Communications, Community Involvement, and Outreach

A Brief Overview
Communications, always important, may be even more so during a radiation incident:

- Risks are seen as involuntary and unfamiliar
- Invisible threat
- Greatest threat may be long-term potential to cause damage
  - Hidden threat
  - Irreversible impact
  - Unknown impact
  - Psychosocial impacts
- Frightening associations – "boogey monster" phenomenon
However, the role of OSC in communicating during a terrorist incident may be limited:

- Current situation unclear, but the Initial National Response Plan is clear on the role of the Primary Federal Official
- Common message is critically important
  - Role of OSC may be to be "seen and not heard"
  - Increased importance of the Joint Information Center in a radiation incident
Role of the Joint Information Center

- Gather incident data
- Analyze the demographic data
- Analyze public perception of the response
- Inform the public
"Perception Is Reality"

• Even more so than for chemical incidents – the psychosocial effects of a radiological terrorist incident must be dealt with
  – Research, past incidents indicate that the long-term psychological impacts of an RDD could be more widely damaging than the physical effects of low-level radiation exposures
  – Impacts could extend from common, transient stress reactions to chronic stress and cardiovascular impacts
  – Contamination-related stigma can break down social networks
Areas to Focus On:

- Avoid radiation-related jargon
- Ensure psychosocial assistance services are well-advertised and "normal"
- Work to diminish stigma of contamination
- Particular efforts should be devoted to high-risk groups such as children and mothers with young children
  - Seek local assistance
Community Involvement
Tools and Activities

• Develop a toolkit in advance, including:
  – Electronic templates and fact sheets
  – Checklist of needed activities

• Develop a communications strategy that includes:
  – An assessment of community demographics
  – Inclusion of community leaders within each demographic group
  – Trusted spokespersons
  – Easy-to-read materials for distribution
  – A role for the media, as well as an 800 telephone line
Assistance from Special Teams

- EPA's Superfund Emergency Communications and Outreach Team (ECOT)
- USCG's Public Information Assist Team (PIAT)
DOE's Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site (REAC/TS)

• Focus is on providing rapid medical attention to people involved in radiation incidents
  – On-call 24/7 to provide direct or consultative help with medical and health physics problems
  – If needed, additional REAC/TS physicians and other team members can be deployed to the accident scene
  – Located in Oak Ridge TN
  – Part of Nuclear Incident Response Team assets
Other Sources of Assistance

• EPA's Radiation Protection Division’s Center for Radiation Information
  – Assistance in developing outreach strategies, plans
  – Available through the Radiological Emergency Response Team
• CDC, State, and local health departments
• Volunteer organizations
  – Focus on partnerships with shelter and care organizations, including existing mental health organizations!
Questions?

• Ask!
• See CD-ROM for additional documents, including:
  – Chapter 9 of a proposed Technical Assistance Document
  – Draft fact sheets for reference purposes
• Check out the National Response Team's guidance on Joint Information Centers