

Bridging the Gap: Communicating with Emergency Management Professionals in the Midst of Climate-Related Disasters

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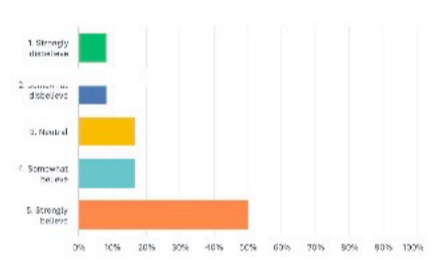
Background: Climate change has already begun to place strains on healthcare delivery systems across the globe and will only get worse. While some hospitals are taking steps to consider infrastructural vulnerabilities to climate change, there is a noted absence in developments for operational and behavioral preparedness in anticipation of stronger heat events, intensified hurricanes, abnormal pathogen spread, and expanded exposure to toxins. Additionally, the likelihood of managing multiple risks concurrently has increased, heightening the importance of adaptable and efficient communication systems to keep emergency management professionals (EMPs) up-to-date.

Objective: To assess how emergency preparedness professionals perceive climate change-related events in order to better craft communication for improved receptivity and to identify gaps in perceived risks. This study both serves to improve NYC Health + Hospitals' (NYC H+H) climate communications with emergency preparedness professionals and to inform the wider understanding of best practices.

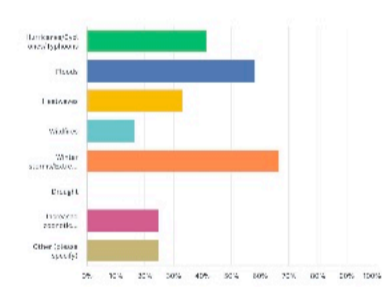
Methodology: This poster presentation showcases the results from a climate-specific study conducted by New York City Health + Hospitals System-wide Special Pathogen Team which surveyed emergency management professionals about their perceptions on climate change and its related emergency scenarios; where they look for information on climate change; and the best modes of communication before, during, and after climate-related extreme weather events. The emergency preparedness professionals work within New York's public hospital system which serves the city's most vulnerable population. These results are then applied to the system-wide Hazard Assessment as part of the Climate Resilience Plan that NYC H+H conducted.

Key Results:

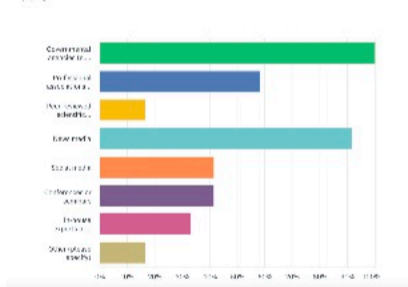
How strongly do you believe that climate change is influencing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events and related emergencies your healthcare facility may face?



Which climate-related events do you perceive as the most significant threats to your healthcare facility's operations in the next two years?



From which of the following sources do you primarily obtain information related to climate change and its potential impacts on healthcare facility emergency preparedness?



Which qualities do you prioritize when choosing messaging to find out more about climate change? (Check all that apply)

Official hospital guidance	50.00%
Experts in the field	83.33%
Clear actionables	58.33%
Simplicity of information	41.67%
Written by someone aligned with political views	8.33%
Most tied to current events	55.00%

Choice of terminology can influence the willingness of EMPs to attend a seminar on climate-related topics: When asked EMPs which seminar they would be most likely to attend, 42% chose the seminar that used 'future' in place of 'climate change,' 33% chose the seminar that included the phrase 'climate change,' and 25% of respondents chose the answer that gestures to a 'changing world' without explicitly stating 'climate change.'

N=12 (Results from EMPs across 12 geographically different healthcare facilities in NYC). Please note that this is an ongoing study and results are subject to change.

Discussion and Conclusions: As NYC Health + Hospitals recently conducted a climate hazard assessment, the findings from this communication study provide guidance on how to best transmit this information to those in frontline settings that are preparing, adapting, mitigating, responding, and recovering from emergency scenarios related to these hazards. The results support prioritizing the incorporation of messages that do not directly utilize the phrase 'climate change' in order to enhance receptivity from a diverse array of emergency preparedness professionals. With broader messaging that attempts to reach a wide audience, more neutral phrases such as 'future emergencies' can prove helpful. While heat events are predicted to be the largest stressors for health systems in the United States, the respondents' perceptions of risk are not aligned with more quantitative measures of risk. Some factors that could explain these results are that perceptions are swayed by a.) recent events (500 year flooding event in NYC) b.) upcoming seasonality concerns (heightened concerns about cold versus heat). These results highlight that further education is important to raise awareness about unperceived risks. Factors impacting perceived risks should be incorporated into the communication strategy and mobilized to harness attention (i.e. calling attention to the significance of recent events in a climate lens and pointing to risks that align with seasonality). The data support that emergency preparedness professionals value official hospital system messaging, information from experts in the field, and clear actionables. These results mark the importance of climate communications messaging from official sources and provide guidance as to how to craft effective messaging (incorporate expert voices, provide clear actionables, etc.). *Recommendations: It is crucial that each hospital system perform a climate vulnerability assessment. In communicating the results of the assessment and educating emergency preparedness professionals about novel risks, the results of this study support a.) the importance of official hospital-system guidance regarding climate risks b.) the use of a diverse array of messaging tactics, including tactics that refrain from using the phrase 'climate change' c.) the use of clear deliverables d.) incorporating expert voices into messaging e.) assessing city factors that impact perceived risk and utilizing them to allow for better engagement.*