CDC and Bioterrorism: Anthrax Response
A Communications Perspective

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(1997-2002)

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CDC Overview

• National Public Health Agency
  8,500 employees in 170 disciplines

• Best known for “Disease Detectives”

• Atlanta National HQ

• CDC includes 12 Centers, Institutes
  and Offices

• $4 Billion budget
Communication Industry Today

- 2,901 broadcast TV stations
- 2,278 daily newspapers
- 12,687 magazines
- 109,574,429 web sites (01/01)
  (17,000 health-related sites)
- CDC in the news:
  2001 – 17,205
  1990 - 6,330
The World Changes

Tragic Event Activates Emergency Response Systems
Communication Centralized
CDC Responds

10/4/01 World Changes Again

A Nation Challenged

Flulike symptoms? It could be the flu

ANTHRAX LETTER AWAITS DISCOVERY, C.D.C. CHIEF HINTS

Many Lessons To Be Learned With Anthrax

Authorities Discovering How Little They Know

ANTHRAX MYSTERY No easy answer in Florida case

CDC
And it only got more complicated from here…

A multi-state investigation intensified

Adapting to a Crisis: Stick to the Basics

- Timely and Accurate Release of Information
- Media Response
- Issues Management
- Promotion
**Release of Information**

**Multi-Channel**

- **Press Releases** - Two daily updates
- **Daily Telebriefings**
- **Audio News Release** – English and Spanish
- **VNR, Bites and B-roll** – Broadcast and Web
- **MAT Article**
- **Individual Interviews, Field Press Conferences**
- **Professional Satellite Trainings**

**Surge Capacity**

**350 Press Calls Per Day**

- Shift Press Officers to Media Response; 12/7 to 24/7
- Deploy Press Officers with Investigation Teams
- Create Teams - Expanded Work Hours/Schedules
CDC - By the Numbers
October 1, 2001 – January 19, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone press briefings</th>
<th>Press Releases</th>
<th>Press calls</th>
<th>Print media mentions</th>
<th>Broadcast interviews aired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 (1,909 journalists)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7,737</td>
<td>12,454</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• 10/18/01 VNR - aired 923 times, 50 M audience
• 12/13/01 VNR - aired 216 times, 34 M audience
• 3 ANRs replayed 1,359 times reaching 10.7 M
• CDC PHTN hosted 10 programs reaching 10.3 M
• CDC responded to 18,000 public inquiries

Lessons Learned
Communication: Integral part of response across CDC – various audiences

• Get News Out Quickly: Don’t Speculate
• Timelines: Accuracy
• Trusted Spokespersons
• Stay in your Niche
• Daily Updates Essential
RISK COMMUNICATION

• Don’t over reassure
• Acknowledge uncertainty
• Emphasize the process and next steps
• Give anticipatory guidance
• Be regretful, not defensive
• Acknowledge people’s fears
• Express through “wishes”
• Give people things to do

Take Away Tips

• Stay Calm – Set the Tone
• Rotate Staff
• Rotate Leadership (hardest to do)
• Don’t Take it Personally
• Let it Go
• Be Flexible
• Ask for help
FOODBORNE OUTBREAK

- Communicate what you know for sure
- Transmission: Food only? Person to person?
- Communicate Next Steps - process
- Communicate about your niche only
  - Group Telebriefings
  - Point to others web sites
  - Investigation findings will always precede regulatory decisions

A Balancing Act

Meeting the Needs of the Media

Timely and Accurate Release of Information
Thinking Globally -- Working Locally

A Conference on Food Safety Education