

## Checklist for Step 4: Identify the questions stakeholders are most likely to ask

The 95 Percent Rule, as coined by risk communications scholar Vincent T. Covello, says that an organization can anticipate at least 95 percent of all questions that stakeholders or journalists are likely to ask during a risk controversy. These questions fall into three categories. Use this worksheet to help your spokespersons to devise answers to these frequent questions. This checklist draws significantly from the work of Covello, whose web site is CenterForRiskCommunication.org.

Overarching questions	Informational questions	Challenging questions
<p>These focus on what stakeholders need to know, particularly to cope with a hazard that experts identify as high.</p> <p>About the situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell us what happened?</li> <li>• When did it happen?</li> <li>• Where did it happen?</li> <li>• Who was harmed?</li> <li>• How many people were harmed, injured, or killed?</li> <li>• Are those that were harmed getting help?</li> <li>• How are those who were harmed getting help?</li> <li>• What can others do to help?</li> </ul> <p>About emergency response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the situation under control?</li> <li>• Is there anything good that you can tell us?</li> <li>• Is there any immediate danger?</li> <li>• What is being done in response to what happened?</li> <li>• Who is in charge?</li> <li>• What can we expect next?</li> <li>• What are you advising people to do?</li> <li>• How long will it be before the situation returns to normal?</li> <li>• What help has been requested or offered from others?</li> <li>• What responses have you received?</li> <li>• What are you doing now?</li> <li>• Who else is involved in the response?</li> </ul> <p>About harm or damage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you be specific about the types of harm that occurred?</li> <li>• What are the names of those that were harmed?</li> <li>• Can we talk to them?</li> <li>• How much damage occurred?</li> <li>• What other damage may have occurred?</li> <li>• How certain are you about damage?</li> <li>• How much damage do you expect?</li> <li>• Is there anything continuing the danger?</li> <li>• Are people out of danger? Are people safe?</li> </ul>	<p>These seek relevant information that may not necessarily be essential to preparing stakeholders to cope with the hazard.</p> <p>About the spokesperson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your name and title?</li> <li>• What are your job responsibilities?</li> <li>• What are your qualifications?</li> <li>• When will we find out more?</li> </ul> <p>About cause and timing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did this happen?</li> <li>• What was the cause?</li> <li>• Did you have any forewarning that this might happen?</li> <li>• When did your response to this begin?</li> <li>• When were you notified that something had happened?</li> </ul> <p>About the investigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is conducting the investigation?</li> <li>• What are you going to do after the investigation?</li> <li>• What have you found out so far?</li> <li>• What steps need to be taken to avoid a similar event?</li> <li>• Have these steps already been taken? If not, why not?</li> <li>• What does this all mean?</li> <li>• Is there anything else you want to tell us?</li> <li>• Has this ever happened before?</li> <li>• Can this happen elsewhere?</li> <li>• What is the worst-case scenario?</li> <li>• What lessons were learned?</li> <li>• Were those lessons implemented?</li> <li>• What can be done to prevent this from happening again?</li> </ul>	<p>These express, or will attempt to provoke, some level of community outrage. They are generally the most dangerous.</p> <p>About responsibility and blame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why wasn't this prevented from happening?</li> <li>• What else can go wrong?</li> <li>• If you are not sure of the cause, what is your best guess?</li> <li>• Who caused this to happen?</li> <li>• Who is to blame?</li> <li>• Could this have been avoided?</li> <li>• Do you think those involved handled the situation well enough?</li> <li>• Why was more not done to prevent this from happening?</li> </ul> <p>About personal viewpoints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your personal opinion?</li> <li>• What are you telling your own family?</li> <li>• Are all those involved in agreement?</li> <li>• Are people over reacting?</li> <li>• What would you like to say to those that have been harmed and to their families?</li> </ul> <p>About legal issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which laws are applicable?</li> <li>• Has anyone broken the law?</li> <li>• What challenges are you facing?</li> <li>• Has anyone made mistakes?</li> <li>• What mistakes have been made?</li> </ul> <p>About trust issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you told us everything you know?</li> <li>• What are you not telling us?</li> <li>• What effects will this have on the people involved?</li> <li>• What precautionary measures were taken?</li> <li>• Do you accept responsibility for what happened?</li> </ul>

Source: Covello, Vincent T., and Hyer, R. (2017). "77 questions most frequently asked by journalists in a crisis." Retrieved November 12, 2019 from <https://frco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CC-77-questions-most-frequentlyasked-by-media.pdf>.