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Good News and Bad News : Media Relations and Emergency Management

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MOTS-CLES

Médias et désastres
Media management

RESUME

Il faut savoir travailler avec les médias.

DEVELOPPEMENT

Médias et catastrophe

0. Présence et vitesse des médias

12 décembre 1985, Gander, Terre Neuve, 256 morts.

Although neither the airport tower operator nor anyone else was immediately sure what had happened, the media got a call within 15 minutes. And, after an incoming flight had located the crash site, a steward from that plane phoned a local radio station with that information. Firefighters and police hadn't reached the scene; but the media were informed and spreading the news. By the end of the day, about 300 media personnel were in or en route to Gander, some as far away as London. (1)

1. Les médias sont partie intégrante du système organisationnel de réponse : depuis la formation des perceptions générales avant l'événement, jusqu'à l'après crise, en passant par l'alerte et l'information durant l'accident. (1)

The media are very much a part of emergency incidents and not only at the impact or response stage. They affect the way people and organizations think about disaster. They are crucial to effective warning systems. They can help or hinder response. They are a main vehicles for post-incident public information. They influence the way outsiders will perceive and react to what has happened.

2. Les médias partagent l'information entre eux lors des crises.
sharing during disasters become a prominent norm.

L'avant désastre

3. Les médias participent à la formation de la perception générale des catastrophes par les populations. En particulier, ils renforcent la croyance dans les mythes classiques de la panique, de l'émeute, de l'abandon de poste, etc. Ces mythes entraînent parfois des carences graves, telles la non information sur une menace pour "éviter la panique".

Worried about panic, officials hold back legitimate warnings. Concerned about victim behavior, they force evacuations. Worried about looting, they invoke massive security. And it's not just police or firefighters, ambulance or hospital personnel who act this way. The media have refrained from issuing official warnings for fear of causing a panic. (4)

4. Pour changer cette tendance, il est nécessaire d'intégrer les médias dans la préparation des désastres. Ils doivent être partie intégrante de l'éducation du public, qui doit intervenir par un mix de différents canaux de communication.

One way to change the way the media perceive disaster is to involve them in the planning process and in exercises. Another is to get the media involved in public education. (4)

5. Il est aussi nécessaire de brancher les médias sur le système d'alerte. Il faut notamment déterminer quel média atteint quelle population et à quels moments.

It means understanding what media reach what audiences when.

6. Il faut aussi informer les médias sur la nature des désastres et de leur traitement. Un certain degré de chaos et de confusion est inévitable.

"It is inevitable, given a widespread disaster, there will be a certain amount of chaos and confusion. No matter how effective the disaster planning and how efficient the response there will be a time when no one will know what has happened or what is happening. The media must be made to understand this so they will not report the lack of information as if it were a function of official incompetence". (5)

Warning Period

7. Les médias sont indispensables pour donner l'alerte; pour asseoir la crédibilité des messages également, d'autant plus que les gens ont tendance à rechercher confirmation d'un premier message. L'absence du partenaire médiatique peut conduire à une défiance.

"If the media are important to pre-disaster education, they may well be crucial to effective warning systems. ... But having the media involved in a warning system is also important because persons hearing a warning from one source may check it out on another. The absence of media from a system may create disbelief about other warnings.

"It has been observed repeatedly that people seldom react with protective behavior to a single warning message. Rather, they typically seek confirmation of the warning... when people get a message that says, 'This is it', they seem to require a second message which emphasizes the point by saying, 'This is really it' " (5, citation de Beach, Horace, Management of Human Behavior in Disaster, Ottawa, National Health and Welfare, 1957, p. 57)

Malheureusement, les médias peuvent subir des problèmes : perte de courant par exemple, comme ce fut le cas à Edmonton.

An effective warning system requires the same warning message – identifying the threat, who is affected and what they should do – must come from all possible sources, including the media. If this is to work, the media must be aware of potential threats, aware how information about them will reach them, capable of putting out accurate, prompt warning messages. This will happen only if officials educate the media before warnings occur. (6)

Impact

8. Les médias ont du mal à resituer l'événement dans un contexte plus large; notamment, ils vont souvent omettre de préciser ce qui n'a pas été touché. Pour les officiels, il est toujours très difficile de gérer ce moment de l'impact, car l'information manque. Les médias peuvent toujours meubler par des détails, des anecdotes; les officiels doivent donner de l'information précise et vérifiée, tout en luttant contre les effets d'une information débridée.

Post-Impact

9. Les médias posent encore des problèmes.

– De par leur nombre

Congestion des lignes téléphoniques, irritation des victimes, etc. Cela est arrivé à Lokerbie, 21 décembre 1988. A Dryden (nord de l'Ontario après un crash d'avion), les lignes de téléphone de l'hôpital ont été congestionnées plusieurs heures, les survivants ont dû demander l'assistance de la police pour échapper aux médias. Les hélicoptères peuvent conduire à une saturation de l'espace aérien, les radio-téléphones peuvent rendre inopérants ceux des autorités.

Les médias vont aussi interroger des victimes perdues, renforçant le mythe, d'autant plus que suivront des interviews de responsables sûrs d'eux-mêmes, laissant voir que seules les institutions agissent.

– De par leur action

The media also tend to distort what happens. They focus on destruction rather than what remains. They talk to upset victims, rather than those who have coped. They take their lead from what Quarantelli calls the command post, from apparently calm, cool, controlled officials. They thus reinforce the view destruction is widespread, that victims are dazed, confused, and in shock and that emergency agencies are the only ones able to cope. (9)

A number of authors have suggested that in the wake of disaster, the media be asked to report what has not happened. They argue that by reporting the good news the media will reassure many outsiders, reducing the number of persons who will call and ask for information.

Recovery

10. The media may be essential for communication with survivors, especially if these have scattered.

11. Mais, après la phase de l'urgence immédiate, il peut y avoir d'autres difficultés pour les officiels. Par exemple, il peut être difficile et dangereux de continuer à prendre des décisions très visibles, telle l'évacuation. L'apparente inaction sera plus difficile à médiatiser.

QUE DIRE ? QUE FAIRE ?

1. First, even before information has been collected and assimilated, it is possible to inform media how emergency agencies are responding. They will have a great deal to report about the official response long before detailed information about the impact of the disaster is available.

2. At the same time, arrangements must be made to set up a media relations centre and to appoint someone to deal with the media.

3. But there is more. Efficient disaster response requires systematic collection and collation of information; so those at the EOC (Emergency Operations Centre) know what's happening and can share information about appropriate response decisions. It also needs a parallel collection system aimed at determining the things the media want to know. It's important to realize that the media, in the wake of a disaster, may be asking one set of questions – how many dead, how many injured, how much damage – while officials are asking others – has every area been searched, are all the injured to hospital, are all transportation arteries open, is perimeter control secure? (9-10)

Leçon 1 : Souligner ce qui n'est pas affecté.

Leçon 2 : Information collection is crucial.

The best way to control the media reports a disaster is for emergency agencies to become increasingly valuable as key sources, forcing the media to turn to them for up-to-date and accurate information. (11)

Leçon 3 : Des briefings sur site. Mais cela peut être difficile si le mal est très étendu, s'étend sur plusieurs juridictions, etc.

Leçon 4 : It is helpful to remind journalists that in the wake of disaster no one no matter how well prepared will know precisely what has happened. That's why initial statements have to focus on what is being done, rather than what is known.

Leçon 5 : It makes sense to provide background briefings. It is also crucial that such briefings include any relevant technical information – even if this has been previously released. It is essential these background sessions be repeated as new media arrive.

Leçon 6 : If there is any suspicion the media may be wary of official sources, it may even be wise, before an incident, to make sure the media are aware of competent scientific and technical experts, so accurate information and accurate assessments will be available. (11)

Leçon 7 : Si site contrôlable, un périmètre de sécurité où est donnée l'information. Mais à l'intérieur du périmètre, des règles strictes sont appliquées. Les médias choisissent de jouer le jeu : information

et obéissance ou pas d'informations. Si pas de site contrôlable tout se jouera sur la capacité des autorités à recueillir de la bonne information.

If the emergency agencies are efficient about gathering and sharing information, they will soon become far better informed than the media. If they make what they know available to the media through regular briefings, they will soon become the dominant source of information. Information is by far the most effective form of influence if not control. (12)

Leçon 8 : S'il y a vraiment trop de journalistes, la seule solution sera le pool, qui sera accepté puisque les médias fonctionnent sur la base d'un partage d'informations. Et pour être sûrs d'en tirer le mieux parti, ils désigneront les meilleurs d'entre eux pour ce pool.

Leçon 9 : Avoir des systèmes de communication indépendants et protégés.

Leçon 10 : Faire du monitoring constant pour détecter rapidement les erreurs, qui vont se répandre très vite, toujours en raison du partage de l'information.

Leçon 11 : De la même manière les autorités doivent être prêtes à corriger immédiatement leurs propres erreurs.

In the confusion of disaster, some mistake will occur, some official reports will be inaccurate. It is important the media (and through them the public) are assured that any such errors, once spotted, will be promptly and candidly corrected. Spokespersons must also be willing to admit ignorance, willing to say repeatedly, "at this point, I don't know but I will try to find out and I will certainly let you know when I do" (12-13)

Leçon 12 : préparer différentes info pour les différents médias. Inondations à Florence : les médias locaux pensent aux gens; les médias lointains aux musées.