Energy Emergency and Preparedness Data:
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Quick Guidance on Crisis Communications

NASEO
National Association of State Energy Officials

NARUC
National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners

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State Energy Offices and Public Utility Commissions rely on timely, accurate, and actionable information to perform their energy emergency response duties and execute their roles as state energy security planners. In support of this need, the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissions (NARUC) hosted an Energy Security and Data Analysis Workshop in Washington, DC to identify energy security response and planning data sources; and to share successful methods of data use and integration in state, federal, and private sector tools. Following the workshop, NASEO and NARUC hosted two topical data-centric webinars based on state priorities to identify best practices in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Crisis Communications programs leveraged in energy assurance planning and response. The Crisis Communications webinar covered best practice tactics for how states can respond during energy emergencies and other crises. Based on the workshop and webinars, this document summarizes commonly used data sources and includes frequently asked questions which may be used by state energy officials (i.e., consisting of staff from Public Utility Commissions and Governor-designated State Energy Offices) to help guide them in developing or improving their Crisis Communications capabilities.

A strong public information program is a key crisis management tool. Timely and accurate information helps prevent confusion and uncertainty and encourages public support and cooperation. As energy subject matter experts, state energy officials are vital in the distilling, clarifying, and conveying energy sector information and implications to decision-makers and the public. Other participants in an effective public information program include the Governor's Office, other state agencies, local governments, energy providers, local businesses, state legislature, and the federal government. It is essential to provide stakeholders and the public with information about the nature, severity, and duration of an emergency because inadequate understanding and awareness can lead to undesirable actions that could further exacerbate the situation. Before a state government can provide information to the public, it must gather information, describe the emergency accurately, and develop recommendations to manage the situation.

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Public information programs have two primary functions in an energy emergency:

1) To help the public understand the nature of the problem and prevent panic.
2) To encourage appropriate public, business, and individual responses including fuel conservation, energy use reduction programs, and public safety messages.

What are the main considerations for SEOs and PUCs when developing or executing a public information program?

- **State Energy Officials should first examine where they fit into existing public information programs. Some questions to ask are:**
  - Does the office have a responsibility to directly engage with the public, or is the office responsible for providing information to other state agencies?
  - Who are the key people needed to develop and approve official answers to questions asked by the public? people (i.e., who needs to be in the room when messages are crafted and distributed).
  - What is the timeframe for official public information to be distributed? Who makes that determination?
  - What does the flow of information look like? (e.g., incoming information, draft responses, approval, distribution).
- **Designate Contacts:** Maintain an up-to-date **24-hour** telephone and address directory of key staff and other stakeholders, such as state agencies with ESF-12 responsibilities, local governments, federal government agencies, and energy industry representatives.
- **Include Local Officials:** Make certain that local officials receive at least as much information as the media. The National Association of Counties (NACo) has a consolidated list of county officials which can be used to find county government representatives. The National League of Cities has a map of State Municipal Leagues, which can also be used to find local government representatives.
- **Use National and State Information:** Use data from trusted sources, like EIA and/or CESER, plus other sources, to describe the external forces (e.g., international markets, shipping issues, transportation, refinery outages, and weather) that might affect a state's energy situation. Use industry experts in the interpretation of events.
- **Ensure Accuracy: Verify** information before release.
- **Prepare Press Kits:** Handouts for press conferences and written statements for broadcast appearances are excellent tools for disseminating information, such as fuel supply and use issues, data, responder actions, and comparisons with previous emergencies. Written statements provide a record of what was said by who and to whom.
- **Access Key Policy Makers:** Use access to key policy makers and experts from various state agencies as needed. Ask these persons, when possible, to answer substantive questions from the media.
- **Don't Rush to Conclusions:** Use extreme caution when drawing conclusions with media present. Energy emergencies usually involve complex factors, and members of the press may be under pressure to simplify information and meet deadlines even with incomplete information. Public opinion can be swayed by fragmented data and unsupported opinions. Information and conclusions should be balanced and accurate.
- **Regularly Engage Press:** Regularly scheduled meetings with the press help relieve any pressure to answer questions prematurely without adequate verification.

- **Use Contacts in Private Organizations and Industry Associations:** Enlist private organizations to distribute information. For example, the Automobile Association of America distributes information about gasoline and diesel fuel prices. Fuel oil and propane dealer associations are invaluable for providing information and speaking on behalf of the petroleum industry.

For State Energy Offices and Public Utility Commissions with crisis communications responsibilities, what are some strategies for most effectively communicating leading up to and during emergencies?

- Ensure that you are perceived as caring and empathetic. When people are stressed, upset, or fearful, **they focus on trust and feelings over facts**.
- Ensure messaging is as timely as possible.
- Employ the "**Rule of Three**."
  - Focus on 3 major points
  - Each with 3 supporting facts
  - Repeated 3 times
- Start strong and finish strong. An audience under stress is more likely to recall what they hear **first** and **last**.
- Keep it digestible and easy to understand. People under stress process information differently than in normal conditions.
- Balance negative with positive or constructive information.
  - Avoid negative imagery and absolutes (e.g., "no", "never", "none", "always", etc.).
  - Do not repeat negative statements.

What type of energy-related information should SEOs and PUCs share during energy emergencies through a public information program?

- Information that quantifies the size, scope, and potential duration of the problem;
- Geographic area affected;
- Effects upstream and downstream in the energy supply/distribution system;
- Public statements by state officials;
- Specific actions taken by state or local governments to mitigate impacts (e.g., waivers, Disconnection Moratoria, etc.); and
- In-state media reports that accurately describe the problem.

What are some communications pitfalls to avoid?

- **Multiple authorities** may inadvertently release information that appears to be contradictory because they use different technical terms or different data sources.
- Some groups will take advantage of an emergency by **mischaracterizing, dramatizing, or exaggerating** details in ways that further their self-interests.
- **Antitrust laws** prohibit oil companies from sharing certain information among themselves, so companies might have to limit what is publicly disclosed. As a result, the lead state

agency concerned with petroleum may be asked to explain the adequacy and availability of oil product supplies.

How do you effectively communicate to all generations and audiences during crises and emergencies?

- **Meet your audience where they are:** If the power is out, watching television is not possible. Reaching out to neighborhood activists and local officials is a good way to amplify your message. Older audiences may consult traditional media, while younger audiences may first turn to social media. Bringing a variety of trusted associations and groups into your network can inject confidence into messages.
- **Think visually:** People process images first.
- **Think like an advocate:** Equitable access to services is a looming crisis if you are unprepared. States should develop plans to communicate with people with access and functional needs and people who only speak languages other than English.

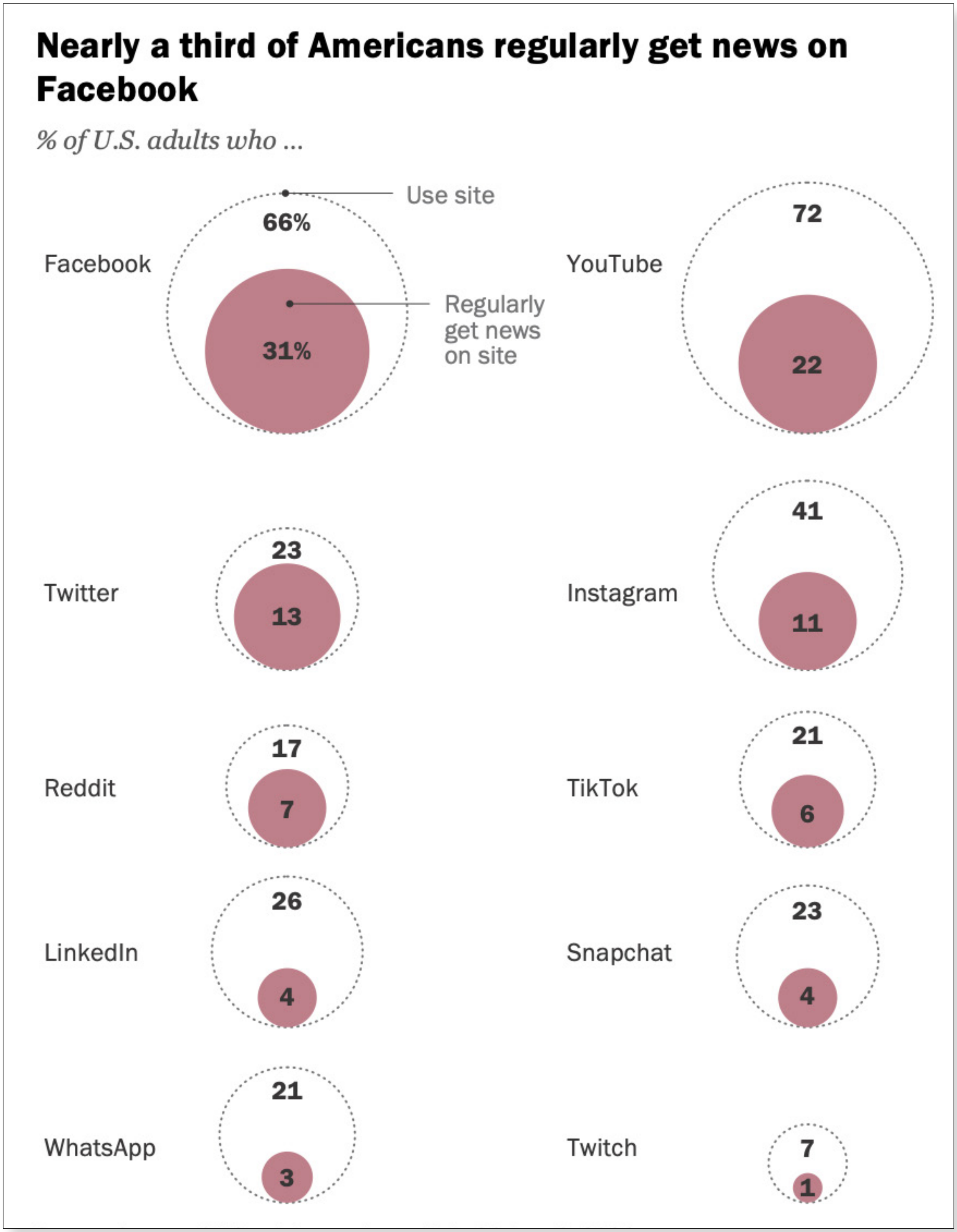
What communications lessons can be shared about dealing with multiple events?

- **Think about depth:** Offices with smaller staff or insufficient internal resources should consider bringing in external partners to help with communications. State Emergency Management Agencies often have robust public information programs that may be leveraged. Similarly, some utilities have communications staff that might be valuable to coordinate with prior to an event. Larger State Energy Offices with dedicated communications personnel might consider training multiple staff to add depth and flexibility, as time-off and shift transitions are most important during long-term emergency response.

How can officials handle the "new press?" (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

- **Speak as a person who represents an organization, not the organization itself:** Virtual messages tend to be better received when coming from an individual as opposed to an official account.
- **Keep messaging consistent but be prepared to pivot:** Prepare a flash report that consists of bullet point highlights, current situation updates, state response actions, and current impacts at both the state and county levels. Updates should be sent to your state's governor, legislature, emergency coordinators, Public Information Officers (PIOs), industry partners, and news outlets at the same time.
- Assign a designated **social media manager.** Ensure that your office has a procedure for **rumor control**. Each social media platform has unique features, content controls, and viewership [See Figure 1: "Social media sites as pathways to news"]. Providing trusted, data-based social media resources can help mitigate unverified rumors.

Figure 1. Social media sites as pathways to news



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.
"News Consumption Across Social Media in 2021"

Pew Research Center

Annex A: Crisis Communications Training Resources

Free Online Crisis Communications Trainings Offered by the FEMA Emergency Management Institute (EMI)

- National Incident Management System Basic Guidance for Public Information Officers
- **FEMA 100 level** Emergency Management Institute (EMI) course for Public Information Officers and Incident Management
- IS 702 – National Incident Management System (NIMS) Public Information Systems
- Master PIO Program (3 course series), EMI (recommended only for those who would be a PIO for an agency or organization)
- G-290 - Basic Public Information Officer – Offered by States' Emergency Management Agencies (training program)
- G-291 - Basic Joint Information Center (JIC) – Offered by States' Emergency Management Agencies (training program)

Other Resources

- Governor's Office Onboarding Guide: Communications – National Governors Association
- Webinar: Crisis Communications: Best Practices for the Worst Times – National Conference of State Legislatures

Annex B: Crisis Communications Quick Guides

Figure 2: 9 Box Message Map:

Crisis communication is a systematic and scientific approach which can be planned and practiced in advance to maximize message delivery in high stress and high concern situations.

<table>
<tr><th>We process and perceive information differently during high stress</th><th>We can anticipate, plan for, and practice most scenarios</th><th>Proper structure and content enhance message delivery and impact</th></tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST
When stressed, fearful or upset, people focus mainly on feelings and trust:
• Audience trust is established within the first 30 seconds.
• Trust is often based on perception over facts—caring, empathy, and listening.
• They want to know that you care, before they care what you know.</td>
<td>PLAN/MAP
What are your "top 10" high impact issues?
• 90+% of the potential "crisis" situations you may face can be anticipated.
• Most of the questions related to those crisis situations can be developed in advance (See: 77 Questions Commonly Asked by Journalists During a Crisis)
• It is easiest to plan BEFORE a crisis.</td>
<td>STORY
Planning and practice allows for appropriate and rapid response:
• If you don't narrate your story, someone else will—respond in the golden hour, with regular follow-up.
• Remember that the agency, the audience, or both, may be in "crisis" (which impacts the ability of your team to process info and execute plans).
• Low-stress (normal) and high-stress communications are VERY DIFFERENT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RULE OF THREE
Stress impacts the ability to process, understand, and remember information:
• Stick to the "Rule of 3s" (3 points, with 3 supporting facts, repeated 3 times).
• More likely to recall what they hear FIRST and LAST.
• Under stress, people process info several grade levels lower (-4).</td>
<td>KEYS
Advance discussion and planning help create rapid message responses:
• Know the flow: incoming information, draft response, approval, distribution.
• Identify your key people: who needs to be "in the room when it happens"?
• Regular reviews, updates, and practice keep plans and personnel ready.</td>
<td>PICTURE
Work on the VISUALS:
• 50% or more of perception in high stress situations is triggered visually; so appearance, visual cues, and graphics are extremely important.
• Visual cues are most often perceived negatively (nervousness, body language, eye contact, confidence, empathy).
• Visuals are processed FRIST, and often INSTEAD OF what we are hearing. Don't distract or undercut your own message (Picture, headline, story – even more important now with online information).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO "NO's"
People under stress focus more on negative information:
• Negative info needs to be balances with more positive or constructive info (4:1 ratio)
• Avoid negative imagery and absolutes (e.g., no, never, none, always, etc.).
• Don't repeat negative statements or questions.</td>
<td>TRAIN
Do you sit down regularly to plan, discuss, and practice response?
• With practice, you can regularly build/grow your response plans.
• Where is your content and is it ready to deploy quickly? (i.e., letterhead, visuals, delivery technology, distribution channels and lists, media and social media).
• Train how you respond, because you respond the way you train.</td>
<td>TIC-TAC-TOE
Understanding crisis communications issues guides you to the best format/template:
• Start with CARING and COMPASSION
• Explore the periodic table of message structure for options.
• Live the "9-box" message templates—it's the foundation for high-impact communication.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Source: Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission

Figure 3: “Periodic Table” for High Concern Communication

INSTITUTE for
HIGH CONCERN
COMMUNICATION

PERIODIC TABLE FOR HIGH CONCERN COMMUNICATION

Use these templates for high concern, risk, crisis, and change management situations

Basic Templates

R3
(Rule of 3)

Use when responding to any high stress or emotionally charged question.

Recommendation: Provide no more than three messages, ideas, or points at a time.

P/R
(Primacy/Recency)

Use when responding to any high stress or emotionally charged question.

Recommendation: Provide the most important items or points first and last.

G/WI
(Guarantee/What If)

Used when asked a "what if" question or to guarantee an event or outcome.

Steps:
- Indicate that the question is about the future
- Indicate that the past and the present help predict the future
- Bridge to "what is": known facts, processes or actions

AAF
(Acknowledge, Action, Follow-up)

Steps:
- (A)cknowledge Uncertainty: Identify knowledge gaps and challenges
- (A)ction: State actions you have taken, are taking or will take to address the issue
- (F)ollow-up: Provide information on where people can obtain timely and credible information

IDK
(I Don’t Know)

Use when you don’t know, can’t answer, or aren’t the best source.
Steps:
- Repeat the question (without negatives)
- Say “My ability to answer is limited by...;” or “I don’t know”
- Say why you can’t answer
- Provide a follow up with a deadline
- Bridge to what you can say

FA
(False Allegation)

Use when responding to a hostile question, false allegation, or criticism.
Steps:
- Repeat/paraphrase question without repeating the negative; repeat underlying value or concern, or use more neutral language
- Indicate the issue is important
- Indicate what you have done, are doing, or will do to address the issue

AGL-4
(Average Grade Level Minus Four)

Use when responding to any high stress or emotionally charged question.

Steps: Provide information at four or more grade levels below the average grade level of the audience.

Y/N
(Yes/No Template)

Use when asked a yes/no question that cannot be answered yes or no.
Steps:
- Indicate you have been asked yes/no question
- Indicate it would be difficult to answer the question yes or no
- Indicate why it would be difficult to answer the question yes or no
- Respond to the underlying concern

Key Templates

CCO
(Compassion, Conviction, Optimism)

Use when asked a question with high emotion.

Steps:
- Compassion (Caring, Empathy, Listening)
- Conviction
- Optimism

Example: (1) “I am very sorry to hear about...; (2) I’m confident that...; (3) In the future, I believe that...”

27/9/3
(27 Words, 9 Seconds, 3 Messages)

Use when responding to any high stress or emotionally charged question.

Recommendation: Be brief and concise in your first response; no more than 27 words, 9 seconds, 3 messages.

IN=3P
(One Negative Equals Three Positives)

Use when breaking bad news or stating a negative.

Recommendation: Balance one bad news or negative message with at least three or more positive, constructive, or solution-oriented messages.

KDK
(Know/Don’t Know)

Use when there is high uncertainty.

Steps:
- State what you know
- State what you don’t know
- State what you are doing to achieve greater certainty or knowledge

Advanced Templates

ALE
(Authority, Logic, Emotion)

Use to encourage appropriate attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors.

- (A)uthority Message: Appeal to authority-those perceived as high in credibility
- (L)ogic Message: Appeal to logic (if x, then y).
- (E)motion Message: Appeal to an emotion (anger, fear, joy, empathy, surprise, grief, hope, etc).

TBC
(Trust, Benefit, Control)

Use when responding to questions or concerns indicating high perceived risks or outrage.

- (T)rust Message: Listening to messages communicating listening, caring, or transparency.
- (B)enefit Message: Messages communicating benefits to the individual, org, or society.
- (C)ontrol Message: Messages that give people things to do or give them a sense of control.

CAP
(Caring, Action, Perspective)

Use to give upset people a greater sense of control.

- (C)aring Message: Communicates listening, caring, empathy, and compassion.
- (A)ction Message: Actions you are taking to address the concern.
- (P)erspective Message: Helps put the concern in perspective.

C/S
(Caring/Sharing)

Use when responding to a question or statement containing incorrect information.

- (C)aring Message: State what you and the person holding incorrect information have in common.
- (S)haring Message (1): Invite person holding incorrect information to share their information w/ you.
- (S)haring Message (2): Share the correct information again.

KDG
(Know, Do, Go)

Use to give upset people a greater sense of control.

- (K)now Message: Share what is most important for people to know.
- (D)o Message: Share what is most important for people to do.
- (G)o Message: Share where people should go for credible information.

KDD
(Know, Do, Do)

Use to give upset people a greater sense of control.

- (K)now Message: Share what is most important for people to know.
- (D)o Message: Share what you are doing to address the concern.
- (D)o Message: Share what people can do to address the concern.

VCD
(Voice, Choice, Do)

Use to give upset people a greater sense of control.

- (V)oice Message: Messages communicating listening, dialogue, or participation.
- (C)hoice Message: Messages communicating options, alternatives, or available choices.
- (D)o Message: Messages that give people things to do, increase feelings of hope, etc.

Reference

INSTITUTE for HIGH CONCERN COMMUNICATION

Dr. Vincent Covello, Director
www.centerforriskcommunication.com

MAGA

Maga Design, Visual Strategists
www.magadesign.com

Source: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/thurs_georgia_9_10_915_covello_6.pdf

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