USACE Dam Safety Program:
Dam Risk Communication and Training
OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Explain Corps Workshops
- Provide Overview of Workshop Content
- Share Communications Pointers from the Workshops
WHY ENHANCE RISK COMMUNICATION?

- Lessons Learned from Katrina
- Good Data to Share
  - From risk assessments
- Timely
  - Dams continue to be in the news
- Building on Momentum
  - Skill building/Culture change
USACE DAM SAFETY PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

1. Public safety is the primary focus.
2. Dam safety is a component of a broader flood risk management approach.
3. An effective safety program requires continuous and periodic project inspections and assessments.
4. The sustainable, systems and collaborative approach is the most effective way to manage and assess dams.
5. Dam safety information and risk communication must be **accurate, timely and clear** so individuals can understand risks to make informed decisions about their safety.
1. Provide local emergency managers with dam risk information and mapping tools to enhance emergency response & evacuation

2. Provide information and tools to community leaders/risk managers so they can:
   - Communicate flood risk to individuals
   - Increase flood risk management

3. Grow public awareness and understanding of dam flood risk so that individuals can:
   - Effectively prepare
   - Appropriately respond to emergency management officials
THE NEW USACE COMMUNICATION PLAN

USACE Communication Planning
Instructions and Template
Annotated for Dam Risk
Communication Planning
TRAINING AGENDA

Session 1: Overview
Session 2: Analyze the Current Dam Communication Effort (SWOT)
Session 3: ID the Communication Team
Session 4: ID and Understand Stakeholders
Session 5: Goals and Objectives for the Dam Risk Communication
Session 6: Key Messages
   This includes developing a draft: Risk Characterization and Summary List of Risk Management Measures
Session 7: Determine Strategies & Tactics
Session 8: In-Person Communication Skills
Session 9: Action Matrix over a 2-year Timeframe
Session 10: Measuring Success.
Session 11: Recap
REAL TIME PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT . . .
. . . AND SKILL BUILDING
### Risk Characteristics

- **Dam Safety Action Classification (DSAC) Priority**: 4
- **DSAC Assigned Date**: 3/30/2010
- **Downstream Hazard Potential Classification**: Low
- **Population at Risk**: 123,456

### Interim Risk Reduction Measures (IRRM)

- **IRRM Plan Required**: No
- **IRRM Plan Prepared**: No
- **IRRM Plan Prepared Date**: No Data Entered
- **IRRM Plan Approved**: No
- **IRRM Plan Approved Date**: No Data Entered
- **IRRM Plan Implemented**: No

**MAP SHOWING:**
- Inundation Grids
- Dam Centerline
- Include Pool Elevations
- "Default EAP Layer"

**Legend**

+ Checkbox in "Legend" widget to toggle layer visibility
ANTICIPATING THE ISSUES THAT NEED MESSAGING

THE **THREE KEY QUESTIONS** WE WILL ALWAYS ASK TO IDENTIFY KEY MESSAGES:

What do we want the stakeholders to know?
The risks of the project – *Risk Characterization*

What do they want to know?
What a dam is and how it works – *Project Description*

What are they likely to be confused by?
What is being done about the risk – *Risk Management Measures*
INCLUDE THE RIGHT INFORMATION

- Provide BLUF
- Keep it Simple
  - Focus on essential facts and details
- Connect the dots
- Limit acronyms and jargon
- Define or substitute technical terms with layperson language

“In response to your request for better communications, I’m going to increase my lengthy explanations by 50%.”
DO explain that risk assessments inherently include uncertainty

DON’T be afraid to talk about what you don’t know

DO explain why the uncertainty is important (e.g., don’t know how a spillway will perform since it has never had water on it)

DON’T get caught up in technical weeds and the urge to be 100.0000% accurate

DO talk in ranges or use scenarios (stories)

DO explain uncertainty confidently
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER HOW WE PRESENT THE MESSAGE?

"Here's what we know so far..."
Brains under acute emotional stress:

- Process fewer messages
- Need less complex information
- Tend to retain “most recent” information provided
CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE’S PERSPECTIVE

Variables that Influence Audience Perspective:

• Perception of risk
• Core values
• Contextual circumstances

(And how that perspective might be different than the perspectives of technical experts.)
RISK PERCEPTION:

WHICH RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY DO PEOPLE GENERALLY FEAR MORE/FEEL IS “RISKIER”?

Actual probability of sudden death (per participant per event):

- Bungee Jumping: 2 in 1 million
- Running a Marathon: 8 in 1 million
VALUES = an enduring belief system that a particular state of existence and/or certain modes of conduct are preferable to another.

What values underly these interests?

“Audience values are important to think about because they give us insight into what drives the audience and what the audience’s interests will be.”
Adopt a mindset of inquiry

Remind yourself of the stakeholders’ perspective
- Risk perception, values, interests, context, and outrage

PREPARE!
- Key Messages/Talking Points
- Practice the conversation
- Note any questions you have
Acknowledge difficult topics immediately

Provide the Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

Admit what you do not know
  • Explain uncertainty
  • Follow-up when possible
Empathize (not Sympathize)
- Attitude, tone, listening
- Genuine understanding of another’s perspective

Engage in active listening
- Acknowledgment empowers
- Avoid agreeing/disagreeing

Of course I’m listening to your concerns. Don’t you see me making eye contact, striking an open posture, leaning toward you and nodding empathetically?
DID YOU?

- Focus on Essential Details
- Minimize TLAs, Jargon & Numbers
- Reword/Define Technical Terms
- Signal Uncertainty
- Engage the Right Tone for the Audience
- Connect the Dots/Tell a Story