

---

## Best Practices in Emergency Services

EMS, FIRE RESCUE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SINCE 1998  
<http://www.emergencybestpractices.com>

---

### On a Common Weapon of Mass Destruction

June 2004

By Mike Taigman

Glassy eyes, drowsiness, waves of nausea and occasional incontinence are common symptoms. If biosurveillance monitors had been installed at several of the conferences I've attended over the last few months, they would have spotted the epidemic immediately. It's much worse than the dreaded Legionnaires' disease that hospitalized conventioners in the mid '70s. This syndrome is so explosive that almost every professional meeting in the fire/EMS world is rampant with its effects. I'm talking about PowerPoint Toxicity (PPT).

It's not something that you get from sharing the same drinking bottle or having unprotected "convention relations." No, it's something that's spread by educators who say to themselves, "Wow, look at all the cool stuff you can do with this program."

They will cram 74 lines of text into five-point type, using orange letters on a yellow background, and then have the text fly in from all directions, accompanied by the sound of breaking glass. No rubber glove, HEPA mask or bullet-proof vest will protect you from a PPT attack. Only shutting your eyes and taking a nap will keep you safe. Thankfully, many folks appear to have this protection strategy down to a science, as indicated by the variety of snores I could hear from my seat in the last keynote I attended.

Prevention of PPT is best directed at the source. Ask yourself this question, "Could I be a carrier (perpetrator) of PPT?" Here are some self-diagnosis clues:

If you've ever used any of the PowerPoint templates that have little lights that move through patterns in the background every time you change a slide, you're a carrier.

If you've ever shown a scatter graph to a group of non-statisticians, you're a carrier.

If any of your slides contain an entire paragraph of text, you're not only a carrier, but there is the potential for criminal charges.

What's the cure? Here's a five-step program to liberate the PPT carrier in your system:

Use contrast. Combine very dark background with very light text or very light background with very dark text. Reserve midrange mild colors for your ties and lip gloss.

All those great transitions that you can choose from in PowerPoint were fun in the '80s. Now they just piss people off. If you can't resist using one, use just one transition in your whole program.

Use the rule of seven. No more than seven (7) new words should pop in front of the audience at a time. If you have a slide that needs more than seven words, make several slides that build to the final one in that series. No more than seven (7) lines to a final slide in a series. More than seven lines means the point size that's too small to see.

Use a big point size. Shoot for north of 32 point, 40 is better.

Sit in the back row of the room where you'll be presenting and run through your slides. If you can't easily read them without a telescope, it's time to revise.

Of course, you could forget all of this and just do what every other presenter does. Don't worry - if I'm in your audience, I know how to protect myself. Just wake me when it's time for lunch.

*More of Mike can be found at [www.miketaigman.com](http://www.miketaigman.com).*

Copyright © 2008 EMS Best Practices, Inc. All rights reserved.