INTRODUCTION

More than 30 years ago, a seminal event in the field of crisis communications occurred at a nuclear power plant operated by Metropolitan Edison in Middletown, Pennsylvania, just outside of the state capital of Harrisburg. The plant, known as Three Mile Island (TMI), was the scene of an incident involving a stuck valve that resulted in the partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor. While TMI was not a serious accident in terms of human fatalities or injuries or release of dangerous radioactivity, it did identify serious gaps in the nuclear industry's ability to communicate during critical events and led to the establishment of the Kemeny Commission, whose tasks included writing recommendations on how nuclear utilities should improve their ability to communicate in the event of an accident.

As a young undergraduate student attending Shippensburg State College (now University), just outside of Harrisburg and Middletown, I remember the difficulties we had in understanding what was happening and how it might affect us at that time and in the future. Living in a college dormitory equipped with pay phones only in the main lobby and one television set for the entire residence of 200-plus students, the methods of communication available to let us know what was happening were extremely limited, leaving us in the dark, while National Guard troops pulled up on our campus as we prepared to take in evacuees.

Imagine how that lack of information would play out if TMI happened today. Our current culture and society relies increasingly on written and verbal messages on a near-constant basis to evaluate the world and the risks associated with living in it. These messages do more than simply provide information; they can cause large groups of people to behave in certain ways as well as change their perceptions of the world around them. As part of their functional responsibilities, safety, health, and environmental (SH&E) professionals are being called upon more frequently to develop the means and the messages to assess and communicate risks to the audiences of their organizations that include their internal workforce, the general public, vendors, suppliers, and other organizations within their field.

Risk and crisis communications is a process of communicating information by a public or private organization to an audience. The information is typically communicated following a formal or informal risk assessment process that delineates hazards that may occur to the organization and require some level of knowledge imparted to the audience on how the hazards will impact them and how they can prepare for the hazard. The process most often occurs when hazards are already occurring, are about to occur, or being planned for as part of an overall emergency response preparedness process.

In most literature, the terms "risk communications" and "crisis communications" are used to describe both the process of developing a relationship with key audiences in which information is communicated about the hazard, as well as the specific messages that are crafted and delivered by various organizational representatives. Risk communications is most often the process and the messages that occur prior to the occurrence of a hazard. Risk communications helps audiences understand their risk as well as what activities they can undertake to prepare for the hazard situation. Crisis communications is the process and messages that are delivered at times of high stress, either because the hazard is already occurring or is imminent.

This book provides readers with a fundamental understanding of the process of developing and delivering risk and crisis communications and has been written to provide a means for SH&E professionals to develop a foundational understanding of risk and crisis communications and use that information to assess the needs of their organization.

In recent years the roles of SH&E professionals have been expanding into new and different arenas. SH&E professionals need to provide value to their organizations by increasing their skill set and the roles they can play in the overall functioning of the organization. The ability to do so will provide a key to their success, both individually and to the profession as a whole. This need to become more valuable to an organization is coupled with the increasing role of media and communication methods in the provision of information to the public at large. Organizations must respond to this need for information in a way that is accurate and timely and is structured in such a way as to be successful. This book will provide the information SH&E professionals need to assure their success in this process.

While the bulk of the earliest history of the development of formal risk and crisis communications techniques centered on the environmental remediation and clean-up arena, more recent efforts have broadened into multiple arenas. The use of the tech-

niques and activities described in this book, as well as others, now commonly cover events such as natural disasters; security incidents; public health crises; and workplace catastrophes, including fatalities and major incidents. Some threads of the theoretical foundations of risk and crisis communications can even be woven into much of occupational safety and health training classes that occur in just about every workplace.

The methods used to communicate risk and crisis information also vary from oral methods such as press conferences, broadcast interviews, public meetings, and safety meetings. Written communication methods range from the traditional press release to brochures, safety posters, and newsletters. Newer methods include robocalls, podcasts, websites, blogs, and social networking sites.

This book will take the reader through the fundamentals of risk and crisis communications and begins by providing a common set of working definitions for a variety of terms used throughout the book, including "risk," "crisis," "risk communications," and "crisis communications." Later chapters review the current theoretical foundations that have been developed by such leading experts in the fields such as Vincent Covello and his colleagues at The Center for Risk Communication; Peter Sandman; and Regina Lundgren and Andrea McMakin. Some limited review of research conducted to ascertain the validity of risk and crisis messages will also be addressed.

Information will also be presented that will guide readers through the steps of developing risk and crisis messages, including understanding the constraints of the organization; the audience and communication topic; the goals and objectives of the messages; how to profile the intended audience; and how to successfully deal with strong audience emotions such as anger, mistrust, fear, and apathy. Additional information on avoiding common mistakes made during risk and crisis communication situations will be identified.

Several chapters will address the crafting of the actual messages that are delivered and will include two current techniques for message crafting: influence diagrams, developed by M. Granger Morgan at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and message maps, developed by Vincent Covello at The Center for Risk Communication. Vital for the successful delivery of messages is the ability to demonstrate empathy to the audience. This will be discussed as will the method for choosing an effective organizational spokesperson.

Other chapters will look at several models for crisis communications plans that can be used as templates for an organization, which will allow it to be prepared to respond quickly to crisis situations. Working with the media, including successful press conferences and media interviews, will be covered as well. Finally, the use of crisis communications when an organization encounters a fatality or a rumor will be examined in greater detail.

The text will close with case studies of two recent public events that provide a wealth of information to study the actual process: the worldwide H1N1 pandemic of 2009–2010 and the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill of 2010, which killed 11 oil rig workers and caused unprecedented environmental damage throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The case studies will analyze comments made by various organizational representatives, politicians, and governmental authorities with regard to some of the theoretical foundations and message-crafting concepts discussed in the earlier

portions of the text. Comments will be given related to the relative success or failure of the messages delivered. A final chapter will summarize the entire text and offer closing comments.

It is hoped that this text will provide readers with a solid foundation and increase their skill set for immediate use within their organizations. It will also provide additional questions that may lead to a more in-depth study of the topic by reading some of the reference material used.