns that may not have been picked up through other sources ("intelligence")

◈ To create a better understanding of stakeholders and their general perception of the risks ("knowledge")

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◆ To give stakeholders a stake in decisions about how to manage risks ("sharing ownership")

◆ To stimulate debate and discussion ("openness")

◆ To provide information so that individuals can decide how best to control their own exposure to risk or judge the action that Government is taking on their behalf ("choice")

◆ To give firm information and advice, for example in the case of fire, or during health epidemics ("public information")

◆ To set out legal requirements, for example farmers in the case of animal diseases ("requirements")

◆ To influence attitudes, change behaviour, for example, smoking, driving habits.("culture changing")

◆ To get people to take action to tackle risks that affect society, for example through participation in vaccination programmes. ("persuasion")

◆ To replace the fear of risk with knowledge and understanding ("reassurance")

◆ To justify and defend Government's position ("justification")

◆ To help build trust in Government and the legitimacy of decisions reached ("credibility")

Step Three:

Get to know who the stakeholders are

Answering the question "what are we trying to achieve" requires a clear view of who the relevant stakeholders are. Identifying these helps to prevent key concerns being missed, concerns which are bound to arise later on when it will be costly and disruptive to address them.

For example, before the 2001 foot and mouth crisis, most of the planning for animal disease focussed on one stakeholder - the farming industry. What was not foreseen was the impact of closing footpaths on other stakeholders - the tourist industry, local businesses, and the wider rural community.

It is therefore essential to list the stakeholders, identify what their concerns and interests are, and who is likely to have the greatest influence over your policy. The following is a guide to doing this. The guide is not intended to be definitive, but is closely based on a number of **authoritative sources** (see annex e).

It is important to recognise that not all stakeholders concerns can be reconciled - some are likely to be mutually conflicting.

However, involving stakeholders can help identify areas of common ground where progress can be made.

Carry out a stakeholder analysis

First, ask yourselves;

- What are the potential issues?

- who will be affected by the risk and the consequences of any management decision?

- which parties or individuals have knowledge and expertise which may be useful to inform any discussion or both?

- which parties or individuals have expressed an interest in this particular, or a similar type of risk problem?

- which stakeholders will be prepared to listen to and respect different viewpoints, and be prepared to negotiate?

Specific stakeholders might include different medical or education professions, charities and campaigning groups, various Government departments and agencies, certain businesses, local authorities, and so on. Many issues have strong international or European stakeholders.

So, first, list **all** stakeholders

- Own Department (including Ministers)

- Government Departments

- Public sector

◈ Private sector, including professional associations

◈ Non-Governmental organisations, charities, pressure Groups, victims groups

◈ International stakeholders (e.g. export markets)

◈ The general public, particularly diverse groups who might otherwise be excluded from public policy

Engaging groups that are currently excluded from public policy

The Scottish Executive has developed guidance to ensure diverse groups are not excluded from public consultation. It identifies diverse as including;

◈ Asylum seekers

◈ Disabled people

◈ Gypsies/travellers

◈ Minority ethnic communities

◈ Lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups

◈ Older people

◈ People on low incomes

◈ People with specific health issues

◈ People in specific areas (such as rural areas or peripheral estates)

◈ Refugees

◈ Religious/faith groups

◈ Women

◈ Young people

Scottish Executive (2002) Good Practice Guidance: Consultation with Equalities Groups

Second, identify the interest of your stakeholders;

▭ What changes do they want and what do they want left unchanged?

▭ What are their expectations?

▭ What resources do they have?

▭ How can they benefit from the policy?

▭ How would they be affected by the risks?

▭ What relationships do they have with others?

Third, decide who the priority stakeholders are. It is unlikely you will have the time or resources to engage with all interested parties. You will therefore need to decide who are the most important.

A simple two-axis diagram can help you do this. The axes show "influence" and "interest" respectively, how much that individual or organisation can affect what happens, and how much they are affected by what happens. While traditional stakeholder mapping tools often refer to "power" and "interest" it may be more appropriate to think of "representativeness" and "interest" in the context of communicating about risks to the public. Remember to think about both internal stakeholders (e.g. within Government) and external stakeholders.

Set up the diagram with the vertical axis representing a scale from no influence at all to exceptional or over-riding influence, and the horizontal from no interest at all to exceptionally strong;

(Making Policy that happens: A Policy Toolkit. CMPS)
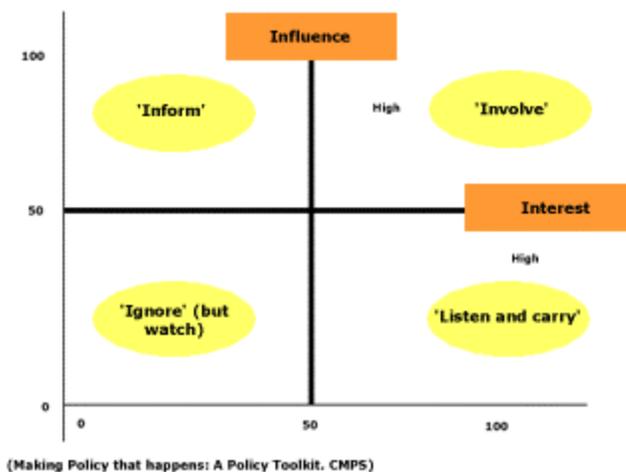
Decide where each stakeholder should appear on the matrix. Put yourself "in the shoes" of players and interested parties. Consider what really matters to them, and how, typically, they act and react.

You should be able to identify those organisations that may be especially sensitive about aspects of a policy issue or problem (some of whom may neither wield great power or influence, nor have a direct interest in the issue as a whole). Such people could seek to exert considerable influence if the development, presentation and implementation of a policy fails to recognise their needs and concerns.

Bear in mind that stakeholders' positions change as the situation develops - for example when people greatly affected but with little influence start to organise into more powerful groups. So keep your first conclusions, keep the diagram under review and constantly monitor changes.

Step Four:

Decide what form of consultation to use

Before engaging with stakeholders it is important to be very clear on two issues.

First, what it is you want to achieve from the consultation. The form of the consultation, and the terms of the engagement depend very much on this. There is also a danger that if you are unclear and uncertain about objectives, the consultation will seem to stakeholders that you are really just going through the motions. It will smack of tokenism, with the result that they will become disaffected. Consultation therefore needs to be genuine and purposeful.

"Departments sometimes confuse market research with genuine involvement in the decision process"
(Risk; improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty. Cabinet Office Strategy Unit)

Your objectives, could be

- to help you with your policy making by -

- using it to define problems, or to find solutions - or both

- establishing the complexity of an issue

- developing innovative policy options

- testing out ideas

- building a consensus

- identifying and understanding the risks, their sensitivity, the scale and severity of their impact, how close they are to stimulating one or more of the Fright Factors

- establishing the numbers of people likely to be affected

- finding the most effective and cost-efficient solutions to problems

- to help your relations with your stakeholders by

- making sure they feel they can make contribution to the policy making process

- sharing with them the risks, and gaining their acceptance

- understanding their general perception of risk

Second, managing expectations. You need to be clear about what you want participants to contribute to the process, what they will gain from taking part, and the extent to which their input can influence decision-making. Make sure they understand these issues so that they are realistic about both what is expected of them, and what can change as a result of their involvement.

Step Five:

Engage and involve your stakeholders

Not all forms of stakeholder involvement will be appropriate for all circumstances. The purpose, or objective, of your public involvement should inform your choice of method or methods, along with a number of other factors, including the needs of your target audience, resources and the time-frame of a specific policy.

It is best not to rely on one method. Depending on the type of issue you are seeking to involve the public in, a range of methods is likely to be required if you are to reach your different audiences and meet your objectives. Using e-consultation tools (for example internet discussion forums and e-citizens' juries) alongside other approaches (such as workshops and written consultation) can be effective in this respect.

There are two main forms of public involvement;

Consultation: a two-way relationship in which Government asks for and receives citizens' feedback on policy proposals. Typically, consultation might be used when extensive responses are required to a specific policy proposal in order to gain views from the public and others such as representatives and pressure groups, for example through publishing consultation papers, public meetings or deliberative polling.

Participation: a relationship based on partnership with Government in which citizens actively participate in defining the process and developing the policy. Participation activities might see citizens involved directly to draw up policy proposals and develop solutions to a problem. This might include representatives from pressure groups working with a Government department to help develop new operating frameworks by co-opting their representatives on to Government bodies or stakeholder committees. Methods for engaging the public include citizens' juries, citizens' panels, or direct delegation to citizens to make decisions.

Below are examples of public involvement methods. See **Annex D** for a more complete list

Public involvement methods

Seeking input and feedback

Written consultations

◆ Questionnaires

◆ Surveys

   - paper based

   - by telephone/ on the street

   - on-line

Good for...	But...
- getting views on detailed and potentially complex proposals	- limited space for in depth feedback
- reaching large numbers/getting a representative sample	- opinion rather than judgement
- exploring attitudes	- dependent on good response rate
- (if online) reaching a large audience quickly	
- getting behind statistics	

Exploring attitudes and ideas

Qualitative research

- ◇ focus groups
- ◇ reconvened focus groups (groups meet more than once over a period of time)
- ◇ interviews

Good for…

- detailed discussion

- ideas generated

- exploring attitudes

- creativity

- delivering beneath the surface - beliefs, values, attitudes

But…

- discussion not quantification

- might want to support with quantitative data

- smaller numbers

- non-representative

Involving people in decision-making

Not just finding out views

Giving people time to get to grips with an issue

And being part of developing solutions

Methods include;

- ◇ citizens' juries
- ◇ workshops
- ◇ consensus conferences

Good for…

- developing informed opinion

- conveying complex decision-making

- building consensus

- linking to real change

But…

- needs to be well- thought through

- must be taken seriously can't be an empty exercise

(Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement. Cabinet Office)

Electronic methods of consultation

New technologies are opening up new channels for the public to be engaged in policy-making. E-consultation, in particular, has many benefits - opportunities to reach wider audiences, enabling more informed consultation by making information accessible to participants, allowing on-line discussion, and on-line feedback.

Research indicates that effective e-consultation can greatly increase the trust and confidence of citizens in Government.

However it is important to ensure that when electronic methods are used, people are made aware of where the electronic information/consultation can be found.

Also, it has to be borne in mind that less than 50 per cent of the UK population currently have access to the Internet.

Some examples of electronic methods of consultation;

Electronic letterboxes
Email addresses on websites or documents give citizens opportunities to feedback to Government

Email distribution lists
Lists used to circulate consultation documents to interested parties. Citizens can register for these lists via a website. Their comments can be forwarded to Government

Internet based fora
These can be limited to certain individuals (e.g. a core group of stakeholders) or open to anyone. They can be designed to allow citizens to; respond to Government proposals on-line; read and view the comments of all participants; and engage with other citizens in a dialogue on the proposals.

On-line live chat events
Participants exchange views, within a fixed period of time (usually 2 hours) with Ministers, MPs etc. These can take place during the time period of an Internet discussion forum.

On-line chat events
These are surveys conducted through emails or on specific websites

Interactive games and scenario planning
These can be used to engage citizens in developing policy options or proposals.

(Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement. Cabinet Office)

Remember to give a feedback to those involved in the consultation

People take time out of their busy lives to contribute to involvement exercises and it is therefore important for them to know if their views were taken into account. Without feedback people will assume you are not listening.

Feedback should include two elements:

- the outcome of the exercise

- any resulting decisions

Feedback to participants and others with an interest in the particular policy - such as other Government departments, organisations, and the wider public - can enhance the legitimacy of the final policy by showing that it was subject to a public involvement process. It should also be viewed as an important part of the communication strategy for the policy, both internally and externally

Case studies

Using a range of methods

The **Food Standards Agency** undertook a wide-ranging consultation to inform its submission to the Policy Commission on Farming and Food for England. This included: **written consultation**, an **opinion poll**, an interactive **web site** called talkfood.org.uk, **meetings** with consumer organisations, **a project** to explore the views of low-income consumers, regional **seminars** and a **youth forum**.

Having an impact on policy

The **DFES** consulted on the proposal that schools should no longer have to produce separate school prospectuses and governors' annual reports for parents. The overwhelming majority of the 583 groups and individuals who responded to the consultation said they were opposed to the idea of the law combining the two documents in the way that was put forward. In the light of the consultation, the Government decided not to change the law.

Reaching hard-to-reach groups
In addition to undertaking written consultation on the proposed Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, the **Social Exclusion Unit** held over 70 events throughout England to explain the Strategy and to obtain feedback. The events were arranged in partnership with the Urban Forum, the Local Government Association and others who were able to draw in a broad range of voluntary, community, and public sector and special interest groups.

The Unit also used MORI to gather more in-depth reactions to the Strategy from residents and local public service workers. This research was successful in finding out the views of some traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as the elderly, and people for whom English is not a first language.

(Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement. CMPS)

Step Six:

Monitoring and evaluating your strategy

Having set your objectives, decided who you need to communicate with, and how you are going to do it, you need to set up arrangements for measuring progress and achievements. This is important for a number of reasons;

◆ to make sure that your strategy is on course, that you are actually achieving what you said you would achieve

◆ to identify problems, and either solve them or make adjustments

◆ to keep a watch on known risks, and spot new ones (whether the Fright Factors are increasing or decreasing)

◆ to monitor stakeholders' mood so that any alarms or concerns can be dealt with

You need also to evaluate your public involvement exercise, to -

◆ find out what worked and what did not. Learning from communication, and applying the lessons is vital.

◆ assess whether it was cost effective in terms of staff and resources

◆ decide whether involving the public actually contributed to improved decision-making

There are a number of elements here you need to evaluate, and you need to do so cost effectively, and proportionate to the scale of the project and the resources invested in it. Evaluation need not be complex, expensive or time-consuming. It could feature one or more of the following

To evaluate the strategy

◆ assess the impact of your public involvement programme

Do this, by asking

1. **Those taking part;** what do they feel they gained from the process? What do they see as the outcomes of the involvement? Do they feel they understand better the nature of the risks, and would they be able to deal with them? Do they feel their contribution has had an effect on policy making?

2. **Policy makers/communication experts;** What have you changed as a result of the involvement? What do you now know you didn't know before? Was the Minister or key stakeholders influenced by the views given, if so how and what was their response

   Methods; questionnaires, structured/unstructured interviews, focus groups, observation and surveys

- for the longer term

  - monitor stakeholders' attitudes by maintaining regular contact with them. Your evaluation of the consultation process (see below) will guide you on the method to use

  - for particularly sensitive, volatile issues, set up regular public opinion research surveys to monitor attitudes, and to detect changes and any influences on those changes. The costs for these are not negligible, and will need to be conducted under certain existing rules, but they may be the most reliable and efficient way of dealing with concerns.

  - close monitoring of the media, nationally and regionally, particularly publications and programmes likely to be read by your stakeholders; use the media as a source of intelligence

  - regularly scan websites of those groups representing your stakeholders, or likely to influence them

  - monitoring the nature of questioning through your public inquiry point, or your website

To evaluate the public involvement exercise, find out from those involved

- did they understand the objectives?

- how far did they feel it achieved its objectives?

- were they all provided with equal opportunities to participate?

- did it reach the target audience?

Step Seven

Maintaining the policy communication strategy

Constantly reviewing and maintaining your communication strategy is important for four particular reasons

- it is a good early warning system; you can be kept aware of developments and potential dangers; surprises can be avoided

- it keeps you up to date; new developments, new technology, new ways of doing business can quickly make a strategy obsolete and ineffective in a time of crisis

- it keeps you in close touch with your stakeholders, allowing you to identify new ones, and less influential ones, and to spot potential changes in attitudes

- it helps you develop or adjust your policy, be innovative, and flexible

So, regularly revisit your objectives, analyse your stakeholders and changes in their perceptions and keep a close watch on the media for other evidence of changing attitudes.

Your strategy potentially gives you one of the best defences against crisis - the ability to scan ahead and spot possible difficulties in advance. You can strengthen this in a number of ways, by

- stimulating **internal** consultation between policy leads, communication experts, managers, administrators, technical experts, to spot all relevant issues in advance,

- ensuring all **staff** are briefed on risks, are encouraged to come forward if they identify problems, and are prepared to deal with situations as they arise,

- making sure your **public inquiry point** and **web managers** are kept fully in the picture and up to date, and that you listen to their feedback,

- extending two way contacts with outside organisation beyond immediate stakeholders, into **other networks**, particularly representative groups, so that you get wider and fresh perspectives on your risks

...and finally...test yourself...

A good way of avoid getting bogged down is to formulate a SORCO - Single Over-riding Communication Objective. This specifies the main elements of your strategy in simple terms:

SORCO Sheet

1. In one brief paragraph state the **key point** or **objective** of your communication. This statement should resemble what you, the writer would like to see in a newspaper story or in a broadcast news report about the issue

2. What are the **three facts** or **statistics** you would like the public to remember as a result of reading or hearing about your story?

   i.

   ii.

   iii

3. What is the main **audience** or **population segment** you would most like this item to reach?

   Primary   Secondary

4. What is the **main way** (channel) you will use to get the item to them?

5. What is the **one message** the audience really needs to take from this one item?

6. How will you know whether it has **reached** them, and they **understand** it?

7. Who in your office will serve as the point of contact for any media or other publicity questions?

   Name......................

   Phone....................

(Based on; C Murphy (1997); "Talking to the media" Public Health Laboratory Service Microbiology Digest 14 (4)

6. How to communicate effectively about risk

Good risk communication planning is about managing risk as effectively as possible - i.e. identifying potential risks and either avoiding them or reducing their potential harm. Section 5 offers guidance on ways of doing this.

The emphasis of this section is on communicating when things have gone wrong. However, many of the principles apply more generally to communicating risk and are based on good planning, developing relationships and being both aware of and alive to fast changing situations.

This Section sets out

◈ **Why communication handling strategies are necessary**

◈ **The importance of clear aims and objectives**

◈ **Who to target**

◈ **Getting clear messages across**

◈ **How to identify who is best placed to deliver the messages**

◈ **Managing the channels of communication**

◈ **How to work effectively with the media**

◈ **Monitoring and evaluating the communication handling strategy**

6.1 Why communication handling strategies are necessary

By its very nature crisis means loss of control, growing uncertainty, growing isolation, and attack, from the media and others.

> "Disruptive and confrontational protest is now a regular and normal part of British political life. Even illegal protests pursuing very different goals gain widespread support. In these circumstances even when the number taking part in protests remain small, their impact can be significant, particularly when, as was the case with the [2000] fuel protests, their interests articulate with dominant interests in British society."
> *(Explaining the Fuel Protests; Brian Doherty, Matthew Paterson, Alexandra Plows and Derek Wall, Keele University)*

The way out of it is -

◈ to take **control**, using **knowledge**, resources, **influence**, relationships with stakeholders

◈ increase **certainty** among all stakeholders - with **information**

◈ **resist attack**, by using **information**

◈ **reduce isolation**, by developing **allies**, **independent spokespeople,** and through **dialogue**.

Communication is therefore a key element in a crisis. The purpose of a communication **handling strategy** is to -

◆ develop a way of maintaining **control** or putting you back in **control**

◆ **map out** how you will operate

◆ identify the **staff and other resources** you will need and how you will bring these into play

◆ establish which **other departments or organisations** you may need to work with, and your respective roles and methods of operation.

Remember, you will be under severe pressure; there will be little time to think or put new systems in place. Preparing the groundwork in advance is your best chance of withstanding this pressure and finding the best path through the difficulties. Base it on six guiding principles;

Six guiding principles of a communication strategy

◆ **Sound management systems** - making sure communications experts, policy officials, operations staff come together quickly to deal with situations as soon as they arise. This means planned and rehearsed call-out arrangements, and being prepared to work on a 24 x 7 basis for a considerable period of time. It also means, if necessary, joining up with other departments.

◆ **Robustness** - building flexibility into the planning process to allow for a variety of different and changing scenarios. Hours spent on producing ready-made solutions to predefined problems are unlikely to succeed in preventing all surprises. Agility of thinking, unfettered by pre-conceptions, is essential in fast-moving and unpredictable situations.

"There is no such thing as a routine crisis" **(Patrick Lagadec)**

Robust strategies should satisfy two criteria -

First, initial statements and actions should appear sensible in a wide variety of possible scenarios. (This may rule out doing nothing or issuing completely anodyne statements)

Second, they should as far as possible leave future options open, to be taken as more becomes known (Communicating about risks to Public Health; Department of Health)

◆ **Speed** - developing the ability to move quickly

- to agree and issue messages, latest information,

- to deal with rumours, speculation and misleading information.

◆ **Messages** - getting out key information that is up-to-date, clear, co-ordinated, consistent, and actually satisfies public concerns, or if it is not possible to do this immediately, explaining why it is not possible.

◆ **Images** - on the basis that pictures often speak louder than words, making sure that graphics, pictures and diagrams are used to provide impact, and to explain complex or unfamiliar concepts.

"When Greenpeace staged its high-profile stand against the sinking of the Brent Spar oil platform, it not only posted information on the Web, but it was reported to have airlifted sophisticated filming equipment and a satellite down station on to the rig, so that they could provide their own VNRs direct to news outlets" (Nicholas 1996)

Intelligence - keeping fully in touch with latest developments, knowing what is going on. This means close monitoring of the media - particularly the broadcast media, and, wherever possible, contact with stakeholders.

Your aim should be to be **ahead of the game**

6.2 The need for clear aims and objectives

It is important to have a clear idea of what it is you want to achieve, of your end-game, even though it may be difficult to see this at the outset. Your objectives are likely to vary according to the nature of the crisis, and even during the crisis they will change. So they need to be clarified early on, but kept under review.

The main communication aim will almost certainly be to protect the public, or help them protect themselves, and reduce any disruption to their lives to the minimum.

To support this your objectives might be to;

◈   issue warnings, advice, instructions,

◈   ensure the public feels confident, safe and well-informed,

◈   provide information so that individuals can decide for themselves how to deal with situations.

There could be other, less obvious goals;

◈   gaining sympathetic coverage for the victims, generating support from opinion formers and the wider community

◈   achieving positive coverage of the work of emergency and relief workers, reinforcing morale, and developing public understanding of their difficulties

◈   developing public confidence in the handling of the aftermath

◈   building a fund of goodwill among the media for help with publicity, or for restraint

◈   gaining the moral high ground from which to deal with misbehaviour

Achieving these relies on one thing above all others - a flow of authoritative, cohesive, co-ordinated, information, and where necessary, warnings and advice, to the relevant audiences.

> Today's society, particularly the media, abhors an information vacuum, so fill it, engage with it, and learn from it; "Nature abhors a vacuum" (Spinoza)

This means ensuring that -

◈   the public, news media and others have all the very latest information and that this is transmitted by whatever means is available at the time; no constructive opportunity is lost in getting messages across

◈   there is no lack of information at any level, that all Ministers, officials, communication professionals, and other relevant players have full up to date information and advice, to ensure consistency of message and the avoidance of mixed messages and confusion

◈   all involved, from the emergency services, to local authorities, from medical staff to private companies, are informed and engaged, and feel free to make a contribution;

◆ unfounded rumours and inaccurate reports are rebutted quickly and authoritatively, facts published, problems dealt with quickly and effectively;

Principles on which communication handling strategies should be based

Being honest and open

Ensuring the facts are right

Correcting any mistakes as soon as possible

Providing information that is up to date

Giving as much local or regional detail as possible

Addressing the needs of different audiences

Communicating internally as well as externally

Making maximum use of available technologies

Being inclusive

Communicating promptly

(Foot and Mouth Disease 2001; Lessons to be learned Inquiry. Dr Ian Anderson. July 2002)

6.3 Who to target

Identifying and compiling a list of stakeholders - which includes both intended audiences and others who may react - is crucial. The list should be comprehensive, but time and pressure will almost certainly mean some degree of prioritisation. A stakeholder analysis along the lines suggested in **Step 3 of the tool-kit** will help to identify

◆ those involved in crisis response - e.g. the lead Government Department, the emergency services, the local authority,

◆ anybody who may need to be informed quickly in order to protect themselves,

◆ those to whom people will turn for advice on what to do if they are worried about an issue (e.g. medical professionals following a health scare),

◆ people who need to be informed of issues in advance of wider publicity (e.g. relatives of accident victims),

◆ those not directly involved but who might be deeply affected (e.g. tourist organisations during the foot and mouth crisis),

◆ staff in all organisations affected,

◆ the media, who may be vital allies in disseminating information quickly, as well as potential adversaries in demanding information to help them report events.

Remember, as the crisis develops, stakeholders will change, new groups or new interests/concerns will be drawn in and you will need to move quickly to deal with these.

It is also important to remember that a wide spectrum of the public will be interested, whether they are affected or not, so their needs - e.g. for general background information – is met.

6.4 Getting clear messages across

"To create better two-way communication, Government needs to

- Overcome difficulties of 'information overload' by providing simple but accurate accounts of what the issues are

- Avoid patronising the public

- Speak to the public on their terms

- Address the needs of different audiencest

- Avoid unnecessary jargon

- Use appropriate messengers for different age groups

- Get the 'tone' right with simple, non-highbrow messages

- Empower the public and educate them
(Running Risks - National Consumer Council. 2002)

You need to -

- **understand** your stakeholders, their perceptions of risk, their pre-existing knowledge and beliefs,

- identify what it is your stakeholders want - **information** to help them form their own judgements, **reassurance** that you are doing all you can to protect them from the risk, or **a say** in deciding on how to handle the risk.

These are the core communication needs, which will determine both the nature and tone of your messages. For a more detailed analysis of these **see section 3.5**

Your first and prime task must be to bring together all these key messages and Q and A briefing together in a core script and to make sure all involved - including outside organisations - e.g. the emergency services, local authorities - have copies. This is crucial if the public is to receive consistent information. You may need to update and re-circulate this two or three times a day.

The script should

- give clear, unambiguous and authoritative information about what has happened and is likely to happen,

- let people know what they need to - or can - do themselves to assure their own protection

- be kept simple, straightforward and brief,

- be consistent - "joined up",

- respect and address people's urgent concerns and requests for information,

- avoid speculation or guesses and stick to facts,

- temper expectations; over optimistic forecasts of a return to normality, or end of a crisis, are likely to backfire.

When a major incident occurs, this is likely to be the expectation during the FIRST HOUR

The public NEEDS

Basic details of the incident -WHAT, WHERE, WHEN (WHO, WHY and **HOW**, if possible)

To know the health and safety implications

Advice and guidance (e.g. stay indoors, symptoms, preparing for evacuation)

Reassurance (if necessary)

The public WANTS to know

Other practical implications such as the effect on traffic, power supplies, telephones, water supplies, etc)

A Help line number - an email address

What is being done to resolve the situation (a spokesperson)?

Broadcasters will REQUIRE

A well thought out and 'joined-up arrangement between the Government department, agency emergency services, local authority and other organisations that is capable of generating agreed information at speed

An immediate telephone contact

A media 'rendezvous' point at the scene

(**Connecting in a Crisis**. A Guide to working with the BBC during an emergency. BBC Nations and Regions)

It is important to -

- be open as to the likely or potential negative aspects of the policy, including uncertainties in scientific assessments, explaining why - in spite of this - you feel your message is right.

- give a candid account of the evidence underlying decisions. If there are genuine reasons for non-disclosure of information, give the reasons clearly and early on

- In any statement about probabilities -

    - make sure the base line is made clear if relative risks are given

    > E.g. a 30 per cent increase in the risk of contracting a specific disease may seem significant, but the implications for public health small. If, for example, the disease is quite rare, affecting say 1 in 100 000 of the population, the increase in risk would be just 0.3 in 100 000, i.e. the added risk would affect only three in a million.

- be careful to make sure that comparisons serving to illuminate alternative options do not appear unfair or flippant

> E.g. one employer assured women that occupational exposure to chemicals carried "no more risk to your unborn baby than a large gin and tonic"

- consider the framing effects of the wording

> E.g. A typical study presented people with a hypothetical choice between two cancer therapies with different probabilities of success or failure.
>
> Half were told about the relative chances of dying, while the rest had the same information presented in terms of survival rates. This more than doubled the numbers choosing one alternative.

- "Risk analyse" messages, thinking through who they might alienate and why, and the responses they are likely to elicit from different people. The "Cultural theory" template in **section 3.4** may help here, as may role-playing.

- back up your messages with

  - clear signs that you are prepared - stockpiles, trained staff, clips from exercises

  - good visual material - graphics, pictures, maps, diagrams to explain complex issues, and to illustrate key points

In terms of HOW to communicate, remember

- frankness and honesty are always the best policy

- behave as though you and your organisation recognise the importance of communication - appearing to act only under pressure, for example, can be fatal,

- emotional tone - conveyed by words and actions - is important. For example, to engage with an outraged audience it is first necessary to acknowledge the outrage. Failure to recognise this often exacerbates the problem of trying to inject "cold-detached" scientific findings into a highly charged atmosphere.

- people's trust in what you say will be heavily influenced by HOW you say it. If your manner switches them off, they may never hear WHAT you say

And remember, **speed** in delivering messages to and through the media and every other means is of the essence. This **does not** mean being forced into instant decisions when the media is clamouring for news, and issuing unverified statements. It **does mean** keeping the media in the picture, and explaining **why** it is not possible to fully meet their demands.

6.5 How to identify who is best placed to deliver the messages

"Messages are judged first and foremost not by content, but by source; who is telling me this, and can I trust them? If the answer to the second question is "no" any message is liable to be disregarded, no matter how well-intentioned and well-delivered"
(Communicating about Risks to Public Health; Department of Health)

Who should deliver messages will depend on the nature of the messages to be imparted and the expectation of the public. **Section 3.5** identifies three core communication needs - information, assurance and involvement, and three perceived roles of Government - advisory, protective and redistributive or participative.

As far as Government is concerned there is the public expectation that it will give a strong lead at a time of crisis, take charge of events and manage situations. The public wants to feel their interests are being protected. Where there is primarily a need for leadership and reassurance, or a need for Government to justify its decisions, therefore, people will look to Ministers to deliver the messages, and it will not go down well if they are invisible.

However, where the need is for information to help people make their own decisions, Ministers may not be best placed to give it, because public attitude research shows that they are not always trusted. In these circumstances it may be better to use a respected independent source to give that information.

> "Surveys suggest that people are more likely to trust local and more visible sources of information (such as GPs) than more remote sources such as Governments."
> *(Risk; improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty. Strategy Unit Report)*

People delivering the messages should be selected on the basis of their empathy with the target audience, as well as their communication skills. A cadre of suitable people should be developed and helped to function as effective communicators, through training and support,

Full use should be made of trusted, independent parties - leading academics, NGOs, subject experts, industry bodies, doctors, professional bodies such as the Engineering Institutions and accounting and actuarial bodies - people who the public is likely to turn to for advice; or from whom they will form their opinions. Get these on board early. Make sure they have access to information and advice, which helps them deliver their responsibilities. They must feel confident that they are being consulted and kept informed. They must have ownership and feel full partners in protecting the public.

No matter whom you choose to deliver your message, the message the public gets will be influenced by other people within and outside your organisation. You therefore need to establish who these "secondary" messengers are. They could be your own staff who have an interface with the public, as well as people "in the field" involved in inspection, enforcement or delivering related services. You need to liaise with them and make sure the messages being put out are consistent.

6.6 Managing the channels of communication

If you have established channels of communication with your stakeholders, these will stand you in good stead. Upgrade and enhance them - for example, through newsletters, regular briefings, or a special website- so that you become the trusted source.

But crises often radiate out to a much wider range of people - the local community, business, those who need information on which to base personal decisions (e.g. North American tourists deciding whether to come to the UK during the foot and mouth crisis).

And people will turn to informal networks of family, friends and acquaintances - the grapevine.

So authoritative, up-to-date information needs to be available from a wide and varied range of sources. The media clearly is one of the most powerful of these, but there are many others that have a proven track record at time of crises

> **"It is important in a crisis that all routes to key audiences are fully exploited.**
>
> - "A variety of means are used to get warning of an impending floods to households likely to be affected, including
>
> - automated telephone calling of the highest risk properties
>
> - automated communication links between flood officers and local BBC stations
>
> - a recorded telephone information line
>
> - networks of local flood wardens with responsibilities for advising specific groups of local people"
> (Environment Agency. Quoted in "Risk Communication; A Guide to Regulatory Practice. ILGRA 1998)

These include:

- **Websites**

- **Call Centres**

- **Public inquiry points**

- **Face-to-Face Communication**

- **Advertising, posters, leaflets, direct mail**

- **Teletext and Ceefax**

Websites

> "The internet changes power relationships because smaller interest groups can present their cases as well as large organisations, and interact directly with other stakeholders. An activist group or NGO's power to influence is increased while a corporation's ability to resist is reduced."
> *(Institute of Public Relations, April 2000)*

Websites are now a well established and prime means of getting factual, information in our own language, and uninterpreted by others, straight to the public. Effectively they are an organisation's own broadcast medium.

To be of value in a crisis, it is necessary they:

- have well-written, cleared information that is relevant to the readership,

- are kept fully up to date - where necessary, on a 24 x 7 basis.

- are robust, with sufficient connectivity and server capacity to handle large amounts of traffic in bursts during a crisis,

- have sources of information on the crisis clearly marked on their front page, with the necessary hot links,

- have links to other key sources of information, such as other Government departments, local authorities and to the UK resilience site - www.ukresilience.info Crises often transcend departmental boundaries, and it is important to make it as easy as possible for the public to access all necessary information,

> **www.ukresilience.info website**
>
> This public-facing website provides links to Government and non-Government sources on a wide variety of emergencies and crises that can affect the UK, plus emergency planning guidance and information from Government and non-Government bodies.
>
> The site can be updated 24/7, and it responds immediately to events. Since it went live continuously in March 2001, it has provided help and information on the foot and mouth crisis, the aftermath of 9/11, and the fire fighters dispute in 2002/3
>
> The site is constantly expanding its library of links and advice, and it's become recognised as the central source of disaster planning guidance in the UK.

- have links to and from key **media sites** - such as BBC-Online, one of the world's biggest - to attract attention, particularly to new developments,

- provide answers to users seeking on-line information; or if this is not possible, to explain why.

Users' queries can be used to inform and adapt the site so that it responds to the **real concerns** of the public.

Use them proactively, for example

- by setting up an e-mail distribution list so that users can sign up to receiving e-mail updates on the crisis;

- having feedback pages or other methods of contact, so users can ask questions, suggest links, and solicit further information,

- using webstreaming to carry video of ministerial statements, speeches, and briefings from stakeholders, experts and third parties.

Call centres

Less than half the UK population currently has access to the Internet.

Over 95 percent have telephones. Setting up a call centre to provide information and advice may therefore be necessary. At the very least it could be a good safety valve; sometimes people find it necessary - and comforting - to be able to have a more personal means of getting information. Call centres operate in different ways. The main ones being to;

- serve as an electronic signpost and, through recorded information, delivers recorded messages, and re-directs callers to specific organisations,

- provide personal counselling and guidance by recruited staff specially trained for this,

- give latest information based on a prepared script,

- act as a fulfilment point for requests for literature.

"The questions being asked at the media centre and over the help-lines provided a wealth of information about whether and how the information put out by the incident management team had been heard and understood, illustrating the importance of constant listening for feedback to verify receipt and understanding of outward communication, and to tailor future messages."
(Observation on nuclear exercise, crisis communication case study. Quoted in "Risk Communication; A Guide to Regulatory Practice. ILGRA 1998)

Public inquiry points

Ensure that your own public enquiry points are fully briefed, kept up to date, and if necessary reinforced with extra staff. They are likely to be swamped. You also need to make sure that inquiry points of other departments are fully briefed so that you are all speaking with one voice, and callers are not being pushed from one point to another.

Face-to-Face Communication

Personal contact is often the most powerful form of communication. Where issues are of local concern and involve sensitive matters, for example human or environmental health, personal contact might be the only way to inform and reassure the public. Public meetings, presentations, seminars, conferences all have a role

Case study;

During the 2001 foot and mouth crisis there was considerable concern over the health and environmental issues surrounding disposal of carcasses. The strategy to deal with this was as follows; Three regional teams of top officials were set up covering the most affected parts of the country. These were headed by the Regional Directors of Public Health. These organised public meetings in the most affected areas, to consult with local communities and reassure as far as possible on local health risks. The local public health director - selected essentially because they were known, respected and trusted - led the team for the meeting. The team included representatives from environmental health, the local authority, the Government Office in the Region, and MAFF.

Before the meeting informal contact with local opinion formers was made to ensure that the real issues were being tackled.

Teams were provided with Question and Answer briefing, which was regularly updated, and responded directly to all the difficult issues.

A leaflet for the general public, giving unequivocal advice was distributed through GP surgeries, health and community centres and other public buildings as well as at meetings

In support of this a MAFF Mobile Communication Unit toured the affected areas delivering basic advice and guidance, as well as copies of the leaflet. This was available at the public meetings, as well as at local community centres, shopping centres and other public places.

Involvement at local level will enable you to tune into the local grapevine, the power of which should never be underestimated

"Significantly, in (infected) areas the local grapevine is as important, if not more so, than the national media in spreading information about FMD outbreaks and how they are handled. More credence is given to word of mouth information coming from local people than what is carried (or not carried) in the national media"
(Foot and Mouth Research. DEFRA. November 2001)

Advertising, posters, leaflets, direct mail

There may be a need to give basic advice on, for example safety issues, or to point the public in the direction of where they can get information. The quickest, most immediate way of doing this is to buy space or airtime in newspapers and/or commercial television and radio.

Teletext and Ceefax

Teletext and Ceefax have large audiences - two fifths of all adults access them at least once a week, particularly the news pages. Messages can be placed on air quickly - within hours of copy being approved. Teletext (ITV/C4) charge per page; Ceefax (BBC) do not take advertising but are normally willing to place copy on their editorial pages.

6.7 How to work effectively with the media

In many cases the media will be the main channel of communication with the wider public. It will be one of the biggest influences on how they perceive risk; it is likely to have the greatest impact on them.

You can regard the media either as a positive opportunity to get messages out to a wide or targeted audience. Or as a threat, a scaremonger likely to do more harm than good. If the latter, shunning it or mismanaging relations with it, is likely to make the threat become a reality. If it is starved of information from you, it will find it from elsewhere, and this may not be helpful to the reporting of your issue.

Your media objective should be seen as achieving accurate and balanced coverage, which will help the public, make informed judgements.

The best policy is to work with the media, not against it.

> "It is not the media's job to scare the public, nor should we be in the business of underplaying danger for fear of alarming people. And whatever we decide to broadcast we do so in the knowledge there are thousands of other sources of information out there against whom we are judged.
>
> The truth is, if our audiences trust us they are smart enough - given straight facts - to make up their own minds about levels of risk.
> *(Richard Sambrook, Director of News, BBC. "The Unlikely Counter- Terrorists". The Foreign policy Centre. November 2002)*
>
> "Aye well, it's not all lies in the tabloids. There's some little nuggets of truth in there somewhere."
> *(Crisis Communications Research. Cabinet Office. November 2000)*
>
> Newspapers are viewed as a key source of primary information and a means by which consumers can better understand Government opinion. However, consumers tend to approach risk issues discussed in newspapers with a degree of scepticism and mistrust as well as a desire to learn more
> *("Running Risks" - National Consumer Council. 2002)*

This means:

- **Understanding the media.**

- **Developing relationships**

- **During a crisis - base your strategy on**

- **Think creatively**

- **And**

- **Six Pitfalls to Avoid**

Understanding the media.

The media does not comprise a single organisation, or have a single purpose. It has different constituents, different audiences and different concerns.

These include;

- national daily and Sunday newspapers

- regional and local dailies, Sundays and weeklies

- national and regional television

- national and local radio

- national and local media for ethnic communities

- news agencies, such as Reuters, Press Association

- the international media - general and specialist publication produced at weekly, monthly and quarterly frequencies

- the broadcast media is made up of 24-hour news programmes, national news bulletins, regional and local news bulletins, drive time programmes, 'phone-ins, audience participation programmes (such as Question Time)

- within these are editors, news editors, leader writers, columnists, correspondents who specialise in specific subjects - health, science, home affairs, industry, politics - general reporters, documentary writers and producers.

These are all different, and need to be treated differently. For example the briefing needs of a leader writer - who is seeking to understand the essence of an issue, and external and political influences - are very different to those of a specialist correspondent, who will be looking for technical and detailed information. The needs of a national daily newspaper are very different from those of a local evening paper, which is looking for local angles.

Not all journalists are looking all the time for the sensational. Most want to do the serious job of reporting news and information. They welcome close contact and good relations. Background information is helpful to them and will be used to inform their stories and normally they will treat it with respect. It is important to emphasise the point that press officers and policy officials should be working closely together to build these networks with journalists, and not independently of each other.

Developing relationships

Don't wait for a crisis to happen,

- do a media audit to identify which of the media is interested in your policy, and produce a list of contacts. From this -

- create your "lobby" - a well-informed, authoritative corps of journalists, e.g. specialists in health, science, the environment, home affairs - who you will keep engaged through briefings and other opportunities

- ensure national editors and those who form opinions - leader writers and columnists - are fully briefed on major risks

- make sure the local and regional editors and specialist correspondents from both the written and electronic media are involved and kept fully in the picture.

- Use the **Government News Network** to help you. They have offices in all the main regional centres, are highly regarded by the local and regional media, and are an invaluable source of regional information.

> **The Government News Network**
>
> The GNN is the Government Information and Communication Service principal voice in the regions. It has offices in London, Guildford, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, Nottingham, Birmingham, Bristol, Plymouth, Cardiff and Cambridge.
>
> It supports the presentation of Government policies and campaigns in the regions, organises and provides support for ministerial or other VIP visits, monitors regional media, provides support and intelligence gathering during local crises and emergencies.
>
> In an average year it
> - Issues 12 000 press notices
> - Answers 1000 000 media queries
> - Handles media arrangements for over 100 000 ministerial visits

- include the general and specialist publications, notably those with a substantial amount of influence, and who are very effective in trailing stories in the mass media- such as Economist, New Scientist, Nature, Farmers Weekly,

- use representative bodies - such as the Newspaper Proprietors Association, Newspaper Society, Guild of Editors, and ad hoc groups, such as the Media Emergency Forum - to keep senior executives and editors sensitised to public interest issues affecting public safety and confidence.

Case Study

Working with the Media; the Media Emergency Forum

The Media Emergency Forum (MEF) is an ad hoc group of senior media editors, Government representatives, local authority emergency planners, emergency services, police and private industry, set up to consider media issues arising from civil emergencies.

Following the events of September 11 2001 the MEF set up a joint Working Party to produce a joint plan for maintaining communication with the public in the event of a similar incident in the UK. This was jointly co-chaired by a Government Director of Communication, and a senior executive of BSkyB.

The working party looked at the issue of how it would be possible to cope with 5000-8000 media, many from overseas, suddenly descending on a UK town or area which was already trying to cope with the aftermath of a massive attack.

Its **report**, published in June2002 made recommendations on;

- Media accreditation procedures.
- A general protocol between the media and Government covering access arrangements, briefing, accreditation etc which would be invoked in the event of a catastrophic incident. - Arrangements for establishing a media centre.
- Clarification of financial and staff resource arrangements for dealing with the communication aspects of a catastrophic incident.
- Provision of telecommunication requirements.

One of the results of this work was that a London protocol was agreed between all the different agencies involved in communicating public information about emergencies across London, and the media on how they would jointly work together during a major crisis.

The MEF has met on a number of other occasions, to discuss issues such as improved handling of rail accidents, and the last Stansted air-crash. In the run-up to the millennium extensive joint preparations were made, which included media participation in exercises, and unfettered live broadcasting from the Government's Cabinet Office. Following the events of 9/11/2001, the Forum was convened twice so that media representatives could be briefed on the threat of anthrax attacks in the UK

"A section of the media that received widespread praise…was local radio. It provided the vital service of telling local people what was happening and where in their locality. At best it was up-to-date, accessible and regularly available"
(Foot and Mouth Disease 2001; Lessons to be learned Inquiry; Dr Ian Anderson, July 2002)

During a crisis - base your strategy on

- providing all media with a staple diet of **good, timely information**. A gentle flow punctuated by set-piece conferences is the best routine. For newspapers and radio, this is a considerable part of their diet. Use

  > press conference
  > "lobby" briefings
  > providing facilities
  > technical briefings
  > briefing one-to-one
  > interviews
  > websites

- **maintaining** this on a 24 x 7 basis, if necessary. Remember, the 24-hour news media never closes.

- meeting the special needs of **television**. TV can only operate effectively for its audience - the biggest and most easily influenced - if it has relevant, meaningful, up-to-date pictures. Its combination of demands and its very technology make it the most intrusive medium, but it also has very considerable power to set the agenda

- being prepared to meet the demands from **all** media for high quality, striking photographs

- establishing a **collection plan** for interesting and non-controversial information, which can fill the gaps between the releases of hard information about the event. Stories of individual endeavour, swift-thinking, hardship, or selflessness, will always be available, and will play a valuable role in maintaining the focus of the media on official sources, and on facts.

- remembering that if an incident is significant enough, it may have international implications and the needs of the foreign media must also be catered for.

Think creatively

- as well as the news programmes use programmes and reporters that are **valued and believed** by the public (the Trevor Macdonald effect). Local programmes, in particular use presenters who are local "institutions".

- talk **direct** to your audiences (i.e. not through a journalist or presenter, who might dilute your messages) through drive time programmes, phone-ins and chat shows.

- encourage newspaper **readers** to write in with their **questions** and concerns, and provide an expert and/or Minister to respond to these directly (the interactive nature of this makes it more likely to be read than a standard feature article)

- provide visual aids, strong imagery, such as graphics, pictures and diagrams to explain complex or unfamiliar concepts, or to make a particularly dramatic point.

  During the 2000 fuel crisis, television pictures of oil tankers leaving refineries was the most convincing way of demonstrating that supplies were getting back to normal.
  (Government Information and Communication Service)

And

- **stay focussed.** Media coverage frequently brings in diverse secondary issues, which often keeps an issue in the public eye when nothing is happening on the main issue itself. For example, BSE media coverage included genetic modification, what the countryside is for, pressure on farmers, and fox-hunting. It is crucial to recognise and address these to ensure you are not sidetracked from meeting the objectives of the main issue.

- **maintain accuracy and clarity.** Media output should be closely monitored and inaccurate, misleading information, and rumour dealt with immediately.

- **deal with outrageous behaviour.** Condemn it openly and quickly. Complain to editors

Six Pitfalls to Avoid

Causing concern, alarm or even panic through being open and frank. Think through the language and framing of the message. Use plain English -don't hide under scientific or technical jargon. Use reassuring and trusted figures who can give some perspective (such as the likelihood of something happening). Brief senior media staff, such as editors, on a non-attributable basis and explain to them the problems likely to be caused by over-reporting If you can't answer a question, for example to protect sources, or victims, or for legal reasons, explain why.

Giving over-categorical assurances. Don't say that a situation is under control, when it isn't, or normality will be returned in three days when you know it is more likely to be three weeks. Don't guarantee absolute safety. Be realistic and honest.

Leaving information gaps. Vacuums will be filled, and probably in ways you will not like. During the 2000 fuel crisis rumours of fuel shortages, confirmed by television pictures of queues at filling stations and the lack of official information, led to people, acting rationally in their own interest, adding to the queues. This compounded the problem.

"It was lunchtime and there were all these rumours going around 'it's started again' and all the staff were going out filling their cars. Everybody panic-bought again. It was on the radio and then we had this e-mail and everybody shot out to the petrol stations. I rang my husband and said 'fill up' and he said 'I can't, the queues are massive"
(Crisis Communications Research; Cabinet Office)

Always communicate, even if you have to maintain a holding position. Explain why you can't say more.

Providing the public or the media with highly technical or complicated material. The media generally avoids "real science" in their stories. This means that scientific or technical information must be structured carefully, preferably reduced to the essential mechanisms and principles and in usable forms, with more detail provided for those who want and understand it.

Ignoring issues of most concern to the public. Keep in tune with the public mood, make sure you understand the public's central concerns, through media monitoring, monitoring of e-mails, calls to the call centre, through contact with stakeholders, or if a situation is likely to be prolonged, through public attitude research. Make sure you understand these and demonstrate clearly that you are responding to them and that you are doing something about them, or if you are not, why not.

Appearing to have all the answers in a situation of uncertainty. Follow the advice of the Phillips Inquiry into BSE -

"Throughout the BSE story the approach to communication of risk was shaped by a consuming fear of provoking an irrational public scare....The Government must resist the temptation of appearing to have all the answers in a situation of uncertainty....If doubts are openly expressed and publicly explored, the public are capable of responding rationally and are more likely to accept re-assurance and advice."
(BSE Inquiry, Findings and Conclusions. Stationery Office. October 2000)

6.8 Monitoring and evaluating the communication handling strategy

Case Study

In preparation for the Y2K (millennium 'bug') problem, regular research was carried out to measure public attitudes to the issue. This had two particular objectives -

- to give a feed-back on whether the public information campaign messages were being heard and understood, and

- to keep a watch on public concerns.

The results gave clear indications of public attitudes and were used to shape the on going information campaign.
(Government Information and Communication Service)

In a crisis it is crucial you

- are fully in the picture, aware of new developments, even able to anticipate events before they happen,

- have a full appreciation of public mood, be able to detect shifts in attitudes, particularly growing anxiety or unrest, assess the effects on local or ethnic communities, particularly those who might feel vulnerable,

- identify where there is a lack of information, and where messages are not being understood,

- are able to react swiftly to moving situations, and to clamp down on rumours, scares, or misleading stories.

    This means

- regular monitoring of the national, regional and local, and, if necessary, ethnic and international media,

- scanning of key websites,

- working closely with networks (e.g. the emergency services, local authorities), consulting stakeholders.

This information needs to be assessed carefully and should form a daily or twice-daily assessment. It should cover main emphasis of coverage, tone, problems, and potential problems. It will give you an indication of whether your strategy is working, whether your messages are getting through, where and how you need to adjust. It could help you to spot the next major issue, the next story to hit the headlines. It can therefore help to set the agenda for the next 24 hours or so. Also, it provides information to decision makers, to help inform their decision making.

> "The strategy for foot and mouth that evolved depended on the perceived gaps in public information. Media coverage/anecdotal evidence received 'at the front line' as well as research evidence and feedback via MPs constituencies and from help-lines, websites etc have all played their part in developing the strategy"
> *(Lucian Hudson, Director of Communication, DEFRA)*

In the longer term, you may need to do more formal attitude research to take public opinion soundings, on concerns and fears, feelings of whether messages are being understood, the means of communication are the right ones and where there are information gaps.

Be prepared to set this up early in the crisis, and follow it up later to measure changes.

Case study

In the immediate aftermath of the attack on the New York Trade Centre in autumn of 2001, the Cabinet Office commissioned research into public attitudes. The primary intention was to examine needs, in relation to information, advice and reassurance about security.

Three particular findings were helpful in policy development;

1. a general feeling that there was no urgent need for reassurance about preventative measures for the general public, although this was fragile - one incident would immediately undermine this

2. no apparent gaps in information about any aspect of the situation in the UK, nor of a strong demand for more information

3. amongst the Muslim community,

there was strong feeling about the fact that there was no representative body in the UK - no organisation that spoke for mainstream Muslims as one; no Muslim forum

word of mouth was an important medium for transmitting information - friends, relatives, in the community centre, mosques, shops.
(Qualitative Research on Public Perceptions of the Current Situation. Cabinet Office)

Annexes

A.   **A media handling strategy**

B.   **How the News Co-ordination Centre can help Departments**

C.   **Principles of Managing Risk**

D.   **Public involvement methods**

E.   **Further Sources of Information**

F.   **Acknowledgments**

Annex A: Media handling checklist

The following is a checklist of media handling points. It brings together many of the points made in this guidance. Although mainly intended for highly visible incidents, such as rail or motorway accidents, it contains principles that can apply to any risk event.

Handling checklist

Wherever the incident occurs -

◇   organize **media facilities** - rendezvous points and vantage points

◇   set up an **accreditation system**- press cards - to ensure that only genuine journalists are given access

◇   ask the media to nominate **pools** to cover restricted facilities

Hold **regular media briefings**, the first as quickly as possible after the start of the incident

Put up **spokespeople**, who are as senior as possible, clearly identifiable as such and who have been trained

Compile a list of **third parties** - health, science experts - who can be deployed to give expert advice and reassure the public

Establish a **dialogue with the media**, not only to discover their needs and requests, but to provide the means for dealing with problems and the dissemination of public information. That will require a focus: first the rendezvous point mentioned above, and then some form of media centre.

> The **media centre** needs -
>
> ◇   to be easily **accessible**,
>
> ◇   capable of holding a **large number of journalists**, and their vehicles equipped with IT - notably ISDN and telephone lines
>
> ◇   staffed as long as possible, probably **24 x 7**

Establish a flow of **credible information**. Set up a **media co-ordinating group**. This should oversee the media centre. Information must be accurate, swift, authoritative and consistent. It must be underwritten by all those involved, who must speak with one voice.

The co-ordinating group should **log and record** all information which is released, and ensure that all those providing information) such as HQ press officers) are kept up to date. All news releases and supporting material should be posted on the web site to which inquirers can be referred.

Ensure that the media **check their facts** with official sources at any time.

Where organisations cannot take the same line (for example where a regulatory body must speak independently) use the co-ordinating group to ensure that all those involved have a **clear understanding** of what is to be said before release

Agree a **communication strategy**, including a media strategy with clear objectives; and review progress regularly.

Key staff at all levels should be continually **briefed** on what the media are saying

Establish a **collection plan for interesting, non-controversial information** which can fill the gaps between the releases of hard information about the event. Stories of individual endeavour, swift-thinking, initiative and hardship or selflessness will always be available, and will play a valuable role in maintaining the focus of the media on official sources and on facts.

Remember - **never leave vacuums** - they will be filled with speculation and material that could be harmful.

Deal with poor **media behaviour** swiftly and directly, not only with the journalist concerned, but also with the most senior editorial executive who can be contacted.

Arrangements for VIP visits should be considered at an early stage, so that the inevitable disruption is kept to a minimum, and the benefits are maximised. VIP briefing must aim to ensure that the VIP has plenty of information from which to brief the media and others on the efforts and needs of all involved.

Inaccurate and misleading information must be rebutted immediately; rumours and scares must be stopped, for example by quickly making an authoritative figure - a leading medical expert or a chief constable - available to the media.

All this requires **close monitoring** of the media nationally, regionally and among specific groups, such as ethnic communities.

The complex **needs of victims** with respect to the media should be considered by the co-ordinating group. Many walking wounded may benefit by describing their experiences, while those who want their privacy need to be shielded.

Remember, members of the media have a job to do, in trying circumstances. Unless they prove otherwise, they deserve the same courtesy and consideration as anybody else.

Give none, and you will get none, despite all the smooth talking, elegant press releases, or robust responses you can muster

(Source - Civil emergencies and the media - a central Government perspective by M S D Granatt. Home Office. 1996)

Annex B: How the News Co-ordination Centre can help Departments

Many risk events by their very complexity are likely to place severe demands on individual departments' information resources, and to involve a number of different organisations. If departments need extra help and support, for example in co-ordinating the collection and distribution of briefing material, the News Co-ordination Centre can be activated.

When the NCC is activated it can bring together pre-identified multi-skilled professional staff from across Government. These can be deployed to work within the organisation leading the response to the incident, in the regions, overseas, or as a team at the centre, whichever is likely to produce the most effective response. They will provide 24 x 7 cover, if necessary, for as long as the incident lasts.

The Unit's task is not to replace the responsibility of the lead organisation, but to support and strengthen the organisations ability to deal with the situation. It can do this through -

- Providing interdepartmental co-ordination of communication issues, working with all departments involved.

- Ensuring that ministers, No10, stakeholders, outside interested organisations, and the general public are kept fully up-to-date on developments.

- Working with the Government Communication Network (GCN) to ensure rapid deployment of staff either to the NCC or to the lead department, as required.

- Linking together individual communication strategies.

Its products include -

Media products

- Production and distribution of a core brief, giving key messages and background information on all aspects of the incident. This can be up-dated and issued two or three times a day if required.

- Handling some or all media bids, notably from the broadcast media.

- Press Office facilities, co-ordinating the work of a number of departments within one team.

- Handling some or all media bids, notably from the broadcast media.

- Running a one-stop-shop press office operation ensuring departments work together to agree who will take calls on certain issues to avoid "bouncing" journalists between departments.

- Working with lead Government departments to organise third party experts, specialists in their own fields, to reassure the public.

- Co-ordination of stakeholder information, ensuring that outside organisations - local authorities, utilities etc, are kept in touch and their contributions included in overall briefing packages.

- Operational management of the team, providing the facilities and resources to manage the operation.

Regional products and services

- Developing regional strategies, together with the **Government News Network**.

- Planning and organise regional visits for Ministers and third party endorsers.

- Liasing with network of emergency PROs, in local authorities, the emergency services.

- Providing local knowledge, information.

Websites

- Adapting opening page of **www.ukresilience.info** to provide updates of the incident or links to key sites.

- Providing support to lead departments on development of their own sites.

- Designing new sites for specific stakeholders.

Advice/help on…

- The use and setting up call centres.

- Producing advertising/ literature/ direct communication.

- Organising provision of information for Teletext pages.

- Commissioning public attitude research.

Monitoring; assessing

◈ Providing up-to-date assessments of media and public opinion, based on monitoring of the;

　　◈ media,

　　　　- national

　　　　- regional

　　　　- international

　　　　- ethnic

　　◈ and scanning of websites.

The Unit was first activated for the fuel crisis in 2000, and was operational for floods, foot and mouth and in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 2001 event. It co-ordinated media facilities for the funeral of the Queen Mother in 2002, and supported the media arrangements for the Royal Jubilee. It was then activated to co-ordinate information activities during the fire-fighters dispute in 2002/3.

Annex C: Principles of Managing Risks to the Public [5]

People face a range of risks - including direct threats, safety concerns, risks to their welfare or livelihood, and risks to the environment - and no aspect of life can be entirely risk free. Government's role will vary according to the nature of the risk - it may involve providing information and advice on risks that individuals manage themselves, regulating how risks and benefits are distributed across society, or by intervening directly to provide protection from external hazards. The following five principles apply to the handling of all types of risk to the public:

- Openness and transparency

- Involvement

- Proportionality and consistency

- Evidence

- Responsibility

Government will be *open and transparent* about its understanding of the nature of risks to the public and about the process it is following in handling them

Government will make available its assessments of risks that affect the public, how it has reached its decisions, and how it will handle the risk. It will also do so where the development of new policies poses a potential risk to the public. When information has to be kept private, or where the approach departs from existing practice, it will explain why. Where facts are uncertain or unknown, Government will seek to make clear what the gaps in its knowledge are. It will be open about where it has made mistakes, and what it is doing to rectify them.

Government will seek *wide involvement of those concerned* in the decision process

Government will actively involve all significant stakeholders, including members of the public, throughout the risk identification, assessment and management process. Two-way communication will be used in all stages of policy development, risk assessment and risk management. Where there are differences in interpretation it will aim to clarify these through open discussion, and it will seek to balance conflicting views in a way that best serves the wider public interest. It will explain how views obtained through consultation have been reflected in its decisions.

Government will *act proportionately and consistently* in dealing with risks to the public

Government will base all decisions about risks on what best serves the public interest. Action taken to tackle risks to the public will be proportionate to the level of protection needed and targeted to the risk. Government will seek to apply a consistent approach to its assessment of risks and opportunities, to its evaluation of the costs and benefits of options for handling them, and to its approach to communication, and will ensure that these are clearly articulated. It will apply the precautionary principle where there is good reason to believe that irreversible harm may occur and where it is impossible to assess the risk with confidence.

Government will seek to base decisions on *all relevant evidence*

Government will aim to ensure that all relevant evidence has been considered and, where appropriate, quantified before it takes decisions on risk. It will seek impartial and informed advice that can be independently verified wherever possible. It will consider evidence from a range of perspectives, including the public as well as experts. It will not use the absence of evidence alone to prove the absence or presence of threat, and will acknowledge alternative interpretations of the available evidence. It will make clear how evidence has informed its decisions.

Government will seek to *allocate responsibility* for managing risks to those best placed to control them

Where possible, Government will ensure that those who impose risks on others also bear responsibility for controlling those risks and for any consequences of inadequate control. It will encourage individuals to take responsibility where appropriate, and will aim to give individuals a choice in how to manage risks that affect them where it is feasible and in their interest to do so and where this does not expose others to disproportionate risk or cost. It will seek to clarify where responsibility for managing risks rests and that those responsible have the authority and information to act.

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[5]These principles are intended to be consistent with existing published frameworks, including: the Freedom of Information Act; the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; the Principles of Good Regulation; the precautionary principle, and principles governing the production of Departmental risk frameworks.

Annexe D: Public involvement methods

Method	Description	Strengths
Written consultation exercises	The public is invited to comment on policies and proposals set out in a document	Good for getting views on detailed and potentially complex proposals from interested parties and individuals
Questionnaires	May cover a statistically representative sample of the public or a particular group of citizens;	Good for finding out what large numbers of people think on particular issues as part of a public consultation exercise.
	The public are asked a set of questions; their responses are collected and analysed;	
	Can be designed tom elicit the opinions of the public;	
	Will consist of 'closed questions' (public choose between pre-determined options) and/or open questions (public freely respond).	
Public Meetings	An open invitation is extended to any member of the public (e.g. through advertising) to find out about a particular issue;	Useful as a means of demonstrating a transparent and open approach to policy making and collecting views.
	The organisers will often present information, and listen and respond to questions or issues raised by the audience	
Focus groups	They bring together 8-10 people, led by a trained facilitator, to discuss a particular issue	Good for allowing issues to be explored in some depth.
	Often recruited to represent a particular group of citizens;	
	Lasts between 1-2 hours	
	Information can be provided, but the purpose is to explore opinions in greater depth.	
Re-convening groups	Similar to focus groups, except that participants are invited to reconvene as a group on one or more occasion having had time to read information, debate the issues, with others outside the group, and reflect and refine their views;	Good for enabling participants to continue their discussion and develop their thinking in between meetings.
	They meet for up to 2 hours, allowing for a more in-depth discussion than focus groups;	
	Meetings can be designed to revisit and or build on previous discussions	
Citizens' panels	These panels are made up of a statistically representative sample of the population (ranging from 500-5000 people);	Panels are cost effective once set up, and can be used flexibly. However, attrition can be a problem, as it affects the representativeness of the panel
	The views of panel members on different issues are sought regularly using a variety of methods, such as surveys, interviews or focus groups	
	A proportion of the panel is replaced over a period of time	

Citizens' juries	A group of 12 to 16 citizens recruited to be a best fit of a population, or a particular section of the public, are brought together to discuss a policy issue;	Good for developing creative and innovative solutions to difficult problems. Allows policy makers to get an in-depth understanding of public perceptions to an issue.
	They last for up to four days and use independent facilitators;	
	Citizens are informed about the issue and receive evidence from 'expert' witnesses;	
	Their conclusions are compiled in a report and presented to the commissioning body for a response.	
Workshops	These allow policy makers to engage in a dialogue with a group of citizens or stakeholders on a specific issue;	Good for providing opportunities to assess an issue in some depth, for example, problems, policy priorities and solutions.
	The events can take a variety of formats, e.g. Government may introduce the issue for discussion and invite participants to debate different aspects of it in a mixture of small group and plenary sessions;	
	They usually last between half-to-two days.	
Deliberative polls	Used to measure the opinions of citizens before and after they have had an opportunity to become informed about and discuss a particular issue;	Good for providing the informed views of a wide section of the population.
	They involve 250-600 people, who are brought together at a conference centre for 1-2 days;	
	Participants are divided into small groups; they discuss issues, hear evidence and question experts;	
	Participants are recruited to be representative of the attitudes and demography of the wider population;	
	Only television companies have employed this approach in the UK	
Consensus conferences	A panel of 20-25 people, recruited through random selection techniques, develop an understanding of a specific topic through briefing materials and in dialogue with experts;	Good for opening policy-making to direct public scrutiny
	At its first meeting, at which discussion is facilitated, the panel is briefed on the subject and identifies questions that it wants to address. At the second meeting the panel begins to investigate the topic and identifies witnesses to cross-examine;	
	The panel questions witnesses at a public hearing lasting a number of days;	
	Following the hearing, the panel prepares a report setting out their views on the subject and presents this in public session at the conference	

Issue forums	◈ These are ongoing bodies with regular meetings, but focussing on a particular issue;	Good for providing opportunities to have an on-going dialogue with the public on particular issues to help formulate policies.
	◈ They may have a set membership (illustrated by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's Community Forum) or operate on an open basis (an approach adopted by some local authorities).	
Working groups	◈ These might involve one or more of the following groups in developing specific policy; experts, citizens, representatives of Civil Society groups, Ministers, and Government officials	Good for drawing on the expertise of a range of people to help develop policy.
	◈ Such bodies might be a consultative forum or charged with engaging different groups and individuals in policy-making	
Visioning exercises	◈ A Future Search conference is one example of a visioning exercise;	Good for helping to create consensus amongst a range of stakeholders.
	◈ It brings together a large group of stakeholders (around 60), selected because they have decision-making authority, an understanding of, or are affected by, the topic under discussion;	
	◈ Participants take part in a structured meeting, taking up to two and a half days, where they develop a shared vision for the future and commit to action towards the vision.	
Planning for real	◈ Often initiated by local communities on planning matters, a three dimensional model of a particular neighbourhood is created. At a public event displaying this model, the public is invited to attach cards to identify problems, issues of concern and possible solutions	These techniques' emphasis on visual materials encourages a range of people to participate in the events.

(Source; Viewfinder: A policy maker's guide to Public Involvement. Cabinet Office 2002)

Annexe E: Sources of guidance

Government policy on risk

◆   **Risk: Improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty.** - *Strategy Unit. Cabinet office. November 2002*

Public attitudes to risk - research

◆   on risk generally - **Running Risks; summary research into consumers' views on risk.** *National Consumer Council. 2002*

◆   on crisis generally, **the fuel crisis in particular - Crisis Communications Research.** *November 2000. Cabinet Office.*

◆   on Foot and Mouth - **Foot and Mouth Research.** *November 2001. DEFRA*

◆   on post-September 11, 2001

        - **Qualitative Research on Public Perceptions of the Current Situation. Stage I.** November 2001. Cabinet Office.

        - **Qualitative Research on Public Perceptions of the Current Situation. Stage II.** January 2002. Cabinet Office

Understanding the nature of risk/crisis

◆   **Communicating about Risks to Public Health; Pointers to Good Practice.** *Department of Health. 1998*

◆   Preparing for the Future: Challenges in Crisis Management by Arjen Boin and Patrick Lagadec. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management. December 2000*

◆   Risk Communication and Public Perception. *HSE/ILGRA. March 2003*

◆   **Risk Anaylsis, Perception, Management**. *Royal Society. 1992*

Understanding rumour

◆   The Psychology of Rumour. Allport and Postman. *Published by Henry Holt &Co, New York, 1948*

Risk communication guidelines

◆   **Risk Communication; A Guide to Regulatory Practice.** *ILGRA. 1998*

◆   **Guidelines 2000; Scientific Advice and Policy-Making.** *Office of Science and Technology, July 2000*

◆   **Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees**, *Office of Science and Technology, December 2000*

Stakeholder analyses, involvement

◆   Making Policy that Happens; A Policy Toolkit. *Sean Lush. Civil Service College, CMPS. May 2002*

◆   **Tools for Development Handbook.** *DFID 2002*

- **RAMP - Risk Analysis and Management for Projects.** *Institution of Civil Engineers. 2000*

- **A Policy maker's Guide to Public Involvement. *Viewfinder*** *- Cabinet Office. 2002*

- **Professional Policy Making for the Twenty-First Century.** *Cabinet Office, September 1999*

- **Better Policy-Making.** CMPS. Cabinet Office. November, 2001

Good policy making Case Studies

- **Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money.** *NAO. November 2000*

Risk/Crisis case studies

- **The BSE Inquiry, Findings and Conclusions.** Lord Nicholas Phillips. *Stationery Office. 2000*

- **Explaining the Fuel Protests.** *Brian Doherty, Matthew Paterson, Alexandra Plows and Derek Wall, School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment, Keel University*

- **Foot and Mouth Disease 2001; Lessons to be learned Inquiry**, *Dr Iain Anderson. July 2002*

- Civil Emergencies and the media - a central Government Perspective. *M S D Granatt. Home Office. 1996*

- Disasters and the Media; Managing Crisis Communications, *Macmillan.1999*

- The Unlikely Counter-Terrorists. *Edited by Rachel Briggs, The Foreign Policy Centre. November 2002*

Working with the media

- **Social Amplification of Risk; The media and the public.** *University of Birmingham. HSE. Contract Research Report 329/2001. ISBN 0 7176 1983 4*

- The Social Amplification of Risk. *N.F. Pidgeon, R Kasperson and P Slovic, University of East Anglia. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521 817 285 (hardback), ISBN 0521 520 444 (paperback)*

- Quantifying Risk Amplification Processes; A Multi-level Approach. *Queen's University, Belfast. HSE CRR367/2001. ISBN 0 7176 2098 0*

- **The impact of social amplification of risk on risk communication.** *University of Surrey. HSE CRR332/2001. ISBN 0 7176 1999 0*

- **Connecting in a Crisis;** A guide to working with the BBC during an emergency. *BBC. 2002*

- **9/11; Implications for Communications.** *Media Emergency Forum Joint Working Party Report. June 2002*

Good Communication practice

◆   **Government Information and Communication Service Handbook.** *Cabinet Office*.

Government Policy on Openness

◆   **Freedom of Information Act.** *Lord Chancellor's Department*

◆   **Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.** *Lord Chancellor's Department*

Further Resources - Websites

◆   **CMPS Website**

◆   **Policy Hub Website**

◆   **ILGRA Website**

◆   **Risk Support Team Website**

◆   **PSBS Risk Website**

◆   **OGC delivery toolkit website**

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Checklists and Frameworks

◆　　**Fright factors**

◆　　**Four "world views" on risk**

◆　　**Core communication needs**

◆　　**Media triggers**

◆　　**Seven steps in creating a risk communication strategy**

◆　　**When to communicate about risk**

◆　　**How to carry out a communications audit**

◆　　**Objectives of a risk communication strategy**

◆　　**Stakeholder influence and interest**

◆　　**Public involvement methods**

◆　　**Examples of electronic methods of consultation**

◆　　**Single Overriding Communication Objective sheet**

◆　　**Six key features of a communication handling strategy**

◆　　**Expectations during the first hour of a major incident**

◆　　**Channels of communication**

◆　　**Pitfalls to avoid when working with the media**

◆　　**Media handling checklist**

◆　　**Principles of handling risk to the public**

◆　　**Public involvement methods**