

# Creating Effective Crisis Information Messages

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A Message Development Guide

Hazmat at school  
Unknown agent  
Tweeter on scene  
No PIO





## Public Reaction

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Worried & afraid.

Are my kids safe?

Where/when can I get them?

What happened?

Following Twitter and Facebook



# Emergency Management Concerns

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Life/safety priority

Complex co-ordination

Waiting for confirmed info

EOC likely not open

Media /social media phobia



How would you handle  
Public Information?

**Would You?**



# Lac Megantic Train Crash



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9eU59R3Xqo>

# B-17 Plane Crash at Bradley



<https://youtu.be/l9eU59R3Xqo>

# Crisis Message Goals

get the right  
information



to the right  
people



at the right  
time



so they can  
make  
decisions  
that help the  
response

In an Ideal  
World crisis  
messages  
would...

Meet

audience needs

Be

timely

Be

consistent and clear

Be

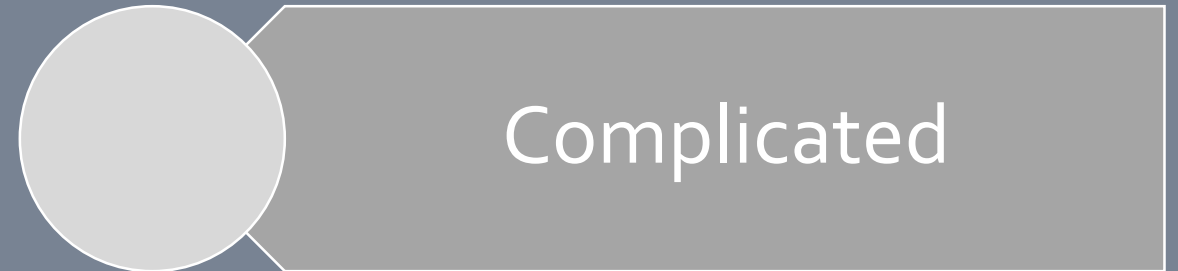
easily understood

Be

credible



Messages  
HURT the  
response  
when they  
are....



# Crisis Messaging MATTERS. It Can...

Rally support



Encourage  
cooperation

Provide info



Calm nerves

Limit rumors



Gain public trust

# New WRHSAC Message Development Guide

to help balance emergency  
management and public needs

# Message Writing Template

- ① Guidance
- ② Planning/Assessment
- ③ Writing the Message Map
- ④ Evaluation/Release

# Example B- 17 Bradley Incident

- ② Planning/Assessment
- ③ Writing the Message Map
- ④ Evaluation/Release

# A+

- Clear expression of empathy
- Clearly chosen audiences
- Brief simple messages
- Supporting facts
- Confirmed facts (no speculation)
- Open, honest



## Message Map Fillable Form

### General Information

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### Planning the Message: Information about the Emergency

What is the Purpose of the Message?

<input type="checkbox"/> Initial Event Message	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Give Facts
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clarify Event Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rally to Action
<input type="checkbox"/> Holding Message	<input type="checkbox"/> Address Rumors
<input type="checkbox"/> Warning Message	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Satisfy Media requests

Scenario: When You are Most Likely to Use This Message?

<b>Weather</b>	<b>Biological</b>	<b>Man-Made</b>	<b>Terrorist</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ice/Snow/Cold	<input type="checkbox"/> Accident	<input type="checkbox"/> Hazmat	<input type="checkbox"/> Active Threat
<input type="checkbox"/> Heat Wave	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Emergency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multi-Casualty Incident	<input type="checkbox"/> Terrorism
<input type="checkbox"/> Tornado	<input type="checkbox"/> Infectious Disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Wildfires	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hurricane	<input type="checkbox"/> Contagious Disease		
<input type="checkbox"/> Flooding	<input type="checkbox"/> Arbovirus		

What Response Activity is Related to the Message?

<input type="checkbox"/> Evacuation	<input type="checkbox"/> Road Closures	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Where to Get Help
<input type="checkbox"/> Shelter-in-Place	<input type="checkbox"/> Rescue Operations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Where/When to Get Info
<input type="checkbox"/> Mass Sheltering	<input type="checkbox"/> Utility Service-Infrastructure Damage	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer/Donations
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Surge		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NTSB Investigation
<input type="checkbox"/> Power Outage		

### Target Audience/Stakeholder Information

It is vital to get your message out to the right people in the right way. By identifying and constructing audience-specific messages, your messages will be more effective.

Consider...

1. Who will be affected?
2. Who might perceive they are affected?
3. Who will be involved or collaborate with you?
4. Who will be upset if not involved/informed?
5. Who would be involved with a similar issue?

# EXAMPLE

Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council

# The Template in Action: B-17 Incident





# Planning/ Assessment

Purpose of the Message

Scenario

Response Activity

Target Audience

Critical Information Needs

Spokesperson

## Purpose of the Message

- ☐ Initial Event Message
- ☒ Clarify Event Status
- ☐ Holding Message
- ☐ Warning Message

- ☒ Give Facts
- ☒ Rally to Action
- ☐ Address Rumors
- ☒ Satisfy Media requests

# Scenario

## Weather

- ☐ Ice/Snow/Cold
- ☐ Heat Wave
- ☐ Tornado
- ☐ Hurricane
- ☐ Flooding

## Biological

- ☐ Accident
- ☐ Water Emergency
- ☐ Infectious Disease
- ☐ Contagious Disease
- ☐ Arbovirus

## Man-Made

- ☐ Hazmat
- ☒ Multi-Casualty Incident
- ☐ Wildfires

Other

Airplane crash B-17 Bradley International

## Terrorist

- ☐ Active Threat
- ☐ Terrorism

# Response Activity

- ☐ Evacuation
- ☐ Shelter-in-Place
- ☐ Mass Sheltering
- ☐ Medical Surge
- ☐ Power Outage
- ☐ Road Closures
- ☐ Rescue Operations
- ☐ Utility-Service-Infrastructure Damage

- ☒ Where to Get Help
- ☒ Where/When to Get Information
- ☐ Volunteer/Donations
- ☒ NTSB Investigation

# Target Audience

## Internal

- ☐ ICS staff
- ☒ Response Partners
- ☐ Local Government
- ☒ First Responders
- ☐ VIPs

## External

- ☒ General Public
- ☒ Victims / Their Families
- ☐ Those Most at Risk
- ☐ Worried Well
- ☐ Business
- ☒ Media

## Other

- ☐ Neighboring Communities
- ☒ National Media
- ☐ Neighbors of Victims
- ☒ State/Federal Agencies

Other

# Critical Information Needs

- ☒ Explain the situation/response
- ☐ Confirm knowledge of the incident
- ☒ Scope of the incident
- ☒ State actions being taken
- ☒ State actions for the public to take
- ☒ First: what, where, when. Don't answer who, why, how until you are sure. Don't speculate!
- ☐ Steps to take to protect themselves/families
- ☒ Steps to take to help the response
- ☒ Where to go for help/information?
- ☐ Who is responsible?
- ☒ How are you helping ?
- ☐ Risks/benefits of Public Safety/Health actions?



# Choose a Spokesperson

Choose a Spokesperson to deliver the message. Characteristics of an effective spokesperson include:

- empathetic
- trustworthy
- trained
- credible
- knowledgeable
- committed/dedicated
- good communicator
- willing to practice the message
- honest/open
- flexible
- works well under pressure
- understands limits of authority

Spokesperson Department (For a press conference you may want multiple speakers/departments)

- ☐ EMD
- ☐ Selectboard Member
- ☐ Mayor
- ☐ Town Administrator

- ☐ Town Council Member
- ☐ Fire Chief/Designee
- ☐ Police Chief/Designee

- ☐ Community PIO
- ☐ DPW
- ☐ Board of Health Member/Staff

Other



# Writing the Message Map

Finalize the target audience

Choose their key concerns

Write 3 short messages

Supplement each message with 3  
supporting points



## Audience & Key Concern

**Target Audience:** General Public,  
Media, Victims and Families,  
Responders

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What happened?             | <input type="checkbox"/> What does this information mean?                             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How are you helping?       | <input type="checkbox"/> Property/infrastructure damage?                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What actions can I take to keep safe? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Where to go for help/information?                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What can we expect?        | <input type="checkbox"/> Who is responsible?  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Why did this happen?       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What actions are being taken/recommended?         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Why wasn't it prevented?   | <input type="checkbox"/> What are the risks/benefits of public health/safety actions? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What else can go wrong?               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>                                   |

# Message Map

**3 Key Messages Guidance:** These are the 3 main points that answer the concern/question. Together the 3 key messages should take roughly 27 words and be as simple as possible. Each of the 3 key messages must stand on its own, without the other two messages, or supporting information. The most important messages are given first and third, with the lowest priority message in the middle.

Key Message #1	Key Message #2	Key Message #3

**Supporting Message Guidance:** Write three supporting messages using the same format as for the key messages. These are used to add detail, fact and proof of your key message. Use graphics and/or cite third parties if this improves the message.

Support Message 1-1	Support Message 2-1	Support Message 3-1
Support Message 1-2	Support Message 2-2	Support Message 3-2
Support Message 1-3	Support Message 2-3	Support Message 3-3

Write 3 Key Messages that :

- Use short simple words and sentences.
- Each message ~9 words < 30 total.
- Most important first and third
- No acronyms or jargon
- Grade 6 reading level

Key Message #1.	Key Message #2	Key Message #3
<b>NTSB arrived at 4 pm and began our investigation. (8)</b>	<b>We have a team of ten people (7).</b>	<b>What we know so far, is preliminary. (7)</b>

Write 3 supporting details for each key message: follow same guidelines

## Key Message #1.

**NTSB arrived at 4 pm and began our investigation.**

### Supporting Info 1-1

**Our mission is to learn what happened, why it happened and to prevent it from happening again. (17)**

### Supporting Info 1-2

**We have started to assess the scene. (7)**

### Supporting Info 1-3

**We have started to collect perishable evidence. (7)**

Key Message #1.	Key Message #2	Key Message #3
NTSB arrived at 4 pm and began our investigation.	We have a team of ten people.	What we know so far, is preliminary.
Supporting Info 1-1	Supporting Info 2-1	Supporting Info 3-1
Our mission is to learn <u>what</u> happened, <u>why</u> it happened and to <u>prevent</u> it from happening again.	Specialists in air operations and air worthiness will assess what happened.	At 9:45 a B17 Tail # N93012 departed Bradley on runway 6.
Supporting Info 1-2	Supporting Info 2-2	Supporting Info 3-2
We have already started to assess the scene.	We have a drone specialist who will document the scene.	The plane was operated by Collings Foundation in Stowe MA.
Supporting Info 1-3	Supporting Info 2-3	Supporting Info 3-3
We have started to collect perishable evidence.	We have family assistance staff to get families resources.	There were 10 passengers and 3 crew on board.

# Evaluation & Release

Evaluate the message map

Seek review and approval

Choose communication  
channels



## Evaluate the Message

- ✓ Suggests positive action steps? Solution oriented?
- ✓ Projects an honest/open tone
- ✓ Projects a positive tone?
- ✓ Follows the 27/9/3 rule (concise)
- ✓ Includes appropriate language/grade level (6)
- ✓ Uses simple words
- ✓ Uses short sentences.
- ✓ Says "We", not "I"
- ✓ Avoids jargon
- ✓ Avoids acronyms
- ✓ Avoids judgmental phrases
- ✓ Avoids speculation
- ✓ Avoids promises
- ✓ Avoids humor
- ✓ Includes **Only Verified** information



## Dept. Review

- ☐ Fire Department
- ☐ Police Department Mayor/
- ☐ Town Administrator School
- ☐ Department

- ☐ DPW
- ☐ Board of
- ☐ Health EMD
- ☐ Other

# Release Approvals

The Message is Approved by: ☐ Incident Commander (IC) ☐ Public Information Officer (PIO)

**IC Signature**

Date

**PIO Signature**

Date

# Channels

- ☐ Media Release
- ☒ Press Conference
- ☐ Media Interview
- ☐ Public Meeting
- ☐ Facebook

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Webpage
- ☐ Radio

- ☐ Television
- ☐ Reverse 911 Messages
- ☐ 211 Messages
- ☐ Hotline scripts
- ☐

# Pre-written Messages

- ① Response Activities
- ② Target Audiences
- ③ Scenarios
- ④ Warnings

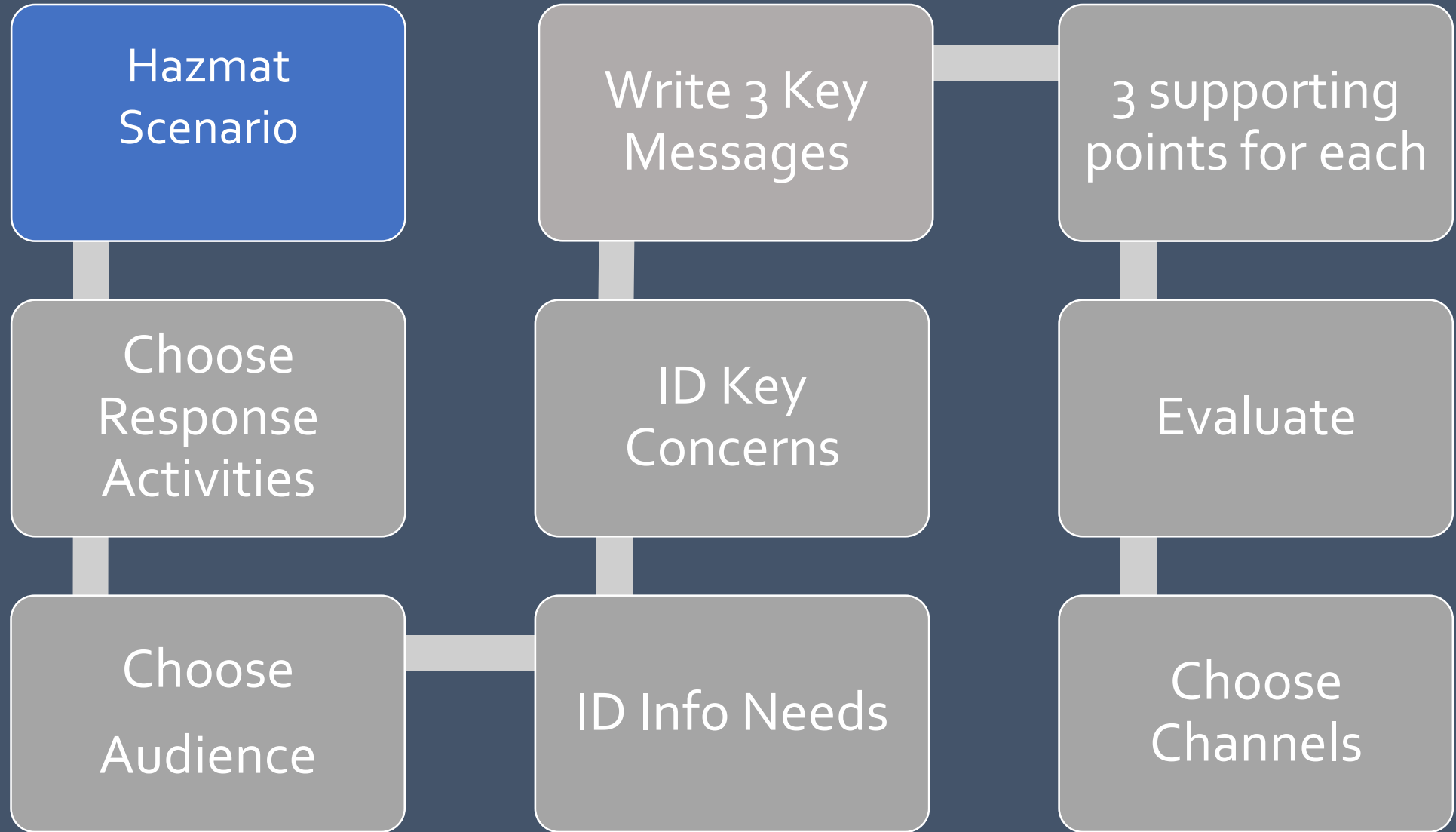


# Putting the Template into Practice

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Hazmat near a school  
Unknown agent







Limited # of  
messages  
that meet  
audience  
needs

Brief

Simple

Easily understood (Grade 6)

Memorable (Positive, prioritized)

Compelling

“ The two words  
“information” and  
“communication” are often  
used interchangeably, but  
they signify quite different  
things. Information is giving  
out; communication is  
getting through. ”

*Sydney J. Harris.*

Use the new  
guide to help you  
“get through”  
during the first  
hours of your  
next emergency!.

Pre-write critical messages and  
share them with others in your  
response community.

# Closing Information

## More Information

- MEMA PIO courses
- Find the documents at [www.wrhsac.org](http://www.wrhsac.org)

## Acknowledgments

- Crisis Messaging and Message Mapping: Dr. Vincent T. Covello (PHD) (The Center for Risk Communication)
- Pre-written Messages: Drexel University Social Media Message Library

“

People will not  
care what you  
think, until they  
know that you  
care. ”

*Theodore Roosevelt*



“On behalf of the NTSB  
we extend our deepest  
condolences to the  
families of those who lost  
their lives in this tragic  
event. To those who were  
injured, we wish a speedy  
and full recovery”.