Local Government Guidelines for
Working With the Media
During an Energy Emergency

LEAP

Local Government
Energy Assurance Planning

pti **Public Technology Institute**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (OE) funded the production of this publication. The Infrastructure Security and Energy Restoration Division (ISER) of OE is the primary DOE office responsible for energy emergency planning and response. For more information, visit the OE website at: www.oe.energy.gov. This Guidance document was produced by DOE/OE/ISER under the leadership of Alice Lippert, Program Manager for DOE's State and Local Government Energy Assurance Program.

Public Technology Institute

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Local Government Energy Assurance Planning (LEAP)

To find out more about local government energy assurance efforts, we encourage readers to visit www.energyassurance.us. This site, maintained by PTI, is designed to support all local governments, large, medium and small, across the nation that want to learn more about creating energy assurance plans for their communities. Once created, these plans will help ensure that local governments can provide life-saving services during an energy emergency.

Editorial Team

Local Government Guidelines for Working with the Media during an Energy Emergency

1   Overview and Background: Media and Communication in Energy Assurance

This document addresses media relations for the three phases of emergency management: planning and preparation, response, and recovery. Local governments play an important communications role during any emergency, and energy emergencies are no exception. Communities depend on a secure, reliable energy infrastructure to meet their daily needs. Therefore, when energy delivery or availability is compromised, it is essential that the public be informed of the details and impact of the disruption. Citizens need to understand why a disruption occurred, who is responsible for restoring energy services, when these services will be restored, what steps (if any) they need to take, and where they should turn for up-to-date information.

Providing factual, up-to-date information can help local governments minimize negative impacts during an energy emergency, and also reduce the potential for public panic, which can exacerbate an energy emergency. A local government's ability to communicate with the public is often based on the traditional local media sources through which citizens receive their information. A significant percentage of local governments, for example, rely on television and radio media sources for disseminating energy emergency information. If the messages remain consistent, these standard media sources can be effectively complemented with use of social media sites on the Internet and cell phone-based communication strategies, including texting applications. For the foreseeable future, however, much of the public is likely to rely on traditional media sources for information during an energy emergency. Fostering a relationship with the media before, during, and after an energy emergency will help ensure that local governments can provide timely and accurate information about the emergency. This document provides strategies that local governments can use for communicating effectively with the media and for cultivating relationships with both the media and the public during energy-related emergencies.

The planning and protocols for an energy emergency are similar to those for the other types of emergencies that local governments prepare to address. Most large jurisdictions have a public affairs office (PAO) and an office of emergency management or preparedness (OEM). While the former manages communications with the media and the public during and after an emergency, the latter is responsible for emergency planning, response, and recovery. Emergency response usually follows consistent procedures, whether or not the emergency pertains to energy; responsible jurisdictional staff members need to be in full cooperation with the PAO and the

OEM, effectively implementing relevant processes and protocols. Because first response teams are existing resources, and are already trained to address emergency events, energy assurance staff members are encouraged to leverage that expertise and work under the auspices of these personnel. Both the PAO and the OEM offices have leads (the public information officer for the PAO and the incident commander for the OEM) who serve as responsible parties for the jurisdiction. They manage relationships with the media and handle planning, response, and recovery, unless these functions are delegated to energy assurance or other staff.

For most local governments, the PAO will be responsible for communicating with the public and the media. Energy assurance staff or planners may help PAOs articulate energy emergency-specific concerns. This document serves as a primer for PAOs responding to energy emergencies.

Not all of the steps outlined in this document are applicable to every local government and situation. Local governments should tailor communication strategies to their individual needs, based on the size of the city, the size of the media market, the severity of the energy emergency, and their emergency response capabilities. The PAO, OEM, and energy assurance planners will need to define their roles and responsibilities during an energy emergency. When developing or updating an energy emergency public communications protocol, important questions to consider include:

- What unique roles and responsibilities do energy assurance staff members have during an emergency?

- What shared roles and responsibilities exist between energy assurance staff and the PAO/OEM, how are they shared, and when (e.g., case-by-case)?

- For which issues do the PAO and OEM retain sole responsibility during an energy emergency?

2 Media Relations

2.1 Why Working with the Media During an Energy Emergency Is Important

Working with the media effectively allows local governments to help the public understand the nature of the energy emergency, prevent panic, disseminate accurate information, and utilize existing public information and crisis communications protocols.

> **Key Definitions**
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> **Critical infrastructure** includes systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital that the incapacitation or destruction of such may have a debilitating impact on security, the economy, public health or safety, the environment, or any combination of these matters.
>
> **Essential services** include services a local government must provide and functions performed in order to assure safety, wellbeing, and security for its inhabitants. Most often these services are mandated in a jurisdiction's charter or enabling legislation and paid for by property and/or sales taxes, fees, and the like.

2.2 Help the Public Understand the Nature of the Problem and Prevent Panic

A government's first priority during an energy emergency is to protect the health and safety of its citizens. Most governments are also concerned about continuing commerce and minimizing the economic disruption associated with an energy emergency. An energy emergency may prevent access to critical infrastructure and essential services such as banking, telecommunications, and water supply systems. In addition, it may cause a loss of services that are sometimes essential to health and welfare, such as air conditioning or heating systems. The failure to provide for basic public health and safety or to humanely address the public's needs during an emergency could cause a backlash or a negative response to a local government's messages.

2.3 Disseminate Accurate Information

Local governments can help minimize the negative impacts of an energy emergency by quickly establishing a mechanism for consistent outreach. A government's first communication with the media and the public should include enough information to ensure that citizens are able to protect themselves if necessary. For example, Entergy Corporation's Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant was shut down in November 2010 after a radioactive water leak was found during routine surveillance. Vermont Yankee immediately released a statement noting that

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Information to Disseminate Quickly and Accurately

- Explain **what** happened and the nature of the energy emergency.

- Explain **who** is involved in responding to the energy emergency and the roles of the responders, to the best of the government's knowledge.

- Explain **when** and **where** the energy emergency took place.

- Explain **what** immediate actions are being taken to mitigate or respond to the energy emergency.

- Avoid explaining **why** the energy emergency occurred unless complete information is available.

- Provide the public with **instructional information** on how to keep safe and avoid bodily injury.

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the leak posed no danger to the public.[1] If the leak did pose a danger to the public, Vermont Yankee or the local government could have detailed the impacted areas and cautionary steps the public could take to ensure their safety.

During the initial outreach efforts, be sure to communicate the essential elements of the crisis situation (see Information to Disseminate Quickly and Accurately).[2] Answering these questions at the outset of an energy emergency helps both the media and public understand the nature of the emergency as quickly as possible. Providing these relevant facts will assist local governments in effectively managing the situation.

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[1] ABC News Money. *Vt. Nuclear Plant Restarting After Leak is Fixed.* November 10, 2010. http://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory?id=12102668.
[2] Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach.* 1996.

2.4 Leveraging Existing Public Information/Crisis Communications Protocols

Dissemination of accurate information is made easier when leveraging – or relying on – a local government's existing public information and crisis communications protocols. It is the responsibility of the local government (often through its PAO) to have the necessary communications protocols in place internally. These would include some or all of the following: trained media spokespersons; a list of stakeholders who need to weigh in on the information being disseminated; the chain of command for approving messages and materials prior to dissemination; protocols for coordination with regional and state-level partners; and a plan for both proactive media outreach and response to media questions.

Providing frequent, relevant updates on the emergency in a timely manner will help improve the chances of a satisfactory resolution. For example, in 1994, an earthquake struck a densely populated area of southern California containing 44,000 miles of natural gas pipeline. Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas®), the region's major natural gas provider, immediately responded to the situation. However, this energy emergency presented extra challenges. Not only did the earthquake knock out power to phones and generators (even at the Emergency Operation Centers), but the earthquake occurred during a holiday weekend. Despite these challenges, a post-event evaluation showed that SoCalGas' downtown headquarters and regions communicated effectively with each other, allowing for consistent communication to the public. Efforts included radio, print media, bill inserts, and direct mail to the public to deliver safety and appreciation messages. A staff employee recalls that during the first three days, news announcements were by far the most effective method of communication, as they provided timely information to customers and key stakeholders about the severity of the situation.[3] After the immediate threat from this particular energy emergency had passed, SoCalGas received accolades from both the public and the media—despite its inability to restore gas service to thousands of consumers as quickly as promised.

3 Phase I: Communications Planning and Preparation

Due to the high level of responsibility that local governments face during an energy emergency, established protocols for disseminating public information already exist in most cases. However, to be well prepared for an energy emergency, the public information or crisis communications protocol should be reassessed frequently. Experts in crisis management[4,5] point out that organizations are best able to handle crises when they have:

- An existing protocol (or crisis management plan) that is updated at least annually

- A designated crisis communications/management team (CMT)

- Exercises or mock drills conducted to test current protocols.

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[3] Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach (2nd ed.).* 2002.
[4] Barton, L. *Crisis in Organizations II.* 2001.
[5] Coombs, W.T. *Code Red in the Boardroom: Crisis Management as Organizational DNA.* 2006.

Additional information on crisis communications planning can be found in Public Technology Institute's 2011 *Local Government Energy Assurance Guidelines, Version 2.0*,[6] and the National Association of Energy Officials' 2009 *State Energy Assurance Guidelines, Version 3.1*.[7]

Another key element to any good crisis communications protocol is the designation of a spokesperson or persons. Because the spokesperson will be working closely with and responding to the media, it is important that this individual be able to represent the local government effectively and have the authority to make official statements. Naming alternate spokespersons, as well as other individuals who can assist in very specific, technical roles (financial experts, energy infrastructure experts, engineers, scientists, physicians, etc.),[8] ensures that there is some redundancy and flexibility in the communications protocol and that the plan is able to withstand unforeseen circumstances.

Relevant spokespersons and personnel should undergo media training for dealing with crisis situations before a crisis ever occurs. The goal of media training is to strengthen staff effectiveness in maintaining the local government's reputation and disseminating its key messages. To reach that goal, objectives for media training include: 1) acquiring techniques for controlling an interview through messaging and response; 2) practicing vocal and physical skills to bolster spokesperson credibility; and 3) obtaining feedback from a media expert. When an actual emergency occurs, spokespersons should practice conveying the approved emergency messages with a media expert before talking with news reporters. Tough questions will be asked by reporters, and spokespersons must be prepared to answer basic information questions as well as leading, probing, and situational questions. More details on the types of questions that might be asked are included in section 4.6 of this document.

The following table presents quick tips for answering media representatives' tough questions.[9]

Quick Tips for Answering Tough Questions	
DO	**DON'T**
• Maintain a positive attitude.	• Guess or speculate on the past or present.
• Be calm, courteous, responsive, and direct.	• Use the phrase "no comment." This appears to the public as admission of guilt.
• Be accessible and pleasant.	• Play favorites with particular media.
• Use everyday language for a lay audience and avoid technical jargon.	• Treat reporters as if they are working against the government.
• Tell the truth.	• Try to hide new or updated information.
• Be consistent in all messaging.	• Talk off the record. Nothing is off the record.

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[6] Public Technology Institute (PTI). *Local Government Energy Assurance Guidelines, Version 2.0*, pp. 63-66. 2011.
[7] National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO). *State Energy Assurance Guidelines, Version 3.1.* 2009.
[8] Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach.* 1996.
[9] Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach.* 1996.

The PAO may want to prepare some standard language to include in media advisory and press kits before an energy emergency. Having a template prepared ahead of time will allow the PAO or the communications team to provide information to the public quickly.

4   Phase II: Communications During a Disruption or Energy Emergency

Despite best practices, energy emergencies are still likely. Once protocols and communications plans are in place, a local government team will be better prepared to handle an energy emergency when it does occur. Communications protocols may take the form of the following steps.

4.1   Activate the Communications Response Team

As mentioned above, having a designated crisis communications/management team (CMT) is important in the face of an energy emergency. With proper training, the team will be prepared in advance to activate energy emergency protocols and to communicate with the media and public quickly and effectively. A well-rounded, trained team that includes the energy assurance coordinator will be prepared for different energy emergency scenarios.

4.2   Assess the Severity of the Event and Its Potential Impact to the Community

One of the first steps in implementing a communications plan is to assess the severity of the energy emergency and its potential impact to the community. Ideally, an energy assurance coordinator will be involved in this assessment, and will provide unique expertise and added value. This assessment will allow a local government to identify appropriate messages to relay, to leverage relevant stakeholders and partnerships, and to help manage the situation. Provided below are four assessment categories with associated questions that should be addressed during any emergency. It is worth noting that not all four categories of questions will apply to every energy emergency or to every local government. The importance of each question depends on the type of emergency that has occurred. For instance, in a situation where severe flooding damages a key energy asset, such as a power plant, the most important information to provide to the media and public may be the location of an emergency shelter or an evacuation route. Being prepared to answer key questions will help the CMT and PAO identify what relevant information needs to be communicated. The four assessment categories and associated key questions for the CMT to ask are:[10]

1. **Ground survey information:** This assessment provides information on direct damage to energy production, transportation, storage, and related facilities (i.e., assessments of levels of energy usage within the damaged area). Ground surveys should also assess any direct impacts to the general public and day-to-day living. Aerial reconnaissance during this assessment, if possible, may be beneficial to determine the extent of damage. Key questions include:

   - What is the immediate damage related to the energy emergency, and what city infrastructure does it impact?

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[10] California Energy Commission. *Local Government Planning Handbook.* Publication #600-04-003. April 2004.

- Who in the community is currently impacted by the energy emergency? Who may be impacted in the future?

- What is the extent of the damage? Is there a risk that the energy emergency may spread if not managed properly? If so, how can this risk be addressed?

- Are there any injuries or deaths? Do community members need access to counseling to relieve stress and worry?

- Do community members need access to a safe place unaffected by the energy emergency?

- Are there any immediate steps a local government can take to mitigate the problem?

2. **Operational information:** This assessment determines the nature of operational problems and the immediate fuel and energy needs of emergency service providers.

   - How long will it take to restore the community to pre-emergency conditions?

   - What are the expected fuel needs of emergency service providers?

   - Are there back-up resources for the community to use?

   - Can neighboring counties or governments help mitigate any localized impact?

3. **Economic impact information:** This information assesses the economic impacts from the energy disruption.

   - How much money will this cost the community?

   - Will community members see a spike in energy costs?

   - What demand-reduction strategies are most effective and appropriate?

4. **Recovery planning information:** This assessment determines short- and long-range recovery efforts.

   - Are there energy systems (electricity, nuclear, natural gas infrastructure, etc.) that are shut down or delayed due to the energy emergency? How will this impact community productivity?

   - What services need to be restored first?

   - Does the energy emergency leave a lasting hazard in the community (chemical leaks, water resource disruption, etc.)?

4.3   Coordinate Public and Private Sector Stakeholders for Information Sharing

Local governments will likely need to coordinate with their public and private-sector partners (e.g., energy service providers, transporters, large-scale consumers, utility companies) and

vendors that have a stake in the emergency. The purpose of this coordination is to share information and agree on appropriate public messages in order to create a consistent approach to informing and stabilizing the community. It is likely that local governments have established public and private sector contacts from a variety of sources, such as the development of the energy assurance plan or other emergency response plans; a continuity of operations plan; or a risk communications plan that includes a list of stakeholders and their contact information. At the onset of an emergency, these partners should be contacted immediately to assess the nature of the emergency, help develop united, cohesive, and consistent media and public messages, and to help manage the situation. For example, during the 2004 hurricane season when four major hurricanes hit the State of Florida, local utility companies sent representatives to State and local government Emergency Operation Centers to help solve emerging problems.[11] This centralized response allowed for effective communications with the public and empowered local officials to make critical decisions quickly.

4.4   Decide Appropriate Messaging to Meet the Emergency

After fully assessing the impact of the energy emergency and coordinating with stakeholders, the CMT should plan and prepare appropriate messaging to share with the media and the public. It is important to note that the content and length of the messaging may vary based on the audience and communications channel. For example, social media and smart phone texting applications often utilize less text than traditional press releases, necessitating more concise, focused messages from local governments. Also, for obvious reasons some information provided to the media and the public may be less technical than information communicated to local utilities.

The goals of this messaging are to: [12]

- **Provide relevant information.** Ensure that information provided to the media and public is relevant, focused, concise, and consistent.

- **Tell it quickly.** Immediately after the energy emergency occurs, ensure that media representatives/spokespersons provide information as quickly as possible. Hesitating to hold a press conference or share a news release may convince the public that the government has something to hide.

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[11] National Governors Association (NGA). *A Governor's Guide to Energy Assurance: Roles and Responsibilities for Ensuring a Robust, Secure and Reliable Energy Infrastructure*. 2006.
[12] Clawson Freeo, Sandra. *Crisis Communication Plan: A PR Blue Print.*
http://www3.niu.edu/newsplace/crisis.html.

- **Tell the truth.** Citizens' lives and livelihoods are contingent on providing all the facts, even if they may not be in a government's favor.

Subsequent messages should maintain consistency with the initial message to the public. Inconsistent messages will make the public suspect that critical information is being withheld. However, new information should be provided to the public and media as it emerges (see Phase III).

4.5   Prepare a Media Advisory and Press Kit; Schedule an Initial Press Conference

Most energy emergencies require the CMT or PAO to quickly prepare a media advisory and press kit and schedule a press conference. These communication channels allow approved messages to get out expeditiously. Some standard language for different types of energy emergencies and an emergency website template with social media feeds can be developed in advance, which will help the CMT or PAO to quickly update a template to share information with the media.

- **Media Advisory:** Issue a media advisory that explains the facts of the energy emergency. The CMT team can prepare generic templates in advance that can be quickly tailored to respond to different energy emergencies. Media advisories generally only highlight the facts and do not elaborate when details are unknown. For example, a first response may state:

  "A (nature of incident) at (location) involving (who, if necessary) occurred today at (time). We are currently analyzing the nature of this emergency and will report back with an update."

- **Press Conference:** Depending on the nature of the energy emergency, a CMT or the PAO may wish to hold a press conference once information is gathered. This press conference can provide the media an opportunity to interact with spokespersons directly. To ensure message consistency, use the messages that are prepared after discussion and approval by the entire team, as this will set the tone for the conference. If possible, it is helpful to coordinate messaging with other energy emergency response partners, utilities, first responders, and other stakeholders to continually reflect the same information. If a CMT or PAO would like the public to have continued access to that information, a video of the press conference can be uploaded to a video-sharing website such as You Tube or posted on an organizational website. It is also a good idea to inform the media and the public when and how they can expect additional updates—whether the government will issue another statement or hold another press conference, even if there is no additional news.

- **Collateral Materials:** After the initial media advisory and press conference, the CMT may want to consider creating informational materials for the media and public, to be distributed through both traditional and new media channels. These materials may range from brochures to tip cards or fact sheets that provide additional information about the energy emergency. The materials can also include steps that can be taken to help decrease the impacts of the energy emergency or steps for reducing energy usage, which may help reduce the length and/or severity of supply shortages. Some materials may explain technical information describing how or where the energy emergency occurred. The information provided on handouts or fact sheets should be clear, concise, and easily understandable.

4.6 Prepare for Anticipated Media Questions

Before holding a press conference, the CMT may want to prepare for the types of questions media representatives will ask (examples in Anticipated Media Questions). Ultimately, the likely questions depend on the nature of the energy emergency; however, there are a few key answers or responses that can be prepared in advance. The spokesperson may want to spend time rehearsing prepared statements and answering potentially tough questions before talking with the media.

When talking with media representatives, whether at a press conference or during a standard interview, the spokesperson should be prepared to respond to and anticipate some of the following types of tough questions:[13]

- **Speculative questions**: These questions typically begin with "if," and open up a wide-range of hypothetical scenarios that the CMT may not want – or be able – to address.

- **Loaded questions**: These questions seek to create an emotional response. During pre-planning, spokespersons should become comfortable learning how to rephrase a loaded question and provide a succinct answer.

- **Leading questions**: These questions imply that the media representative already has the answer.

> **Anticipated Media Questions**
>
> - What happened?
> - Were there any deaths or injuries?
> - What is the extent of the damage?
> - Is there a danger of future injuries or damage?
> - Why did it happen?
> - Who or what is responsible for the energy emergency?
> - What is being done about it?
> - When will it be over?
> - Were there any warning signs of the problem?

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[13] Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach.* 1996.

- **Accusatory questions**: These questions may try to force the spokesperson(s) to blame others.

Throughout the energy emergency, the CMT should continue to engage with the media and the public, keeping in mind some best practices, including:

- **Continue to anticipate the length of the emergency**. Will the energy emergency last just a few hours, a few days, one week, or one month? Determining the duration of an energy emergency with accuracy may be difficult, depending on the situation. As additional information becomes available, the CMT can update the media and the public on estimated timelines for restoration of energy services.

- **Be proactive in ongoing outreach to the media, and be responsive to media questions**. As mentioned above, the CMT should keep communication channels open with the media at all times. Social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, can be particularly effective channels for providing continued information to the media. In addition, the CMT can be proactive by setting days and times when media can contact the team or when the team will post an update. Consider the possibility of allowing media to call daily and ask clarifying questions.

- **Consider pointing out that the local government has been proactively involved in implementing a new Energy Assurance Plan (EAP).** Emphasize that the EAP is designed to get more accurate details to the decision makers and the general public, ultimately helping preparatory, response, and recovery efforts. The CMT can earn important goodwill through this acknowledgement by informing the public that the new EAP is also geared toward providing health and safety-related information.

5 Phase III: Communication During Recovery and Management of Ongoing Impacts

After a period of time, as the immediate dangers of the energy emergency lessen, continuous response efforts should begin to lead to a state of normalcy. At this point the crisis may no longer be the focal point of the community or of media coverage, but it still requires attention. During the recovery period, it is essential that the CMT keep both traditional and new media communication channels open. Doing so can help solidify media relationships and rebuild public trust; keep the public informed of ongoing restoration efforts; and direct the public to available resources for managing ongoing effects of the disruption.

5.1 Solidify Media Relationships and Rebuild Public Trust

After an energy emergency occurs, media representatives can be integral in helping to rebuild public trust. As mentioned earlier, maintaining open communication channels with media representatives will ultimately help local governments ease the community's fears and concerns. Outreach during this phase generally focuses on what a government is doing to ensure the energy emergency recovery process is under control. The recovery period provides governments with time to deliver on any promises made during the initial communications about the emergency. If any form of additional information or assurance was promised during the energy emergency, this information should be shared during the recovery phase to help solidify relationships.

5.2 Keep the Public Informed of Ongoing Restoration Efforts

Keep the media and the public informed of any ongoing restoration or clean-up efforts through both traditional and new media communication channels. In the initial phase of an energy emergency, the public may be more concerned about its safety and immediate needs such as food, shelter, and water. As energy services are restored over time, the public's informational needs may shift. Rather than being concerned only with restoring electricity, natural gas service, and other key services, the public may be concerned about long-term impacts on their livelihood.

A prime example of an ineffective crisis communications protocol and a failure to keep the public informed of ongoing restoration efforts can be seen from the recent BP offshore oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.[14] BP did not quickly communicate information to the public about the severity of the spill, the estimated time to find or fix the cause of the spill, the extent of ecological damage, the expected long-term economic effects on the livelihoods of the surrounding community, and the length of time needed to restore the environment and the community after the spill.[15] A survey conducted by researchers at Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness found that coastal residents had more favorable assessments and trust in their local and State officials and in the U.S. Coast Guard than they did in other Federal agencies or in BP. The study also found that slightly over half of all coastal residents felt that BP's response was poor.[16] This failure of public trust highlights the need to quickly communicate pertinent and accurate information to the public as soon as possible.

One strategy for mitigating a community's anxieties after an energy emergency is to create a timeline of expected restoration activities. For example, if an energy emergency leaves many without electricity, work with local utilities to determine when electricity will be restored. If possible, be specific about the anticipated days or times of electricity restoration in each service area so that the public can plan accordingly. Electricity restoration service notices are well suited for use of new smart phone texting applications. Such early notice of the restoration of electricity is efficient, cost-effective, and useful to the public.

5.3 Direct the Public to Available Resources for Managing Effects of the Disruption

Sometimes, depending on the nature of the energy emergency, traditional communications channels are disrupted for an extended period of time. In such cases, a local government may need to identify alternative communications channels that are available in the community during the energy emergency and in the recovery phase to help disseminate a consistent flow of information to the public. These channels might include non-profit and other community organizations, civic groups, or churches.

Utilizing alternative communications channels can be particularly important when basic societal resources have also been disrupted. For example, the community may be in need of warming

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[14] James Hoggan. *BP's Crisis Communications Strategy Is Fundamentally Flawed.* Huffington Post. June 11, 2010. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-hoggan/bps-crisis-communications_b_609826.html.

[15] James Hoggan. *BP's Crisis Communications Strategy Is Fundamentally Flawed.* Huffington Post. June 11, 2010. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-hoggan/bps-crisis-communications_b_609826.html.

[16] Science Daily. *Survey of Coastal Residents Shows Gulf Oil Spill Has Significant Impact on Families.* http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/08/100803132740.htm. August 4, 2010.

shelters, temporary housing, or safe drinking water. The public may need alternate sources of transportation during a fuel shortage, or may need to know which emergency medical facilities are functioning in case of a medical emergency. These trusted organizations already embedded in the community can help to serve as communication distribution sources. Whatever the nature of the disruption, effective communication is critical, and the information provided to the public should be clear and concise.

Although Americans generally agreed that communication to the public in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 could have been significantly improved, the disaster does illustrate the enormous benefits of communicating available resources to the public through the use of community organizations.[17] These non-profits, church groups, and other organizations succeeded in communicating with the public during the emergency because they were already involved in helping to provide the communities' basic needs of food, water, and shelter.[18]

6 Conclusion

Local governments can help manage or minimize the impact of an energy emergency by working with the media to communicate essential information to the public during all three phases of an energy emergency: planning and preparation, response, and recovery. Failure to communicate effectively and efficiently may result in public panic, adverse health effects, and a delayed return to normalcy.

During an emergency, the media becomes an important ally for disseminating information to the community as quickly as possible. As noted in PTI's 2011 *Energy Assurance Guidelines for Local Governments, Version 2.0*, communication via social media websites and new smart phone applications is increasingly important for local governments, and is likely to be used more during future energy emergencies. Local governments (often via PAOs) are expected to have the necessary communications protocols in place internally, including trained media spokespersons; a list of stakeholders; chains of command for approving messages; protocols for coordination with partners; and a plan for both proactive and reactive media responses. In addition, established working relationships with the media are critical for effective communication during emergencies. It is crucial that new energy assurance staff work closely and seamlessly with designated CMT members, local utilities, and other critical service providers. Leveraging existing public information or crisis communications protocols will improve the effectiveness of work with the media during an energy emergency or supply disruption. Maximizing the effectiveness these energy emergency-related protocols may even save human lives.

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[17] Note: learn more about leveraging private/public sector partnerships in Phase II.
[18] Putra, Fadillah. Planning Forum – Volume 13/14. *Crisis Management in Public Administration.* 2009. http://soa.utexas.edu/crp/planningforum/downloads/pf13-14_crisis_public_admin.pdf.

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