Continued Contact During the Assessment Period

Maintaining the public's trust and support during the public health assessment process relies heavily on keeping community members apprised of what is taking place in their community, why it is taking place, and next steps. There may be a number of months between Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) initial contact with the community and when you return to deliver your report. In the meantime, community members will be wondering what is going on and what to expect, so it is important to stay in touch with the community periodically—even if you only have brief updates.

A combination of traditional and nontraditional communication channels offers multiple options for providing updates and information during the assessment period. The following are some tips on ways to provide updates. It is recommended that you plan for continued contact during the assessment period while you are planning for your initial contact with the community. You will need the assistance of partners to update the community during that time and also need to ensure that you have mechanisms set up before you leave the community.

You may also want to consider conducting a community survey before reentering the community to get a sense of whether the community's perceptions and attitudes have changed as a result of ATSDR's site team interactions and to gauge the current level of concern the community has about the situation.

Newsletters

A newsletter is a good resource for a brief overview or update on a variety of related topics. Developing content for partners to use in their established newsletters will help get your message in the hands of their readers, your target audience. Short, pithy summary pieces give readers a digestible overview of what has occurred in recent days/weeks/months and also provides an opportunity for readers to get more information on topics of interest through resource lists and Web site URLs.

- Determine partners' newsletter **distribution timeline** (biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly); this will determine the **content coverage** period as well as content submission deadlines.

- **Decide if content will be a recap of what has already occurred, a forecast of what's to come, or a combination of both.**

- **Develop content that is easy to read and understand**. Avoid jargon, develop short sentences and paragraphs (4-6 sentences), and use bullets to break up content.

- Create an **eye-catching story title and include images,** where needed, to gain the reader's attention.

- Key points in each story should address most, if not all, of the following:

  - **Who?** Examples:

    - Who will be entering or was in the community (specific names not necessary)?

    - Who should community members contact should there be an urgent matter?

  - **What?** Examples:

    - What will the community assessment involve?

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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- ▸ What is the health assessor trying to determine or find?

- ▸ What are next steps?

- **When?** Examples:

  - ▸ When will the assessment take place (days, weeks, months)?

  - ▸ When will the assessment be completed?

- **Where?** Example:

  - ▸ Where will the assessment take place (specific site or general location)?

- **Why?** Example:

  - ▸ Why is the assessment happening?

- **How?** Examples:

  - ▸ How will the assessment be conducted?

  - ▸ How will the health assessor's presence impact the community (e.g., will there be road or building closures)?

  - ▸ How will the findings of the assessment be provided to the community?

Social Media

Social media has become a common and widely used communication outlet to create, exchange, and gather information. It offers a real-time exchange of information that allows users to keep in contact with family, friends, colleagues, and community members. It also allows individuals to stay abreast of local, State, national, and international news and headlines.

Social media users are looking for quick and interesting information. It is important that content is informative, brief, and frequent.

The use of social media for assessment sites was evolving at the time this toolkit was being developed. Health assessors should work closely with ATSDR's Program Evaluation Team to determine how to best use social media for a given site. ATSDR may handle the social media directly or health assessors may work through the social media channels of partners.

- ▪ **Facebook** posts do not have a character limit, which allows for more text to be included in a post.

  - Posts can be one to a few sentences in length and, when possible, should include a link to additional information.

  - Including an image in your post is a great way to grab the audience's attention and should be included, when appropriate.

  - Engage followers by posting questions that require follower feedback.

  - Include posts for events, such as town hall or community meetings.

- ▪ Unlike Facebook, **Twitter** has a character limit (140 characters), which includes URLs.

  - Twitter posts often include hashtags (#), which represent keywords or topics in a tweet. Hashtags also allow users to search for other tweets that include a specific hashtag (#ATSDR).

  - Reduce the number of characters in a tweet by using symbols (&, @), shortened dates (Dec. 2014), and words (info.).

  - Bitly (https://bitly.com) offers a free service that allows you to shorten URLs, and hence, reduce the number of characters in your tweet.

  - Twitter allows followers to retweet messages that they've received, which offers further dissemination of your message/tweet among Twitter followers.

Social media posts can result in questions or requests for more information from followers. To reduce a lag in response time, create a **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** document that ATSDR staff and partners can use as a guide to responding to posts and private messages. Update the FAQ as needed based on common follower feedback/questions.

- **A bank of posts can be developed** with ATSDR's Division of Community Health Investigations to save time and offer partners and internal staff a quick resource to pull content to post to their social media pages.

  - Posts should be generic so that they can be pre-cleared and used by multiple partner organizations.

  - Include suggested channels for each post (Facebook vs. Twitter).

Web and Email Listservs

In addition to newsletters and social media, individuals read an abundant amount of information via email and while browsing the Internet. Readers often skim content for important points that are relevant to them.

You only have a short window to grab the reader's attention so when developing content for partner **Web postings and listservs**, keep it brief yet informative.

- Develop blurbs or bulleted content that highlight major activities.

- Provide links to other Web sites where readers can get more resources and information.

Resources

Social Media

- CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media

  - HTML version
    http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/guideforwriting.html

  - PDF version
    http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/GuidetoWritingforSocialMedia.pdf

- The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit

  - HTML version
    http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/socialmediatoolkit.html

  - PDF version
    http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf