

# Tips for Effectively Communicating with Emergency Responders

/ BY MICHAEL CALLAN

Success in sharing your message with emergency responders is a process. It requires effective communication, cooperation and coordination. To be truly successful, your message or training must produce an “epiphany” or “ah ha!” learning moment. Success is not measured because you contacted them, but because they GET your message.

## **Rule #1 – Adult learners want to see the value of your message. How will it help them? “What’s in it for me?”**

Communication is the first step. When your message to emergency responders hits home and they understand the benefits, they will cooperate and support your effort. But be careful; if they recognize you are only in it for compliance or “check the box” motives, you’ll lose them. Once your audience believes that your message or training is sincere, the second step, cooperation, will follow. This will build a solid foundation for the final step - coordination.

Coordination is working together in a collaborative effort. Trust keeps the system moving forward. If they trust your motives they will support your effort and work with you. You will see them open up at meetings. They will ask more questions. They might even call you asking about something they saw out on the road or at your facility. There is even a good chance that they will attend more of the table tops, drills and exercises.

To start, identify your message and determine what audience you want to reach. Is your audience national, regional, state, county, metro (large urban area) or local responders in a small town? Each has its own unique message needs, so adjust the message to your audience. Large regions need a global message, while local areas need more specific information. Ultimately, the local area is the most important, yet it is often the most difficult to reach. Now add in the “type” of audience and the message delivery becomes more difficult. Fire, EMS and law enforcement all train and meet differently. Police like smaller “roll call” types of training, while Fire and EMS can dedicate several hours to a class. A career FD can schedule 24 classes to reach every member of the department, but volunteer fire departments have training only on week nights or sometimes on weekends, and several of those meetings are dedicated to business, EMS or other classes.

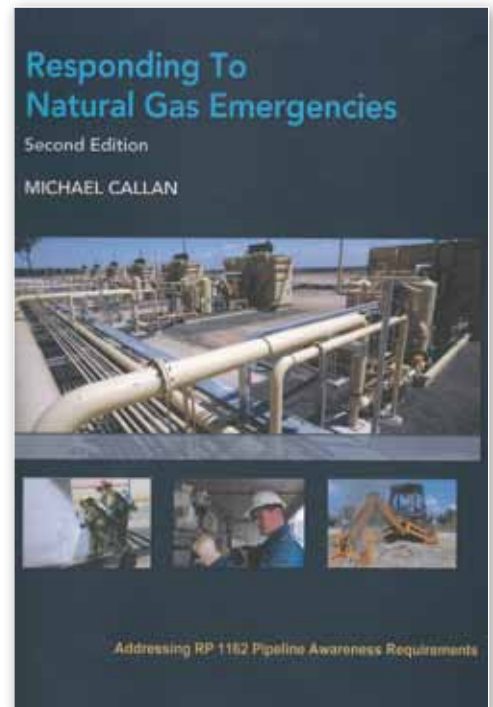
So, how do you reach the specific audience and geographic area? You do it by going into your toolbox of mediums and methods. First, choose the right drawer (medium) and then choose the right tool (method) to deliver the message to the audience and area. Mediums are the vehicle: Live, Print and Online. In each medium there are multiple methods and the combinations are plentiful. You just have to decide who, what, where, when, why and how! This requires that you invoke the tool rule – “The Right Tool for the Right Job at the Right Time using the Right Person!”

Let’s look at the mediums and



tools that are available in your toolbox. A live medium creates a powerful interpersonal experience – face-to-face learning. It is the oldest medium for delivering messages and is powerful for large audiences or a one-on-one chat. Live message tools or methods include:

- **Keynote Presentations**
- **Seminars & Conferences**
- **Train-the-Trainers**
- **Drills & Exercises**
- **Exercise Development**
- **Consulting & Networking**



There are many responders who still want to turn pages and hold a book in their hands. Others, especially younger students, have no problem with scrolling and small screen images. The print medium include these methods:

- **Textbooks**
- **Customized Text & Images**
- **Self-Paced Learning Guides**
- **Multimedia eBooks**

- **Instructor Programs**
- **Interactive Quizzes**
- **Case Studies**


Finally, the most recent and innovative medium is online. This medium has given us great opportunities to get our messages out almost instantaneously. You can use online interactive training and scenario-based learning to apply lessons. Online learning is offered as a “safety net” for those who missed a class, would like more information or who just come back looking for a reference. Of course, it is a great message repository for all your public safety messages. Using online as your medium may include these methods:

- **Online Interactive Training**
- **Public Outreach Information**
- **Streaming Instructor Videos**
- **Scenario-Based Learning**
- **“Lessons Learned”**
- **Blended Learning**

Use your toolbox to mix mediums and methods and you’ll never run out of ways to commu-



nicate with responders. One last note – if it is not documented, it didn’t happen. This goes beyond proving you sent the message (compliance). You must make certain that responders understand it (competence). This involves some method of evaluation, quiz, test or exercise.

Remember, learning is an observable change of behavior brought about by receiving a message or lesson. You have to make sure they GET IT! 

*Michael Callan is a 41-year veteran of the Fire Service. He served as Captain with the Wallingford, Connecticut Fire Department for 20 years. Michael is the author of the textbooks and training website “Responding to Utility Emergencies Natural Gas and Electricity” used extensively by utilities for training emergency responders. For more information, visit his website at <http://mikecallan.com>.*



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