Media Analysis Guide

Conducting a quick, informal analysis of print and online media coverage can help the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) site team and its partners get a sense of community perceptions of risk and the level of concern about an actual or potential exposure. Social and broadcast media tend to be harder to search, analyze quickly and easily. Therefore, this document focuses on print and online media only. You are welcome to add social and broadcast coverage if it comes up in your search. This information is helpful when developing messages to engage with the community, especially when used in combination with community member interviews and the Community Concern Assessment Tool.

To conduct a media search, first determine the questions that will be addressed by the media analysis, such as:

▪ What is the tone of the media coverage? Is it upset or is concern expressed? Or is it more neutral?

▪ What types of concerns or frustrations are voiced by the community and stakeholders, and are they what you expected? Are they based on facts, rumors, or misinformation?

▪ What is the tone of concerns (e.g., worried, upset, or confused)?

▪ Is there a perception that specific groups have been exposed to or affected by the exposure more than other groups?

▪ Is there any misinformation being reported that needs to be addressed with the community?

▪ Have there been environmental issues in the past in this community? What were those issues and how were they addressed? How is this event being related to that event?

▪ Is there a sense from the coverage about how the response from public officials is being perceived? Does the community think they are doing a good, fair, or poor job? This perception could carry over to how ATSDR is perceived when entering the community.

▪ Are there any community members or officials that have substantial media coverage? The analysis can help identify major stakeholders and/or influencers that should be included in community engagement activities.

▪ Can you discern community characteristics from the coverage (e.g., age and sex, languages spoken, education level, employment level, poverty level)?

To conduct a search of articles:

▪ Type in keywords into an Internet search engine such as Google News and hover your mouse over a dropdown arrow for advanced news search (http://news.google.com/news/advanced_news_search), or use Lexis-Nexis, BurrellesLuce, or Factiva if you have access to these services.

▪ Customize the search to select publications or media outlets, if desired. For example, you can restrict searches to community newspapers and news Web sites within a target community.

- Enter in a date range, if desired. Depending on the volume of news, you may want to adjust the dates to a 1-year, 6-month, or 3-month period, for example, to ensure that you have a sufficient number of articles to analyze.

- Examples of keywords or search terms include:

  - [Name of hazard or exposure] in [name of community]

  - [Name of hazard or exposure] and [name of public officials or stakeholders] in [name of community]

  - ATSDR and [name of community]

  - CDC or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and [name of hazard or exposure] in [name of community]

To conduct a quick, informal media analysis:

- Generate a list of articles obtained from the search and include links to them.

- Review articles to ensure they are relevant to the media analysis questions.

- Remove any articles from the search that are not relevant (e.g., those that do not address the specific community or hazard/exposure, etc.).

- Total the number of articles remaining. Of these, determine the number of articles that address each of the media analysis questions. This number will give you a sense of how representative your information is. For example, it is harder to discern trends or patterns from 2 articles than 22.

- Review the articles relevant to the question you are trying to answer. Note what trends emerge regarding community concerns, stakeholders, and spokespersons. Note if there are specific community partners and/or public officials mentioned or quoted repeatedly. These are organizations and individuals that you will most likely want to follow up with. Note the tone and emotion in the stories. Are people angry, frustrated, or critical? Or are they supportive of the investigation effort and local efforts?

- Make notes regarding your findings and how you feel the findings will affect the communication strategies that you employ. This analysis is not meant to be a quantitative or scientific endeavor; rather it is meant to help take the pulse of public perceptions at a given point in time