



Introduction to disaster and risk communication between citizens and authorities

A first approach to disaster communication concerns communication of information about disasters between authorities and citizens. In the same way as risk communication is defined in some studies as a top-down process through which information is conveyed from authorities to individual citizens, disaster communication, involves, in some views, only the way public authorities act. In this reading of the term, there are four stages in the life of the disaster: preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery. The task of the authorities are to send proper and clear messages, which are meant to explain to the population what they should do in case of a disaster, during the preparedness phase. Further, during the response phase, authorities should guide the population about what they should be doing, while undertaking the proper response measures. Finally, during the mitigation and recovery stages, authorities are tasked with sending messages to re-emphasize the unity of the population and to show strength and hope for the future. Another approach to the idea of disaster communication regards communication from the affected population, addressed either to the authorities, to other people or to the general public. A study conducted by the Associated Press' NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research of the University of Chicago discussed how citizens used different means of communication in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, which affected the New York and New Jersey Areas. According to the study individuals in the affected areas of New York and New Jersey report using a variety of communication methods to reach out to those around them, including cell phones (77%) in person communications (73%) and landline phones (41%). Residents in the affected area also utilized electronic methods to communicate during the storm. Thirty - three percent reported using email, 31 percent reported using Facebook, and 7 percent reported using Twitter (Associated Press, 2013). Moreover, the study also organized the data according to age groups and showed that communication by cell phone, landline and in-person conversations differed significantly based on age of resident. Those 65 and older were the most likely to report using landlines but the least likely to report using any other mode of communication [...] Additionally, social media usage during Superstorm Sandy varied significantly by age of resident. Overall, 7 percent of those living in the affected region report having used Twitter, and 31 percent used Facebook to communicate during Superstorm Sandy. Less than 2 percent of people over 50 used Twitter to communicate. Sixty-one percent of residents age 18 - 29 used Facebook to communicate during Sandy, while 34 percent of residents age 30 - 49 and 21 percent of residents age 50 - 64 did so. Just 5 percent of people age 65 and older used Facebook to communicate during the storm during Superstorm Sandy, compared to 8 percent of people age 30 (Associated Press, 2013). The third understanding of disaster communication concerns communication between the public authorities before and during a disaster. The literature on this discusses the first process as one of bureaucratic negotiations in order to establish such documents as definitions, action plans and common procedures to react in case of a disaster. Alternatively, during the response phase, the sources consulted address the technical issue of communication: how communication equipment has to be placed, organized and maintained so that efficient and speedy communication is achieved inside the members of a public authority in order to



deliver fast and efficient results. A presentation of FEMA equipment on the agency's website begins from the statement that "It is important for public safety agencies (such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and fire services) to be able to provide and maintain communications before, during, and after a disaster or emergency" (FEMA website).

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Attitudes toward the media](#), [Communication](#), [Norms/values](#), [Attitudes toward authorities](#), [Social networks](#), [Social control](#), [Access and use of infrastructure/services](#)

Disaster Phases: [Prevention](#), [Preparedness](#), [Response](#), [Recovery](#), [All disaster phases](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [Healthcare and emergency services](#), [NGOs](#), [Active citizens](#), [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Non-active citizens](#), [Media](#), [Government](#), [Red Cross](#), [Law enforcement agencies](#), [UN and other international organisations](#), [European Civil Protection Mechanism](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#), [Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations](#), [Man-made intentional hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves](#)
- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

Source

[Deliverable D8.1 "Report on risk communication models and best practices" \(page 26\)](#)

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