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# Embedding social identity principles in the practice and policy of mass decontamination: An impact story.

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# Introduction

## Three sections:

- Overview of findings from our programme of research.
- Description of initial engagement activities with policy makers and emergency planners.
- Highlight key successes, and outline next steps.





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## Background

- Increased risk of incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) agents.
- Interventions designed to reduce the impact of CBRN incidents may be more stressful for the public than the incident itself (e.g. Holloway et al., 1997).
- Planning for incidents involving mass decontamination has been purely technical, with no attempt to understand public experiences and behaviour.
- Reliance on myths about ‘mass panic’ is unhelpful
- People typically behave in a helpful and cooperative way



## Outdated assumptions

- Assumptions about mass panic lead to ‘control’ management strategies – may be counterproductive
- Focus on technical aspects and assumptions about irrationality lead to neglect of communication strategies.





## Applying the social identity approach during a field exercise

- Questionnaires developed which included social identity measures.
- 115 volunteers completed a pre-exercise and post-exercise questionnaire.

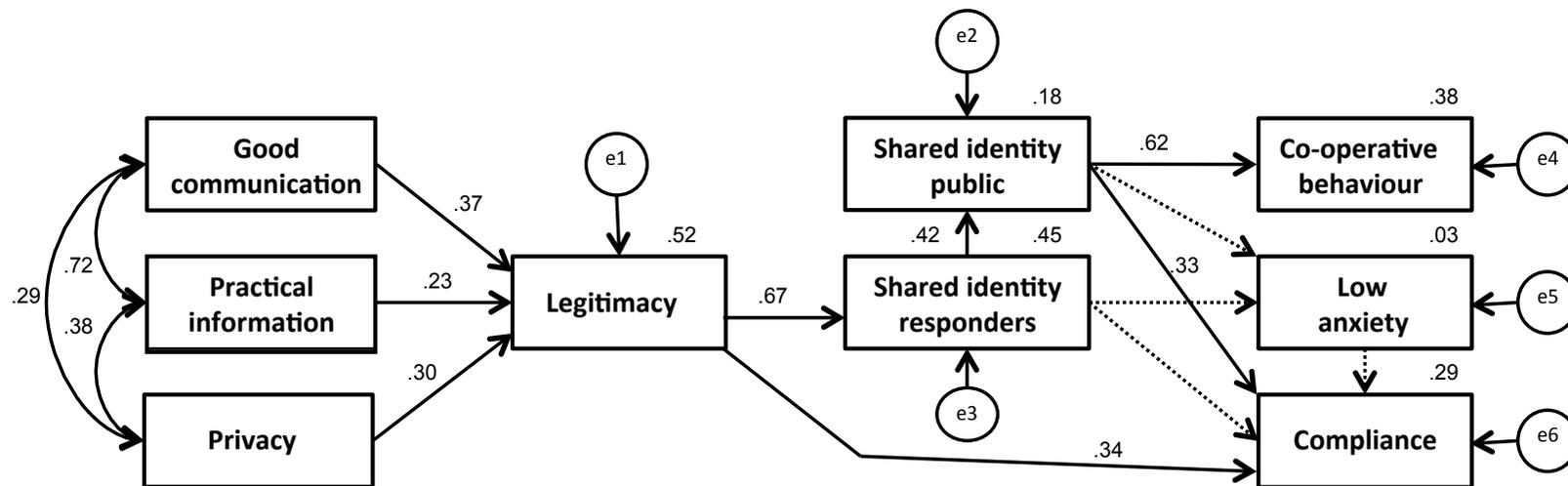




## Applying the social identity approach during a field exercise

### Results

- Effective communication and sufficient privacy enhance compliance and cooperation.
- Legitimacy and shared identification explain this relationship.
- Novel examination of social identity processes during mass decontamination.





# Mass decontamination experiment

Tested three communication strategies:

1. ***'Theory-based' (health-focused information, sufficient practical information)***
2. ***'Standard practice' (no health-focused information, sufficient practical information)***
3. ***'Brief' (no health-focused information, insufficient practical information)***

## **Behaviours of interest:**

- Compliance
- Cooperation
- Efficient progression through decontamination



# Mass decontamination experiment

Participants 112 students from University of Sussex, took part in one of the three different communication conditions: **theory-based, standard-practice, brief.**

Four different types of data collected:

1. Timings for how long each group took to go through decontamination
2. Observational data
3. Quantitative questionnaire data
4. Qualitative questionnaire data





# Mass decontamination experiment

- Participants listened to a scenario, and were shown a picture of a mass decontamination incident.





# Mass decontamination experiment

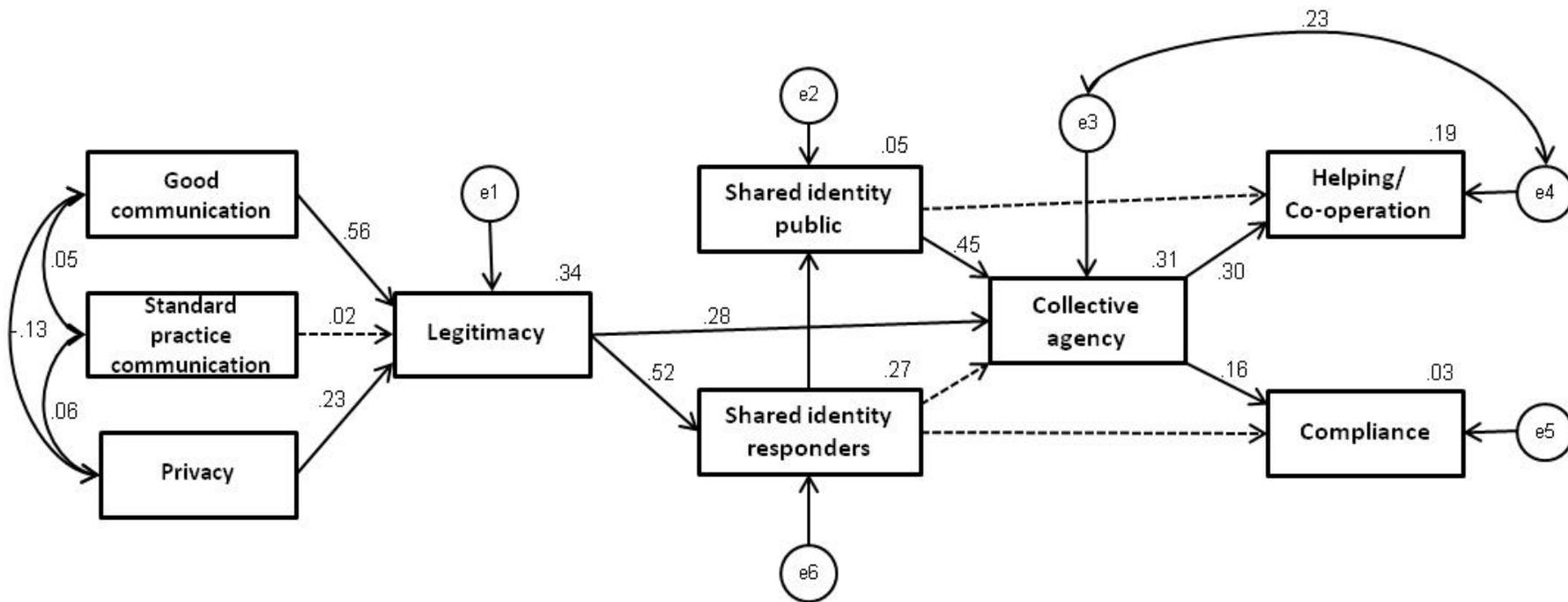
Timings for completion of the decontamination process:

<b>Condition</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Range</b>
Good communication	10.80	.67	10.00	11.50	1.50
Standard practice communication	14.84	3.42	11.80	18.30	6.50
Poor communication	11.83	5.34	8.50	19.80	11.30



# Mass decontamination experiment

- Effective communication messages, and sufficient privacy, increased co-operative behaviour and compliance, mediated by social identity variables.





# Recommendations

- 1. Emergency responders should communicate openly and honestly with members of the public about the actions they are taking.**





# Recommendations

- 2. Emergency responders should communicate in a health-focused way about decontamination.**



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- **WHY decontamination is necessary**



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2. Emergency responders should communicate in a health-focused way about decontamination.

- **WHY decontamination is necessary**
- **HOW decontamination will protect someone, and their loved ones**
- **WHAT the process will involve**



# Recommendations

3. Emergency responders should provide members of the public with sufficient practical information during the decontamination process.





# Recommendations

4. Emergency responders should respect public needs for privacy and modesty.





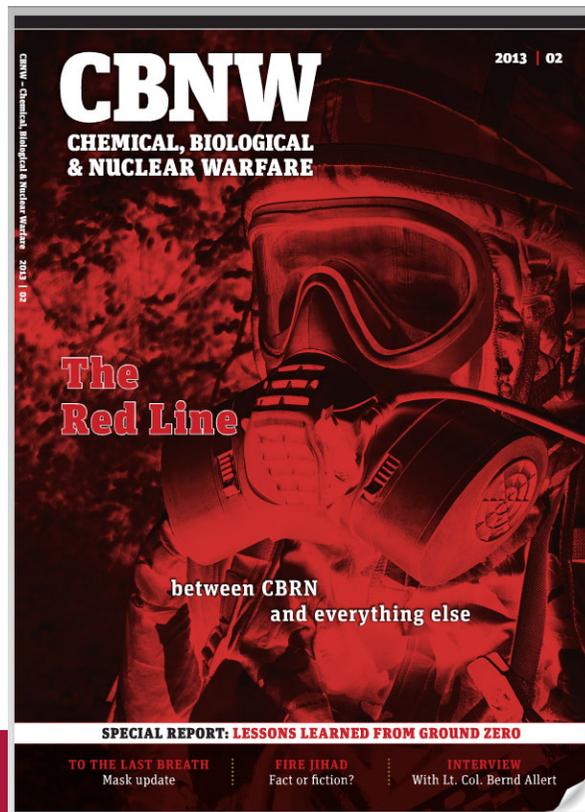
# Engagement activities

- Wrote a summary paper of key findings.
- Developed a dissemination strategy.
- Sent the summary paper round to key contacts, and recorded responses.
- Enabled us to document the impact of our research.



# Engagement activities

- Published a summary of research in various trade magazines.
- Aim to ensure findings seen by emergency planners and responders.

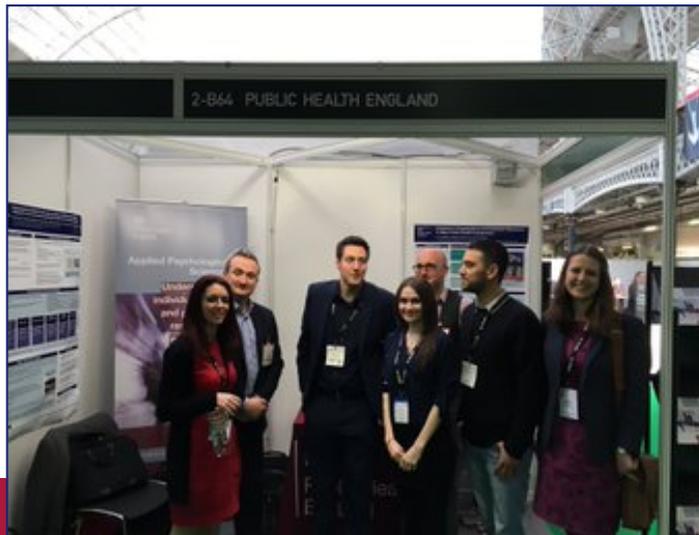




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# Engagement activities

- Presented findings at international practitioner conferences.
- Posters and oral presentations.
- Received positive feedback on the research we presented.
- Planning underway to run a symposium during this year's CBRNE Convergence.





# Successes

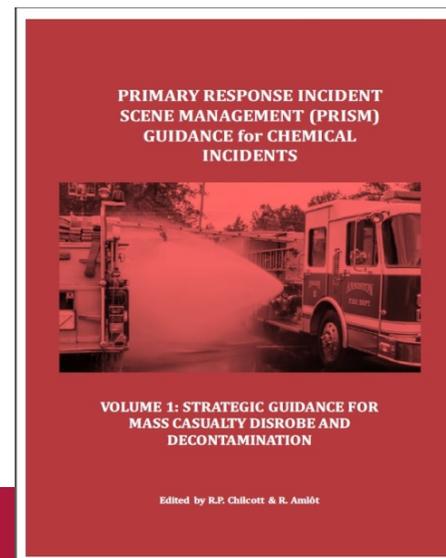
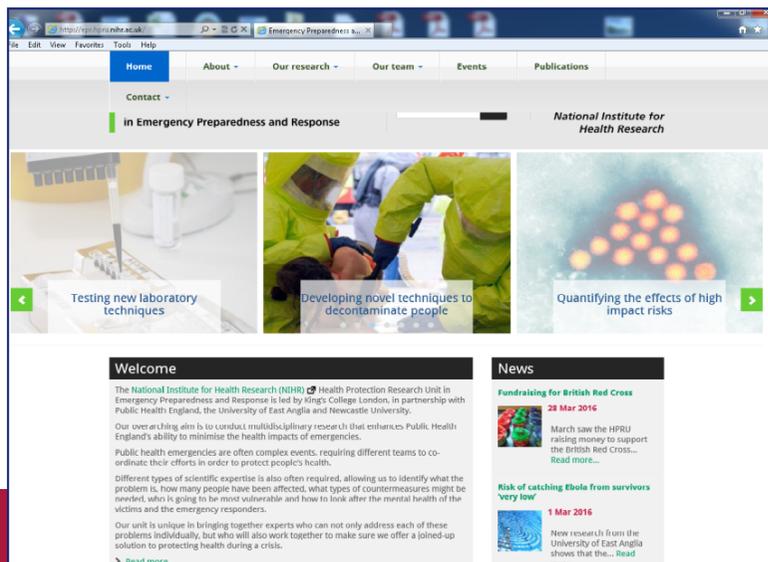
- Invited to develop training module for FRS mass decontamination instructor's course.
- Came about as a result of distribution of our summary paper.
- Mass decontamination training currently contains little information on psychosocial issues.
- Our work has the potential to significantly impact the way in which mass decontamination is managed.





# Successes

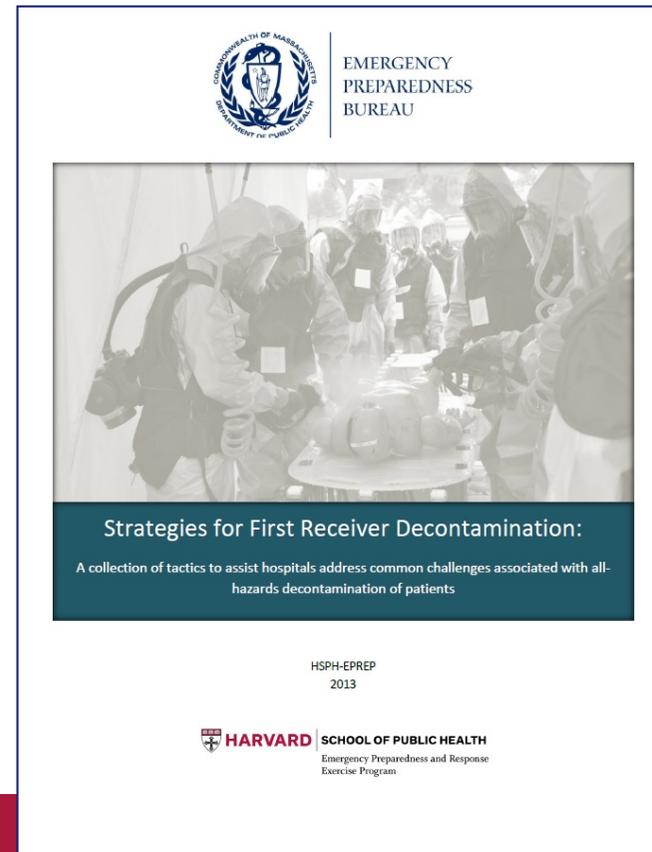
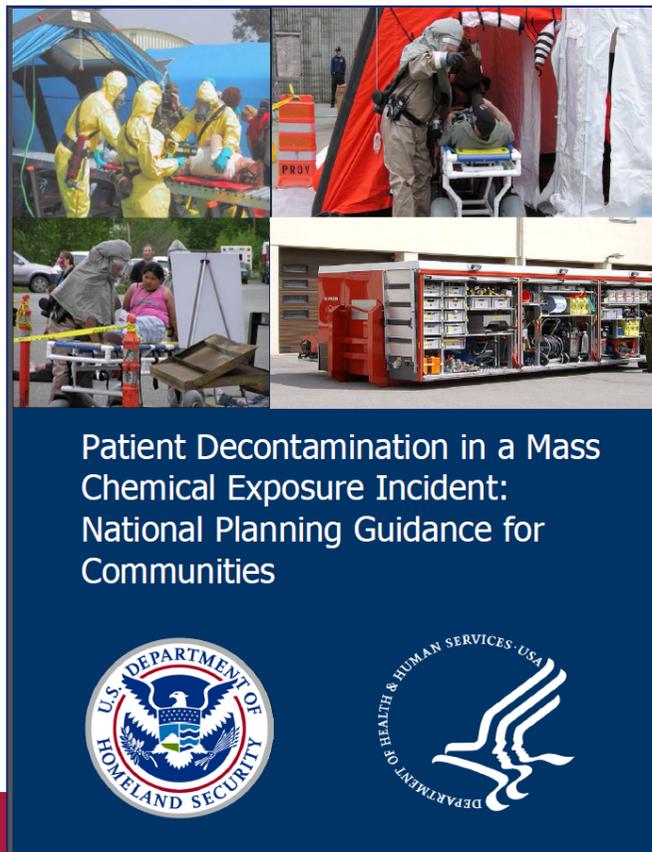
- Opportunity to develop psychosocial guidance based on our findings.
- Include communication strategy, understanding impact of responder actions, and importance of respecting public privacy.
- These guidance documents have the potential to transform the way incidents involving mass decontamination are managed.





# Successes

- Work cited by two international guidance documents, produced by Harvard School of Public Health, and the US Department of Homeland Security:





## Next steps

- Our next steps for achieving impact will be:
  - To circulate our summary paper and new decontamination guidance documents to additional contacts.
  - Run a seminar with members of the London FRS to disseminate our findings to them.
  - Run a symposium at this year's CBRNE Convergence conference.
  - Follow up opportunities to deliver training in other countries, including Italy and Belgium.



# Conclusion

- The nature of decontamination is under constant review and development.
- This provides a great opportunity for us to ensure that our findings are incorporated into all future guidance and training for mass decontamination.





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# Thank you

**Thank you very much for listening.**

**Are there any questions?**

