

Industry Challenge to Best Practice Risk Communication

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Abstract: Effective food safety and food defense risk communication helps to inform consumers without causing panic and alarm. The Risk Communication Team of the Natl. Center for Food Protection and Defense has developed a list of 11 best practices recommended for effective risk communication. These practices, designed for a food defense crisis, are currently applied to food safety issues, since fortunately a food defense crisis has yet to occur. IFT examined the utility of these best practices and the limitations on their use during food safety and food defense crises by academics, trade associations, and the government. It was hypothesized that legal and business considerations as well as the nature of the event would determine the implementation of the best practices. Through the use of focus group meetings, it was discovered that there was a low level of awareness of the best practices. However, stakeholders practiced some aspects of the recommended practices. Participants felt some of the practices were related and could be consolidated. They also agreed that a food defense event will increase the urgency of the communication and include players not typically involved in food safety issues. The challenges reported by the stakeholders varied, but legal liability, as well as the impact their communications could have on an industry, were often cited. From the government perspective, their need to act within their authorities drove some of their actions with respect to communication. Determining the differences in communication limitations during food safety against food defense events can provide key information to further developing and refining risk communications and specific messages targeted for a food defense incident.

Keywords: consumer confidence, food defense, intentional contamination, risk communication

Practical Application: Effective food safety and food defense risk communication helps to inform consumers without causing panic and alarm. Determining the differences in communication limitations during food safety against food defense events can provide key information to further developing and refining risk communications and specific messages targeted for a food defense incident.

Introduction

Consumers expect that the food they purchase is safe. However, despite the best efforts of food safety professionals, food continues to cause human illness. Consumers are already concerned about the manner in which food is produced and distributed (IFIC 2010). When contamination that can cause illness or injury occurs, the messages must be effective in alleviating fears while giving people meaningful information to protect their health.

Because a large-scale intentional food contamination incident has not occurred, it is difficult to use food safety-focused case studies to assess the adherence of food system stakeholders to the “best

practices.” The Risk Communication Team of the Natl. Center for Food Protection and Defense (NCFPD) developed a list of 11 best practices for stakeholders to implement for effective risk communication surrounding food. (Sellnow and Vidoloff 2009). There have been criticisms of the way and manner in which recent food crises and/or near crises were handled by food system stakeholders including slow responses and lack of coordination between agencies (Pew Charitable Trust 2008). Although resources to aid food system stakeholders in effectively engaging in risk communication (including in advance of a crisis) exist, few studies have critically examined the root causes for the gaps that exist between the recommended “best practices” of risk communication and the nature of communications surrounding a food safety event (Sellnow and others 2008).

The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) undertook a study to determine whether people working within the food system in the United States were using the best practices for risk communication. Food system communicators were asked about their current ability to use the “best practices” for responding to a food safety issue, against their expectation of barriers to using the “best practices” if there was a need to communicate about a catastrophic food defense event. Additionally, determining the differences in communication limitations during food safety against food defense events can provide key information to further develop and

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refine risk communication messages targeted for a food defense incident.

Materials and Methods

Evaluation of "best practices"

Three targets for focus groups meetings were identified: independent scientists, trade associations, and government representatives. Three targets, 2 with independent scientists, and 1 with trade associations, were conducted between February and April 2010. Because of the difficulties associated with convening a single focus group meeting of government representatives, four agencies participated through individual conversations between April and August 2010.

Before the meeting, participants were provided with the article "Getting Crisis Communications Right" (Sellnow and Vidoloff 2009), and a hypothetical account of an intentional contamination event, which was developed specifically for this study (Appendix A).

At each meeting, after a review of the best practices (Figure 1), participants were asked to divide the best practices into three groups: ones that were most important and relevant to them; those of medium importance; and those of lesser importance. Given that there are 11 best practices, they were forced to put at least 3 practices in each category.

Prior to the first meeting, a discussion document (Appendix B) was generated to ensure that the questions asked to each focus group were the same, to enable comparison of results. Questions pertaining to each of the 11 "best practices" were asked during each of the 6-h focus group meetings. The conversations with government agencies took between 1 to 2 h depending on the number of participants.

Comparison of food safety and food defense events

After discussing the best practice in the context of food safety, the conversation turned to food defense. Participants were asked to review the hypothetical food defense scenario and discuss how their responses to the discussion guide questions might change in light of the scenario described, where contamination was intentional and the number of people affected was large compared to most food safety events.

Data analysis

The responses offered by the focus group participants were qualitatively evaluated. Because of the size of the groups, a valid statistical analysis is not possible. Still, these results offer insight into areas which should be further explored through a more formal study.



Figure 1—The 11 best practices of risk communication (from Sellnow and Vidoloff 2009. Used with permission).

Results and Discussion

Focus group demographics

"Independent scientists" were identified either by their role as an IFT Food Science Communicator (mostly academics) or as university extension professors.

Because the food industry encompasses so many product types and roles in the supply chain, trade association representatives were used to form a focus group as a proxy for the food industry. The associations represented a variety of types of food products. Unlike the scientists, several of the trade association representatives noted the need to have more than one representative participate, notably a member of their technical team as well as a communications person.

Government representatives consisted of a blend of communications and technical experts, and commonly referenced the reliance on the other during a food safety event. Within the government group, one state government representative participated, and between 3 and 12 representatives from each of 3 federal regulatory agencies contributed.

To open each focus group session, participants were asked if they had been previously aware of the NCFPD, and of the risk communication theme within the Center. Familiarity of NCFPD was highest within the academic groups, where about half were very familiar with the NCFPD, and most others had heard of the NCFPD. Awareness was lower within trade associations and governments, where only participants with detailed knowledge of food defense reported hearing of the NCFPD.

Focus group assessment of best practices

Although 3 different types of stakeholders participated in the focus groups, some general sentiments were expressed. Participants in the focus group meetings were asked to sort the best practices in high, medium, or low categories with respect to importance. Table 1 summarizes the results, allowing side-by-side comparison of which best practices were viewed as most to least important by independent scientists, trade association representatives, and government agents.

Although the number of individuals participating was too low to show statistical significance, the results do lend themselves to speculation. Accounting for cultural differences was clearly viewed as the least important to all groups, and further discussion showed that this was viewed as too large a task to execute at the national level.

Planning ahead

Crisis communication networks. The government undoubtedly was the most process-oriented group, with formal inter- and intra-agency standard operating procedures. To ensure consistency, most communications are routed through internal groups before public dissemination. There is also increased effort to partner with other agencies that may have overlapping responsibilities before a crisis occurs. The rate of receiving information can limit how promptly government agencies are able to communicate with their audiences.

Trade associations also had formal systems for communicating. Trade associations keep a database of member, regulatory, and media contacts. They belong to several networks within their organizations, allied organizations, and the regulatory community.

Some scientists use listervs to maintain a network and keep abreast of current events. In some instances, universities also market the research of faculty so that they are contacted during crisis.

Relationship with the media. Independent scientists reported that they rarely, if ever, sought out the media, and constant turnover in media staff challenge establishing meaningful relationships with the media. The role of university press offices varied by institution, but generally was used by academics as a resource if an unfamiliar member of the media sought information, or was used as a switchboard to pair a media inquiry with the correct expert. Surprisingly, some university scientists noted that they are not permitted to speak disparagingly about a company or organization in their states. In the group of extension specialists, most reported a similar policy, either written or unwritten.

In some cases, extension professors prepare information for county extension agents or field calls from consumers, but do not generally reach out to the media to push information. They may also increase their visibility by being active on social media about the issue, however, only a few do this regularly.

The government agencies are generally the first to know of an issue and release the information as appropriate. In many cases, issues can be dealt with outside of a public forum. As a rule, government representatives are proactive in seeking out the media when there is a public health issue that needs attention.

Trade associations valued their relationships with the media, but varied in how they would interact if an issue affecting their members' products arose. Some reported that they would alert their members as a priority over contacting the media, and keep their members updated as a crisis evolves. They acknowledged the importance of starting communication directly with the public as well. Many have adopted the use of social media outlets, although there was a wide range in use.

Social and nontraditional media. Independent scientists were weary of social media and desired greater formality in communications. However, all participants recognized that the media and consumers use internet search engines as primary sources of information. Academics noted that with the increased accessibility and influence of information on the web, the nature of media inquiries has shifted from reporters seeking to gain knowledge to reporters already having the information and seeking commentary. They saw their role as guiding the media toward asking the correct questions and translating existing information.

Scientists noted the demise of the newspaper. This was discussed both in the context of losing contact with trusted reporters, as well as the concern that stories are simply lifted from the newswire and regurgitated, without an understanding by the reporter of the real issues.

Both trade associations (to varying degrees) and the government have begun exploring social media, and all groups showed interest in becoming more active. However, there was con-

cern about misinformation spread through this communication outlet.

Accept uncertainty

Admitting that you do not have complete information gives room for amending previous statement. Scientists readily admit when they are not experts in a field. In many instances, they defer inquiries to other experts rather than risk being wrong about an issue.

Scientists cited frustration with reporters who want black and white answers and do not appreciate that people's risks vary. They felt that the parts of the story that provide room for uncertainty are seldom reported, and that journalists tend to gravitate toward scientists who give them explicit, boldly stated answers.

The main concern with uncertainty for the trade associations lied with rolling recalls. In such situations, they have to balance the risk of the legal liability associated with claiming their members' products are not involved if later they are wrong while trying to limit the damage to the brand or the industry they represent. Because of the legal liability to be right with information, trade associations usually say "we'll be back to you with more info" when there is uncertainty. This also helps establish them as a source of ongoing information.

Government agencies may be vulnerable to lawsuits if they provide inaccurate information. They have to balance being prompt with giving accurate information. They are clear about what they know or may not know and increasingly state their source of information (often another government agency).

Communicate responsibly

Partner with the public. Scientists, especially extension professionals, seemed to have ties to the community, but overall, participants did not feel that they had the resources or responsibility to "partner with the public." Although they are aware that people can do internet searches, they feel they are a resource for directing the public to the correct information, and need to manage the inaccurate information in the public domain. Calls to extension offices have decreased due to information being more accessible to the general public.

Trade associations felt food retailers are best positioned to reach their public, given that they know the local community. Trade associations and the food industry may use focus groups and conduct market research to know how the public feels about a particular issue. They also monitor the media and blogs and address any outstanding issues. They do not engage the public *during* crises because these do not last long enough for a company to build long

Table 1—Percent of focus group participants, by stakeholder type, who deemed each best practice to be of high, medium, or lesser relative importance.

Best practice	High%			Medium %			Low %		
	Sci't	Trade	Govt	Sci't	Trade	Govt	Sci't	Trade	Govt
Prompt response	82	83	100	18	17	0	0	0	0
Comm network	45	67	50	18	33	17	18	0	33
Uncertainty	9	17	33	54	50	33	45	33	33
Public partnership	9	0	0	27	80	50	64	20	50
Public concern	36	0	17	64	100	67	0	0	17
Open and honest	73	83	83	27	17	17	0	0	0
Media accessible	36	80	33	45	20	50	9	0	17
Compassion	64	50	33	36	33	33	0	17	33
Self protection	36	17	17	45	67	83	18	17	0
Update plan	0	0	50	36	33	17	63	67	33
Cultural difference	0	0	0	27	0	33	73	100	67

term goodwill. Currently, companies are able to communicate directly with the public via websites and social media.

One government body reported that they try to reach affected populations, but another agency commented that they need to be careful not to single any group out, and need to ensure that all groups are treated fairly. Previous government outreach programs have not always been successful. Contact with the public is largely through the media. Government communicates with local communities on issues of food safety by utilizing local health departments to reach individuals and extension services to reach small businesses.

The questions heard in each discussion were “Who is the public? Which public?” There was a sense that this was a difficult endeavor.

Acknowledge public concern

All groups, but particularly trade associations, felt that public concern is driven by the media. Issues that are more detrimental to public health and should be of greater concern are not always highlighted by the media; rather those that have a sensational effect get headlines. It can be difficult to distinguish public concern from media concern so continuous education of the media is needed. Trade associations provide facts and scientific evidence to the media to back their safety claims and try to put the level of risk in perspective. The science behind some high-profile, media-driven issues evolve over time and the science on these issues tends to be misinterpreted. In addressing these, scientists try to stick to the facts without taking sides. They seek to allay fears, when appropriate, and draw comparisons between similar issues.

The government acknowledges that people have a choice in what they eat irrespective of whether the government says it is safe or not. They give the public information necessary for them to make informed decisions.

Openness and honesty

Although initially all independent scientists acknowledged the importance of openness and honesty, one made the distinction between being open and honest about science against being open and honest about personal opinion. Additionally, although most consider scientists as unbiased, scientists should be open in revealing their source of funding for their research or any other economic stake they may have in the matter.

Although all participants agreed that it is important to be open and honest, some groups, particularly in the government, were cautious about providing unverified information (for example, before laboratory results were in). They also noted that foodborne illness outbreaks prompt investigations for which civil or criminal charges may be made, and that they cannot say things that may compromise the investigation. Government agencies are always available to the media and avoid the use of “no comment” as it shows an unwillingness to be truthful.

In communicating during food crises, scientists believe in giving enough facts so that the public does not overreact or under react to the issue. Companies seek to avoid alarming people based on word choice and tone. They use context/examples to draw attention to the magnitude or severity of a situation. For instance they may say “equivalent of 1 drop in lake Michigan.” There was recognition that certain terms may indicate legal liability, such as admitting failure or negligence. For example, the trade association focus group picked up on the use of the word “fail” used by the CEO of Maple Leaf in a YouTube video shown at the meeting (Maple

Leaf 2008). There was a sense that this increased the legal liability of the company.

Minimize harm

Be accessible to the media. The media is the most effective way to reach the public, and the relationship with the media, change in media types and outlets, and other media issues were dominant throughout all conversations. The trade associations observed that although fewer reporters inquire, the impact of the information is bigger as stories get picked up and spread.

Scientists, especially extension faculty, try to make themselves available to the media to the greatest extent possible. When they are not able to answer inquires, they direct them to appropriate sources. Fewer faculty members, because of their busy schedules, follow up with the media when there is a new development in a story.

Trade associations advise their members to never say “no comment” when asked to speak on an issue.

Government agencies are highly accessible to the media through regular and frequent press releases, conference calls, website updates, and identified spokespersons.

Demonstrating compassion. There was considerable discussion about the role of compassion in communication. Trade associations felt that they were 1 step removed from a situation, since they are not a single food company, and that therefore, their demonstration of compassion could be limited compared to the implicated firm. Government agencies reported that given their role, their communications needed to be factual, limiting the opportunity for compassion. However, multiple government agencies reported their commitment to public health and safety, and stated that their non-stop work during an outbreak demonstrated their compassion. They also noted that when speaking to parents of seriously ill children, the need for compassion increases. Some government representatives felt that compassion was demonstrated through spokespeople rather than written communications. It was noted that during high profile events, spokespeople may be political appointees who can afford to be bolder in their statements, since they may change employment with a change in administration.

Independent scientists seemed to feel most comfortable demonstrating compassion when addressing food safety issues. Scientists agreed that when vulnerable populations are involved, compassion is most important. However, they see compassion as reserved for one on one interaction and not media inquiries.

More severe situations were deemed more worthy of a compassionate response. Groups were divided on whether or not government should show compassion. Some felt government leaders should be neutral; others wondered if compassion would increase the likelihood of consumer response to the message.

Self protection. In the area of self protection (a term strongly preferred to self efficacy), differences in practices were observed. Some academic participants, particularly junior faculty, stated that they would not be comfortable making any recommendation that could be out of line with a government recommendation. However, others, especially the more seasoned scientists, felt that if a recommendation was not based on science, their credibility could be increased by providing an alternate, science-based recommendation. They acknowledged that they would refer to the government recommendation as a best practice, but would, in their communication, state that, for example “we know that cooking a food will kill *Salmonella*.” Some offered that if they were to provide alternatives to a government-issued recommendation, they

would still provide the justification for the recommendation, for example, “although we know *Salmonella* will be killed by cooking food, there is concern for cross contamination, so it is better to follow the government recommendation and discard the food.”

Trade associations reported that if they questioned a message disseminated by the government, they would speak with their government colleagues privately to encourage the agency to modify the message.

Some government agencies have a public health focus, which influences the nature of the message. Some government representatives noted that because of differences in funding levels, some parts of the government are able to provide more robust consumer information. Many expressed concern over a consumer misinterpreting an alternative message.

Evaluating the plan

All the government and trade association representatives reported having a crisis communication plan. Some organizations had robust manuals and plans detailing who to contact during a crisis. Organizations reviewed and evaluated their existing plans after every crisis or after a fixed time. They often held table top exercises to simulate real crises and updated the plans as necessary. There were a few participants who said they would adopt parts of the best practices in their next update. Coming to the forum also raised the awareness of having a working document for some participants who admitted to not having updated their organization’s plan in a while.

Independent scientists generally lacked a formal risk communication plan, but conveyed that they did consider elements of the best practices in their approach to risk communication.

Cultural sensitivity

The changing dynamics of the U.S. population calls for messages tailored to diverse groups. Scientist addressed this by changing the complexity of the messages to suit different audiences. The mode of delivery also differed depending on the community. There was the example of using radio to reach Hispanic communities instead of newspapers. The trade representatives felt cultural sensitivity was better addressed by retailers who were in local communities rather than during the dissemination of general information by the affected company. The same approach is used by the government agencies who allow the issue of cultural sensitivity to be addressed by state and local agencies.

There is the challenge of making assumptions about specific groups that may not be accurate. For instance one may print material in Spanish for a particular community only to find out the population has shifted and is now mainly Haitian. Keeping up with changing demographics was considered a challenge.

Overall evaluation of “best practices” of risk communication

There was a sense that the 11 best practices could be condensed. When performing the ranking at the beginning of the exercise, many had trouble differentiating between best practices. For example, it was felt that if one was open and honest, they would by definition communicate uncertainty.

One academic suggested that the practice related to uncertainty should be expanded to include “complexity of the food system.” The food supply chain is complex, and it was felt that this should be considered in messaging. This is reinforced by a recent study conducted by Verrill and others (2010) examining consumer perceptions of food terrorism.

Another academic, recognizing the role of social media, asked if a best practice with respect to the use of social media, and how to use it both to get and provide information, could be developed.

Food defense compared to food safety

All groups acknowledged that the urgency of a message will increase if there is a food defense issue compared to an unintentional food safety event. The coordination of the investigation will be by the security and intelligence agencies (FBI, DHS, and so on) and the roles of “normal” players in a food safety crisis may change. The affected industry may also face less scrutiny from the public as it might be viewed as a victim of a terror attack, but this will be dependent on the preventive controls in place in the facility.

State representatives expect messages will go out more quickly with less concern about potentially damaging a brand. The capacity to receive information from security agencies will depend on the number of individuals with security clearance available. Federal agencies expect to follow up with phone calls to ensure targeted recipients receive the message. They also expect the story to have unfolded in the media before they would have an opportunity to use the media to reach their targeted audiences. They would take direction from superiors within their department about disclosing whether contamination was intentional or not. For consistent messaging, they would rely on talking points and be more cautious in the message about what product is affected.

The trade associations expected that the media attention would shift from the food system to the government—primarily DHS and FBI—not necessarily the food agencies. They acknowledged that currently there is a general lack of awareness about existing resources to use in such an event; however there is a sense that the food industry is very interconnected and that information would be rapidly shared in the event of a food defense crisis.

Scientists expected to be inundated with questions about what people may eat safely. This group felt that at the onset of a food terrorism event, there would be multiple unknowns, including the type of agent used in the attack and the foods affected. Both groups of scientists arrived at the same conclusions with respect to the types of foods they would be comfortable recommending (food grown in their own garden, or locally produced; single ingredient foods; canned or shelf stable foods from which they had already eaten). Some participants felt they would need to be actively advising their state, and would not have the time to handle the extent of media requests they envisioned. They proposed that they would provide a press release stating the information that was known, explaining why they would be unavailable, and provide information on when they would be available or would provide more information.

In comparing food safety with food defense events, a key difference expressed by scientists was their willingness to respond even as a “non-expert.” Where scientists were unwilling to comment on food safety issues for which they did not feel comfortable, there was recognition that there are so few bona fide food defense experts that scientists would embrace their responsibility to provide information, or at least assess and analyze information, to the best of their ability in an intentional contamination event.

Future areas of research

This study provides a starting point for further refining the best practices of risk communication. The discussion of communication during a food defense event raised issues that warrant further research.

Scientists were particularly concerned with “What will I tell people when they ask, ‘what’s safe to eat?’” This sentiment was also expressed by survey respondents participating in an FDA-led study examining consumer perceptions of food defense preparedness information (Verrill and others 2010). Initial thoughts were that locally grown and single ingredient foods (for example, bananas) should fall into the “safe” category of foods. Canned foods were also mentioned, but there was a question as to whether canned foods purchased recently could be assured to be safe. This led to the question of how to appropriately recommend a time-frame from which “safe” food could be assured: food that was purchased 1 wk ago, 2 wk ago, and so on? The Natl. Center for Food Protection and Defense is currently examining supply chains to provide insight into some aspects of an attack that may limit the scope of possible food types affected or agents used. Moving forward, templates could be developed, so that if an event displays certain characteristics, the appropriate communications could be delivered.

Another question that arose was “If there is an attack, where do I go to learn more?” There was a sense that a graphical illustration of the chain of command for communication and information would be extremely helpful. There was also a concern that the number of food defense experts is limited, and that in the event of an actual attack, these individuals may not be able to respond to all inquiries.

There was a desire to see the schematic of the best practices presented in an alternate form, showing which aspects are prerequisites for others. Academics in particular desired additional tools to help them utilize the best practices, and federal government representatives felt that tools related to the best practices would be useful for their counterparts at the state and local levels.

Although trade association representatives were used as a proxy for the food industry, there would be great value in asking similar questions to individual companies regarding risk communication. Additionally, tools to aid in risk communication efforts could be tailored to the sector (industry, academia, or government) and take into consideration factors that limit communication within a specific segment of practitioners.

One government official expressed the desire for research showing the impact the best practices had on consumers. For example, if a study could show that consumers were 10 times more likely to follow the advice of a communicator deemed “open and honest” against one not trusted, along with an evaluation of the characteristics associated with being open and honest, this would aid communicators. This type of research was also viewed as being able to differentiate what people want to hear compared with what they think they want to hear.

Food defense events were viewed differently from food safety events by most participants. Although the basic best practices were viewed as valid, the timing of messages, chain of command, and relative importance of some best practices were envisioned to differ. By defining the context of the event (for example, food defense and not food safety), researchers can develop additional risk communication tools for targeted groups of practitioners.

Conclusions

The current best practices of risk communication are grounded in solid social science research. However, learning how and why food system stakeholders do (or do not) adhere to them provides opportunities for further refinement. Some best practices were deemed difficult to practice on a broad scale (such as partnering with the public, and cultural sensitivity). Others (including being

open and honest) could expose a communicator to legal liability. Most participants felt that the best practices were general enough to apply to both food safety and food defense situations, but acknowledged that their own communications would likely differ, with the expectation that a food defense emergency would warrant more rapid communications. As the best practices continue to evolve, they should consider the desire to communicate more quickly, while recognizing the increased number of hurdles (or perhaps hurdles that are different than those encountered during communication of food safety issues).

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Appendix

Appendix A. Hypothetical food defense scenario:

Phase 1

Within the past 3 d over 450 people in 38 states have reportedly fallen victim to an unknown poison. So far, 72 of these people have died, with another 212 hospitalized. Family and friends report that those affected consumed “microwave meals” within a day of falling victim. Those inside the food industry fear the worst—a deliberate attack on the U.S. food supply. Japan has stopped the import of any food from the United States, and Europe is expected to follow suit quickly. Meanwhile, doctors are trying to identify what could be causing this.

Phase 2

Total of 2 wk ago, Phyllis Baker popped a frozen dinner in the microwave, hoping to grab a quick dinner before taking her son to soccer practice. On her drive home, Phyllis began to feel intense cramping. Within a day or two, she felt better, but her husband, finding her in agony later that week, rushed her to the emergency room. Total of 48 h later, she died from liver and kidney failure related to what authorities now believe to be alpha amanitin poisoning. In all, there have been 364 reported deaths attributed to the poison, with over a thousand more still hospitalized, many of them experiencing liver or kidney failure. It appears that frozen dinners—microwave meals—are to blame, although the exact brands are still being determined. Since laboratory testing for alpha amanitin is difficult, food companies have ceased the production of a variety of foods, and the freezer cases at most grocery stores have been cleared. Several senators have called for increased inspection of the U.S. food supply, expressing outrage that nearly a decade after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the food industry has allowed terrorists to poison U.S. citizens through food.

Appendix B. Focus Group Working Document

Questions on 11 best practices

1. Prompt response
 - a. Do you seek out the media, or wait until they come to you?

- b. Are there other communication outlets you use (blogs, and so on)?
- c. What are some reasons why you might not want to have a prompt response?
2. Crisis Communication Network
- a. Are there certain reporters that seem to call on you?
- b. Do you belong or are a part of a crisis communication network? If so, how what is your role?
3. Uncertainty
- a. How do you decide how much to share (either directly, through blog, letter to editor, and so on, or indirectly through media)
- b. What do you recommend to organizations in times of uncertainty?
4. Partner with the public
- a. Do you seek to engage the public (for example, read consumer opinion polls, talk to your neighbors) and does that info play into your communication?
- b. What are some examples in ways that you've partnered with the public in past situations?
5. Public concern
- a. How do you address public concern when outrage is high but the hazard is low (for example, irradiation)?
- b. Whom does this communication usually come from in the organization? A Safety Specialist? The CEO?
6. Open and honest
- a. How do you include information that is accurate but not alarming?
- b. Have you seen the policy of being open and honest backfire? If so, please provide an example.
7. Accessible to the media
- a. Are there any subjects you would not want to address?
- b. Do you invite reporters to call you back for an update?
- c. If you learn new info, do you share it proactively?
8. Compassion
- a. If you're an "independent" is there a role for compassion, if you didn't cause/contribute to the incident?
- b. Do you recommend organizations work with communications on developing compassionate messaging?
9. Suggestions for self protection
- a. Where would you get this information from? Would you deviate from it?
- b. At what point would an organization provide this information? Immediately at the onsite of the crisis?
10. Update plan
- a. Do you have a plan?
- b. Are there organizational hurdles that limit what you can say?
- c. Are plans shared with outside organizations like partners?
- d. What do you recommend as an acceptable time frame for updating plans?
11. Cultural differences
- a. Do you communicate to a local community, or nationwide? Do your messages differ?
- b. Are there different plans depending on the constituents?

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