

Crisis Communications Considerations:

Quickly gather full, accurate information from appropriate sources. Determine whether an immediate response is necessary.

Establish your crisis communication committee – General Manager, Security Director, Marketing Director, Public Information Officer.

Designate who will speak on behalf of the organization. In case of all major crises, the General Manager should speak. A public relations spokesperson should also be designated.

Determine other individuals or agencies to be notified or coordinated with (such as law enforcement, Governor's office, Department of Agriculture, hospitals). The General Manager will make that decision.

Draft a brief statement and list of details (such as statistics and questions/answers) for use. The media may demand an immediate response even before all the facts have been gathered. A simple statement acknowledging the situation and addressing how you plan to obtain further information avoids "no comment" and acknowledges that our agency recognizes the need to cooperate with the media. Example:

"Our first priority is the safety of our employees and customers. We are gathering information, and as soon as details become available, we will inform the media."

Determine what means of internal communications will be used if the crisis affects employees.

Alert switchboard where to refer calls pertaining to the crisis.

Be the first to acknowledge the incident. Post your statement on your social media outlets and immediately begin to monitor social media response and reports. Don't forget to check social channels for any pre-scheduled posts, which may now be deemed inappropriate in nature.

Decide whether a news conference and/or news release is an appropriate means of conveying information to the news media and the public. The Marketing Director and Public Information Officer will decide the logistics of the news conference – when, where, how the media will be contacted, which media will be contacted, etc. The news conference/media staging area should be accessible, not in the way of operations and, if possible, where the media can see topic of conversation. Consider offering WiFi and even catering, to keep media in the designated area.

Decide whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers. Determine when, where and who will accompany the media. If deemed necessary or beneficial, assign in-house videographers and photographers to take pictures of the scene. This could prove helpful in responding to media inquiries as well as documenting events. Decide whether to provide TV footage for immediate distribution.

Discuss alternative or additional means of conveying information. This might include such items as letters to the editor, consultation with editorial boards, or other activities. Other means of communication that might be considered include making phone banks available and using radios.

Monitor news outlets and social media for coverage using clipping services, Google Alerts, Hootsuite, etc. Deliver copies of relevant clips to appropriate individuals.

Set up information files on the crisis at hand. Material related to the crisis, including clippings, statements, letters, memos and any other documents should be filed in chronological order. Try to maintain a chronology of events for possible use for fact sheets or historical information later.

Have a follow-up assessment to determine what worked, what did not and what changes might be made for further improved crisis management. If a crisis team has been called together, the full crisis team should meet after the event has been handled to review and discuss.

See sample of Ohio State Fair's Crisis Communication plan here:
<http://bit.ly/2qlwdrQ>

Spokesperson Guidelines:

Do not speculate.

Always stick to the facts. A more in-depth investigation is required to determine the cause.

Consider human safety first. When human safety or other serious concerns are involved, deal with those considerations first. You can admit concern without admitting culpability.

Focus on two or three key messages to communicate and repeat them during the interview.

Keep answers short and to the point. TV reporters want "sound bites" of no more than 10 seconds. Try to bridge to your key messages throughout the interview.

Use a technical expert. There is no substitute for knowledge. If the questions are outside your area of expertise, find an appropriate technical spokesperson.

Speak in simple, common terms.

Avoid jargon.

Remain calm.

Do not be intimidated into answering questions prematurely. You may tell a reporter that you need to clarify an important matter before you can answer questions.

Say what you want to say, then stop. Don't feel pressured to continue talking during an awkward silence or volunteer unnecessary information.

Do not use negative language.

Do not let reporters put words in your mouth.

Do not answer questions you do not understand. Ask for clarification.

Ignore cameras and microphones.

Face the reporter. Don't look away or up at the sky. During videotaped interviews, it's all right to stop your statement and start over.

Make only on-the-record statements. There are no "off-the-record" statements.

Refute rumors. Disprove a rumor without really repeating it, limiting rebuttal to the places it exists.

Avoid saying "no comment." If you don't know the answer, say so, then bridge to your messages.

Always Keep These Things Readily Available:

Cloud-based copies of:

- Crisis communication plan
- Facility maps
- Evacuation Plan

Cell phone

Cell phone charger

Backup cell phone battery

Laptop

Laptop charger

WiFi/Hot Spot

Change of clothes (comfortable shoes, jacket)