



Emergency Preparedness and Response

Zombie Talk and Preparedness

Archived: This Page Is No Longer Being Updated

This information is *for historic and reference purposes only*. Content has not been updated since the last reviewed date at the bottom of this page.



The anchor Tweet was simple: "Prepared for a #zombie apocalypse? If so, ur prepared for any emergency. Learn how: [CDC PH Matters blog](#)." It went viral within 10 minutes. On just the first day, the Tweet, blog, and the web page had 200 million impressions. After a week, that number reached 3.3 billion. More importantly, people engaged in preparedness discussions on social media, and traffic to CDC's [Emergency Preparedness page](#) increased 1,143% compared to the same date the previous year.

It was unconventional for a science-based organization to do something tongue in cheek, so what inspired this approach? Catherine Jamal, who lead the project, calls it "social media listening." For one week, she and her team posted basic emergency preparedness facts on CDC's Emergency Preparedness Twitter feed. Then they asked, "What are you preparing for?" And to their surprise, Jamal and her team noticed a trend in people listing the usual suspects – natural disasters, disease outbreaks, terror events—and a zombie apocalypse.

[Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication](#) is not just about feeding the public what you want to tell them. It's also about listening to what they want to hear. Watching social media trends and engaging with your audience can help drive them to the important information you're trying to communicate. CDC's 2011 blog on [Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse](#), and the zombie preparedness campaign that followed, brought readers to CDC's [Emergency Preparedness page](#) at a time when the page was not getting a lot of traffic despite the valuable guidance included on how to prepare for any emergency. Humor would not normally be appropriate during an emergency, but—per the [CERC rhythm](#)'s preparedness phase—effective emergencies start with good planning. In this case, our communication team realized that people were more interested in preparing for real-life emergencies if it also meant they'd be ready for a future (imaginary) zombie scare.

For more information on CERC visit our [website](#) and check out the [CERC manual](#). You can also read previous [CERC Corners](#).

Have you used CERC in your work? To share your CERC stories, e-mail cercrequest@cdc.gov. Your stories may appear in future CERC Corners.