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## **COSSA BRIEFING SHEDS LIGHT ON POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SHORTCOMINGS IN RISK AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

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“One of the most significant problems during the aftermath of 9-11 was a lack of adequate communication,” said Havidán Rodriguez, the Director of the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware. The subject of crisis communication has been a constant focus of the Washington policy making community since 2001, and is especially relevant as the terror alert level has been recently raised.

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) has released the official transcript of its Capitol Hill congressional briefing, “Risk and Crisis Communication: Building Trust and Explaining Complexities when Emergencies Arise,” held in response to the growing concerns over whether the public will be able to safely mobilize in the event of another terror attack on the United States.

“What does this color-coded warning system mean or what does it represent? ... What happens when the general public is informed over the TV, by Ashcroft or another government representative, that there is a 60% probability that there will be a terrorist attack on the U.S. and, therefore, we are now at code orange or red? What does that exactly mean for the general population? Is there any concrete hazard event that is going to occur?” Rodriguez questioned, “given that this warning system does not address these issues, it is, to a large extent, meaningless.” Dr. Rodriguez was joined on the panel by H. Dan O’Hair and Katherine Rowan, two communications professors from the University of Oklahoma and George Mason University.

These social scientists were also joined at the briefing by experts from the communication, disaster management, and homeland security communities to discuss many of the problems that we currently see in risk and crisis communication with the public. These include: failing to take into account different socio-cultural factors in how we convey crisis information and instructions on emergency procedures; the disparity between what the communicators see as the salient issues and what is truly salient to the general public; the communicators’ lack of credibility in the eyes of the public; and the inherent need for people to personally confirm a disaster or risk before taking action.

This briefing was an important follow up to COSSA’s March briefing on “Detecting Deception: Research to Secure the Homeland,” a dialogue among specialists in the fields of psychology and communication to discuss how the social sciences have helped to advance homeland security and domestic intelligence efforts.

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), an advocacy organization for Federal support for the social and behavioral sciences, was founded in 1981 and stands alone in Washington in representing the full range of social and behavioral sciences.

Encl:

*Risk and Crisis Communication: Building Trust and Explaining Complexities When Emergencies Arise*  
*Detecting Deception: Research to Secure the Homeland*