Dilemmas in Emergency Communication Policy

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(Based on work done for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

For each of the ten dilemmas that follow, I lean toward the first of the two poles. That is, I prefer candor to secrecy, speculation to refusal to speculate, etc. But these are *dilemmas*, not questions with obvious answers. There is truth on both sides. You want to wind up somewhere in the middle. Note, however, that all the pressure and all your intuitions are going to push you toward the second pole. So aim for the other extreme (my extreme) in order to reach the middle.

1. Candor versus secrecy

2. Speculation versus refusal to speculate

3. Tentativeness versus confidence

4. Being alarming versus being reassuring

5. Being human versus being professional

6. Being apologetic versus being defensive

7. Decentralization versus centralization

8. Democracy and individual control versus expert decision-making

9. Planning for denial and misery versus planning for panic

10. Erring on the side of caution versus taking chances

For more about my take on this issue, see:
- Risk = Hazard + Outrage: A Formula for Effective Risk Communication (1991) – http://www.psandman.com/media.htm#vid1991
- "Chapter 2: Components of Outrage" in *Responding to Community Outrage: Strategies for Effective Risk Communication* (1993) – www.psandman.com/media/Responding to Community Outrage.pdf
- Anthrax, Bioterrorism, and Risk Communication: Guidelines for Action (Dec 2001) – www.psandman.com/col/part1.htm
- Planning for Bioterrorism Communication (Sep 2002) – www.health.state.mn.us/oep/docs/sandman091202.pdf
- Dilemmas in Emergency Communication Policy (Feb 2003) – www.psandman.com/articles/dilemmas.pdf
- "Fear Is Spreading Faster than SARS" -- And So It Should! (Apr 2003) – www.psandman.com/col/SARS-1.htm
- Crisis Communication: A Very Quick Introduction (April 2004) – www.psandman.com/col/crisis.htm

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