

Communication:

Overcoming Language Barriers



During animal health emergency situations, communication among individuals involved will be essential. In some instances, language barriers may impede communication. Key strategies to address language barriers during animal health emergencies are found below.

Language Barrier Issues

- **Animal owners**
 - Convey announcements or warnings
 - Explain evacuation or sheltering directions
- **Livestock producers or workers**
 - Explain response steps needed, such as quarantine, depopulation, biosecurity
 - Assistance with animal health response tasks, such as animal handling, biosecurity, or safety precautions

Any of these situations will be stressful for the animal owner, making the need for effective communication across the language barrier that much more essential.

Overcoming Language Barriers

- **Find someone that is bilingual in the language needed**
 - Farm supervisor or crew leader
 - Community member
 - Interpreting service
 - Other responding agencies
- **Once identified, this person should be uniformed with some type of visual indicator for easy identification when an interpreter is needed.**
 - Colored vest
 - Colored tape on their protective outerwear

Points to Remember

- **Remain calm and professional**
- **Be patient**
- **Communicate with respect to earn trust**

Tips for Communicating

- **If the individual does understand some English**
 - Speak slowly and clearly
 - Give information in small parts
 - Avoid using acronyms or jargon
 - Use everyday language
 - Repeat important information several times to emphasize key points
- **Verify comprehension before continuing**
 - Frequently check for understanding
 - Watch the eyes, facial expression and body language
 - Look for signs of confusion, agreement, disagreement apprehension
- **Provide information by various methods**
 - Verbal (interpreter)
 - Visual
 - Translated signage or handouts in various languages
 - Language boards
 - Picture sets or drawings – either premade or drawn with paper and pencil in the field

Additional Resources

FEMA IS-242.B: Effective Communication. February 2014.
<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-242.b>

Arcury TA, Estrada JM, Quandt SA. Overcoming Language and Literacy Barriers in Safety and Health Training of Agricultural Workers. *J Agromedicine*. 2010 Jul;15(3): 236-248.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2914347/>

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