

WELCOME

Since technological development exposes us to a great many risk factors, risk communication plays an essential role in helping all those involved to understand what risk is and learn how to manage it. With this course we seek to construct an interactive information-sharing process which will lead to the creation of local proposals for risk management.

We welcome you warmly to this course. Here you will find orientation on the theory and methodology of risk communication. The elements of risk communication are described, as well as strategies and effective procedures for intervention in this area. Our aim is to develop your skills so that you will be able to draw up communication plans with the target population and obtain an operational and sustainable vision of risk communication. In this course we attempt to do the following:

- Describe the risk communication process as part of risk management methodology.
- Trace the evolution of risk communication and discuss related myths.
- Discuss the components of risk communication; its forms and stages.
- Recognize the importance of risk perception and factors influencing it.
- Define who should be the actors in risk communication, and what their roles should be.
- Define the most effective ways of coping with uncertainty.
- Design a method to evaluate the different stages of the process.
- Define the needs of the risk communication plan according to the community and the problem at hand.
- Identify the professionals and other persons who should take part in the risk communication plan.
- Propose alternative projects for community participation based on networks and social actors.
- Describe methods that will facilitate the sustainability of proposals for intervention, with emphasis on risk communication.
- Determine ways to involve the media as a legitimate partner.
- Explore the most effective ways of managing disputes and emergency situations.
- Describe the importance of body language as an essential factor in communication.
- Conduct practical exercises and case studies relating to the factors of risk communication.
- Facilitate access to different sources of information on the topic (electronic and in print).

What are the objectives of this course?

Main goal of the course

To create and strengthen skills for the communication of health risks associated with the environment, using methodologies with theoretical and practical approaches applicable in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Specific objectives

1. To learn the background, myths, components, and processes of risk communication.
2. To recognize the importance of risk perception and the factors that influence it, besides the key actors and their roles.
3. To prepare, conduct, and evaluate a risk communication plan, in response to the needs of the different communities and their specific problems, including crisis situations and emergencies.
4. To promote processes of sustainable community participation that will ensure the continuity of the activities resulting from the risk communication plan.

Who made this course possible?

This course was developed in the framework of the CDC/PAHO Project (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States, and the Pan American Health Organization). It is being promoted by the Pan American Health Organization through its Area of Sustainable Development and Environmental Health (SDE); the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences CEPIS/PAHO headquartered in Lima, Peru; and the PAHO Representative Office in Brazil.

The technical contents were developed and tried out in training workshops by:

- Ana Rosa Moreno, MSc, former official of WHO/PAHO and present Coordinator of the Environmental Health Program of the Mexico-United States Foundation for Science, Mexico, D.F.
- Dr. Óscar Tarragó, Coordinator for Training in Risk Communication of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, of the Centers for the Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

Subsequently the material was enriched and transformed into a self-taught course. During this process, a meeting was called and held in Lima, Peru, in September 2003, where the teaching materials were discussed. The following professionals also took part in this meeting:

- Dr. Diego González Machín, Regional Advisor on Toxicology, PAHO/Brazil.
- Dr. Marcelo Korc, Regional Advisor on Air Quality, CEPIS/PAHO.

- Lourdes Mindreau, Biologist, Regional Advisor on Primary Environmental Care, CEPIS/PAHO.
- Marco A. Ramírez Chávez, Environmental Engineer, CEPIS/PAHO.
- Dr. Irasema Araceli Guerrero Lagunes, Head of Health Promotion of the Health Services of the State of Veracruz, Mexico.
- Mitz Ferreira, Educator and Technical Consultant, National Agency of Sanitary Surveillance, ANVISA/Brazil.
- Dr. Hugo Marcelo Aguilar Velasco, Research Coordinator, National Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine “Leopoldo Izquieta Pérez”, Quito, Ecuador.
- Lic. Beatriz Schippner, Communications Official, Water and Sanitation Program, World Bank, Lima, Peru.

Contributions were also received from:

- Dr. Jesús Barragán Flores, Coordinator of the Family and Community Health Program of the Health Services of Veracruz, Mexico
- Carlos Wilson de Andrade Filho. Communications Official of the PAHO/OMS Representative Office in Brazil.

The translation into Portuguese was reviewed by:

- Liduina Gisele Timbó Aragão, Technical Consultant on Methodology for General Coordination of Environmental Surveillance in Health, Secretariat for Health Surveillance of the Ministry of Health of Brazil.
- Jacira Cancio, Adviser of the Technical Unit of Health and Environment, PAHO/WHO Representative Office, Brazil.
- Mara Lúcia Oliveira, Adviser of the Technical Unit of Health and Environment, PAHO/WHO Representative Office, Brazil.

Who is this course for?

The course has been designed for decision-makers, professionals, technical and operations personnel of public institutions, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, students, and all persons interested in risk communication.

What do we expect of you?

It is our hope that the course material will help you to improve your performance in the communication of health risks to different audiences, and to recognize the importance of community participation in the solution of problems relating to health risks.

What methods does the course use?

The course is interactive and self-taught. You follow it at your own pace in the time you have available. You will not have the support of tutors. Once you finish all the

modules, you may take the examination that appears on the main screen (entitled EXAMINATION). If you pass, you will be given a certificate stating that you have completed the course.

A second method can be accreditation of the course at universities, where there are national tutors to guide you as you study the modules. Once the modules have been successfully completed, a certificate is awarded with the corresponding academic credits.

Suggestion

Since risk communication is a process made up of different components and stages, we suggest that you study the materials in their order of presentation. This will optimize your learning process.

Final note

In each chapter of the course you will find icons that indicate whether the material is a Power Point Presentation or a PDF file. Depending on the features of your computer (memory, microprocessor, hard disk capacity, operative system and software installed) these files may take some time to open. We therefore recommend that you first save the files in your hard disk and then open each one as you come to study it.