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Session 2A: Developing Post-Incident Risk Communication Guidelines for Intentional Water Contamination Events

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Presenter Information

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DEVELOPING POST-INCIDENT RISK COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR
INTENTIONAL WATER CONTAMINATION EVENTS

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This panel will discuss a US EPA-funded research project intended to improve risk communication for post-incident decontamination and clearance activities associated with intentional contamination of a water system. The study incorporates two complementary methods conducted in successive phases. The recently-completed first phase included robust case study analyses of risk communication related to recent and significant contamination incidents. The second phase, which is currently underway, will identify ways in which disparate stakeholder groups in a metropolitan area differentially perceive risk and subsequent risk communication efforts. The session will be broken into four presentations of 15-20 minutes, as follows:

1) Study Overview. This segment will focus on research questions, study design, and research team composition. The benefits of the mixed-methods approach will be discussed. Process-related challenges and solutions to date will be described.

2) Best Practices in Risk Communication. The second segment will provide an introduction to the Best Practices in Risk Communication, as outlined in a 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. The key elements of the Best Practices will be discussed, as well as their evolution over time. The use of the Best Practices as a framework for case study analysis will be described.

3) Case Study Analysis: Lessons Learned. The third segment will present lessons learned from four case studies involving water contamination: a 2002 train derailment in Minot, North Dakota; the Tar Creek National Priorities List Superfund site in Oklahoma; the 2010 British Petroleum oil spill into the Gulf of Mexico; and the 2008 TVA coal ash spill at the Kingston Fossil Fuel Plant in Tennessee. This segment will focus on cross-cutting lessons learned from comparing and contrasting post-incident communication responses to current Best Practices for Risk Communication.

4) Employing Community-Based Participatory Communication (CBPC) to Improve Best Practices. The final segment will discuss the use of participatory communication methodologies, in conjunction with lessons learned from case study analyses, to identify key stakeholder groups and improve understanding of the values, knowledge, beliefs, information, and channel preferences for each. This process will contribute to the creation of stakeholder-driven Best Practices guidelines to assist US EPA, public health officials, and emergency responders in communicating with key constituencies during the decontamination and clearance stages of an intentional water contamination event.

The session will close with an interactive discussion with the audience regarding the project and future directions for similar applied environmental risk communication research.