

Public Information in Disasters

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The Importance of Public Information



- Tells the members of your community what's happened and what you're doing about it
- Heads off rumors
- Helps reduce fear

- Tells residents what they can do to help themselves
- Directs the efforts of those who want to help
- Strengthens sense of community
- Offers reassurance that help is on the way
- Increases the public's confidence in its leaders

PIO Tasks

- Attends staff briefings
- Writes news releases
- Answers telephone inquiries
- Organizes news conferences & media briefings
- Briefs officials for interviews
- Locates background information
- Escorts reporters in restricted areas

- May provide resources to out-of-town reporters:
 - local maps
 - hotel list
- Sets up Media Staging
 - shelter (tents)
 - portable toilets
 - water
 - food



- May coordinate Rumor Control
- Provides web address where all news releases can be retrieved

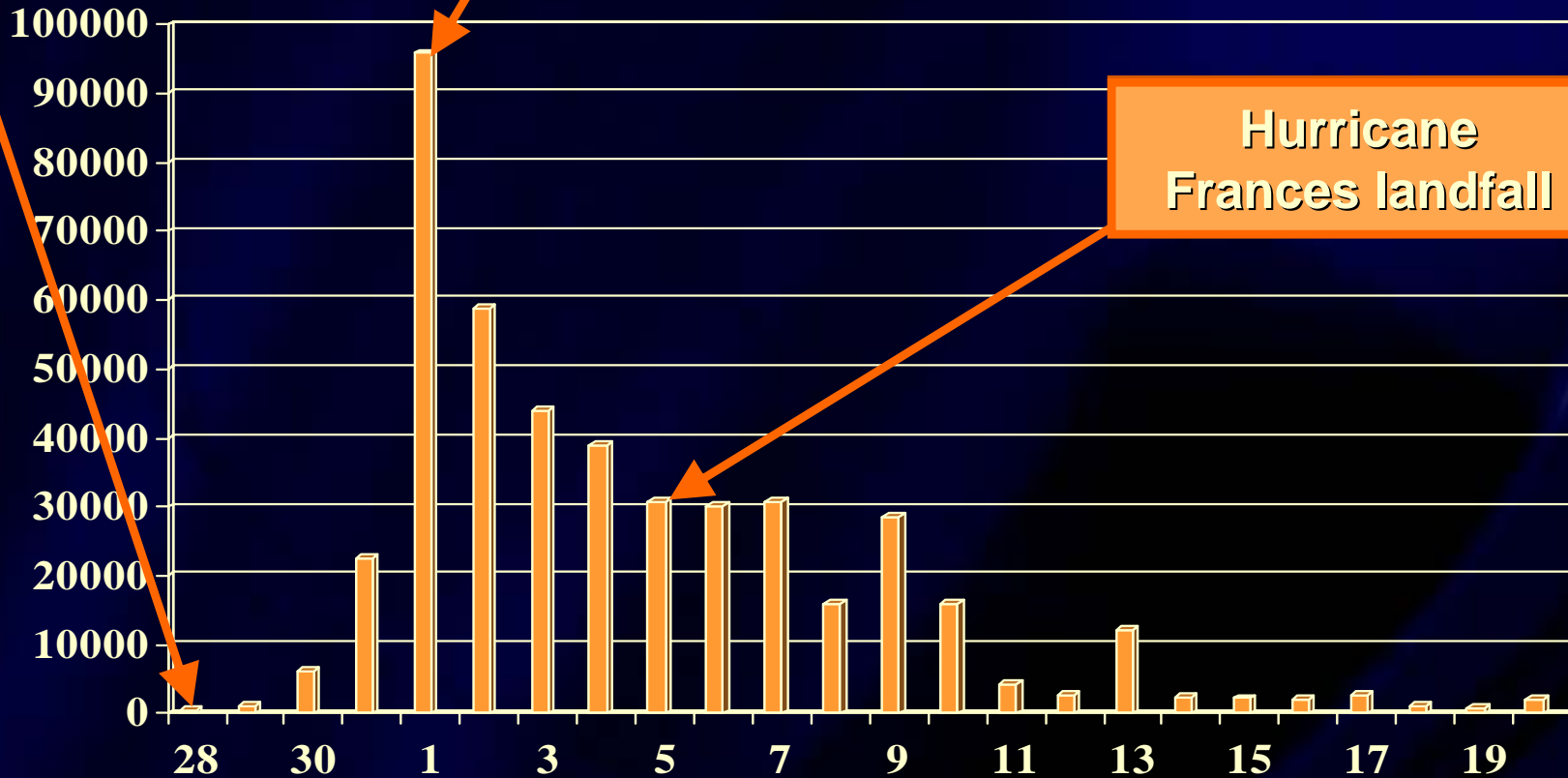


EOC Website Hits

Normal Hits
Per Day: 275

95,863 Hits Four Days Before Landfall

Hurricane
Frances landfall



August 28 – September 20, 2004

Before the emergency



- Identify the PIOs you'll call for help
- Maintain up-to-date media contact information
- Set up distribution system



- Ensure PIOs have adequate work space and equipment
- Talk about protective measures
- Talk about possible evacuation, shelter alternatives

During the emergency

- Media should have a work area near the action
(not in the middle of it)
- The reporters need to know the ground rules up front
- Reporters should be allowed at least periodic access to main EOC room
 - regular briefings
 - interviews



- Help the public understand the process, how decisions are being made.
- Explain your priorities.
- Set realistic expectations.

The interview

- Understand that the reporter isn't out to get you.



- Look forward to the interview as an opportunity, not a threat.

- Speak to the reporter, not the camera.
- **Never, ever** say, "No comment."
- Don't hedge. If you don't know, say so.
- It's okay to say, "I don't know."
- Be honest, even when it's embarrassing.



- *YOU* set the pace.
- Consider each question individually.
- Take your time.
- When you finish your answer, **STOP.**



- Assume every microphone is on.
- Speak in short sentences.
- Speak conversationally, avoiding jargon and technical terms.

News Conference

- Establish “talking points” – no more than 3.
- Include subject matter experts.
- Rehearse.
- Identify yourself, your position.





- Limit questions.
- Plan for an “escape route.”

Joint Information Center

Location where all public information officers involved in disaster recovery can co-locate to more closely coordinate information



Getting the Word Out

- government access television
- billboards
- water/utility bills
- school/company newsletters
- mobile public address systems
- postings at community gathering spots
- flyers
- shelter briefings
- information booth
- hotline
- town meetings
- “reverse 911”

The Aftermath

- *What types of hazards might still exist*
- *How to avoid those hazards*
- *Where help is available*
- *What type of help is available*
- *What to expect from local officials*

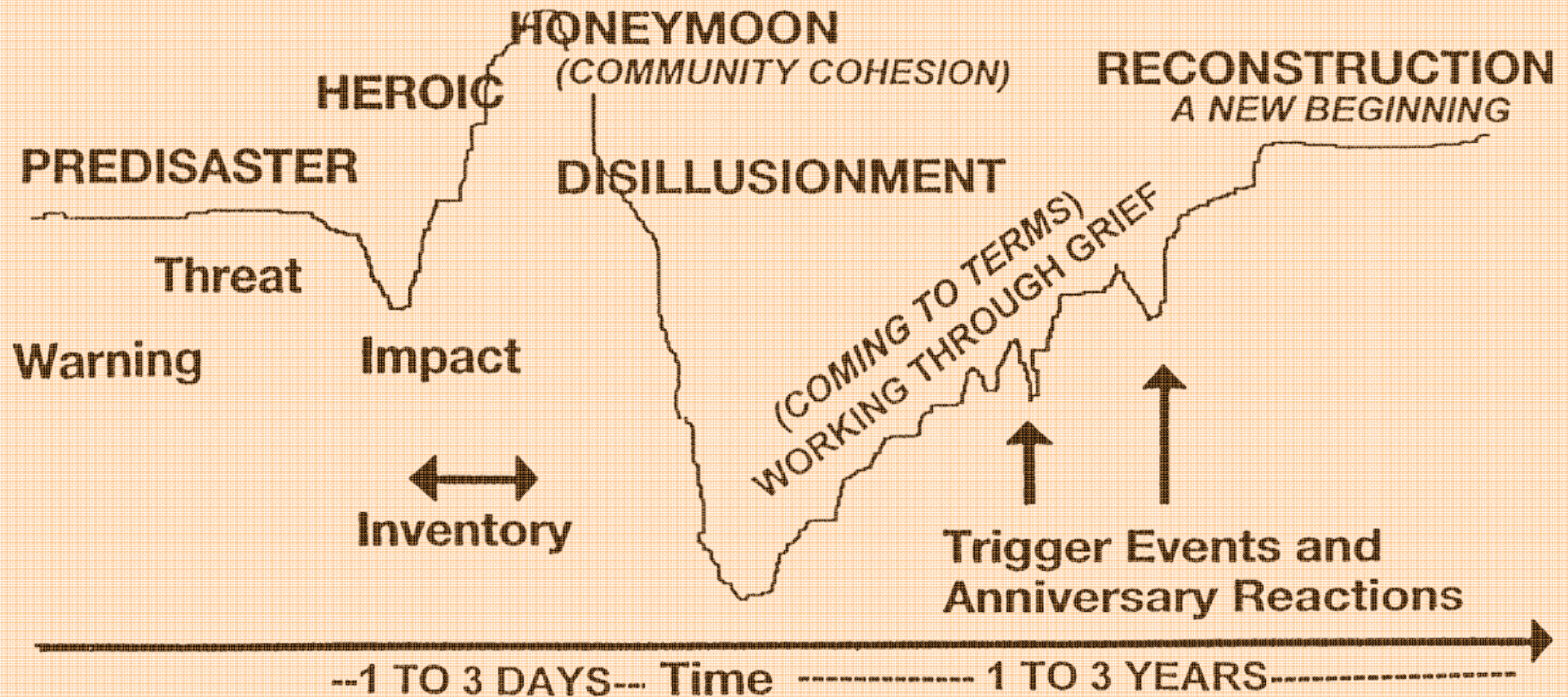


- Be specific about what's being done to help residents.
- Be sympathetic to those who are frustrated.

*“Nobody’s doing
anything to help
us.”*

Psychological Phases of Disaster

Phases of Disaster



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