Building Resilient Communities: Creating Effective Multi-Channel Communication During Disaster Response and Recovery

Vivienne Tippett1, Dominique A. Greer2, Amisha Mehta2, Sharon Christensen3, Bill Duncan3, Amanda Stickeley3, Paula Dootson2

1Health Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, QLD, 2QUT Business School, Queensland University of Technology, QLD, 3Law Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, QLD.

Testing the elements of optimal emergency warnings: Some insights from 10 focus groups and 77 experiments of 3615 Australians

END-USER STATEMENT: Laura Keating, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, WA

Knowing exactly what to say in community warnings is an extremely difficult task. How do you speak, simultaneously, to thousands of people who just happen to be in an area under threat - from older people to young people, tourists to long term locals and people from different backgrounds - in one simple warning? The work that the CRC are doing to clarify specifically what warnings should say, and how they should be structured to make them effective as possible, is absolutely essential. The outcomes of this research are helping the emergency services ensure that we can communicate effectively to as many people as possible during emergencies. It is ultimately helping to provide people with the information they need to save their own lives and those of their loved ones.

Include a visual: While not included here, visuals help to personalise the message and overcome limitations in geographic knowledge. Make it clear where the effected area is quickly and efficiently by using a map.

Build self-efficacy: Provide a map or clear instructions about how to evacuate the affected area to get to family/friends or an evacuation centre. Integrate text to motivate confidence building.

Assume preparation begins in response: Messages should assume no preparation has been done and thus present the community with clear step-by-step instructions.

Clearly name the messenger: People have preferred information sources during events—that are often not the official lead agency.

Be specific with instructions: Place instructions early to capture attention and use language that is clear, specific, and consistent with other agencies. Re-state instructions as it is difficult for community members to return to past messages.

Use time to encourage risk assessment: The length of time between when the message is issued and when it is next updated signals risk to the community. A small time between updates (e.g. 15 minutes) can signal a high risk event, whereas a long time (e.g. one hour) can signal a low risk event. Include a caveat of 'or as the situation changes', to guide information-seeking behaviour and signal the uncertainty inherent in weather events.

Reduce information-seeking barriers: Direct the community to the exact source of information (e.g. an exact webpage rather than homepage) to make information-seeking easier.

Name the location to gain attention: Location is the first piece of information that community members look for when evaluating the relevance of a message. People in ‘Pebble Bay’ will attend to this message as it is clear it will affect them.

Specify the location of the affected area clearly: Location is the first piece of information that community members look for when evaluating the relevance of a message. People in ‘Pebble Bay’ will attend to this message as it is clear it will affect them.

Clearly specify the messenger: People have preferred information sources during events—that are often not the official lead agency.

Assume preparation begins in response: Messages should assume no preparation has been done and thus present the community with clear step-by-step instructions.

Build self-efficacy: Provide a map or clear instructions about how to evacuate the affected area to get to family/friends or an evacuation centre. Integrate text to motivate confidence building.

Be specific with instructions: Place instructions early to capture attention and use language that is clear, specific, and consistent with other agencies. Re-state instructions as it is difficult for community members to return to past messages.

Use time to encourage risk assessment: The length of time between when the message is issued and when it is next updated signals risk to the community. A small time between updates (e.g. 15 minutes) can signal a high risk event, whereas a long time (e.g. one hour) can signal a low risk event. Include a caveat of 'or as the situation changes', to guide information-seeking behaviour and signal the uncertainty inherent in weather events.

Include a visual: While not included here, visuals help to personalise the message and overcome limitations in geographic knowledge. Make it clear where the effected area is quickly and efficiently by using a map.

Build self-efficacy: Provide a map or clear instructions about how to evacuate the affected area to get to family/friends or an evacuation centre. Integrate text to motivate confidence building.

Be specific with instructions: Place instructions early to capture attention and use language that is clear, specific, and consistent with other agencies. Re-state instructions as it is difficult for community members to return to past messages.

Use time to encourage risk assessment: The length of time between when the message is issued and when it is next updated signals risk to the community. A small time between updates (e.g. 15 minutes) can signal a high risk event, whereas a long time (e.g. one hour) can signal a low risk event. Include a caveat of 'or as the situation changes', to guide information-seeking behaviour and signal the uncertainty inherent in weather events.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? For more information on all our results to date, please email Dr Paula Dootson on paula.dootson@qut.edu.au.

LOOKING FOR US? We have two project team members here at AFAC 2016 – Professor Vivienne Tippett and Dr Amisha Mehta – come find us!