SONOMA COUNTY
CRISIS MANAGEMENT
BLUEPRINT



Offered by Sonoma County Tourism and the Sonoma County Hospitality Association
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SONOMA COUNTY TOURISM/HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY
CRISIS MANAGEMENT BLUEPRINT

One of the key goals of Sonoma County Tourism is to be a resource for our partners. As the region has undergone a devastating natural disaster, it is imperative that the tourism industry be prepared for a crisis, no matter the scope. This overall plan is designed to help partners handle a crisis situation – whether large or small. The following blueprint is divided into three major sections:

I. Introduction - background information on how to lay the foundation for a crisis plan and some hints on handling the crisis once it occurs. The section also provides tips on managing media interviews and general media and stakeholder relations.

II. Your Plan Template – fill-in-the-blank crisis plan for partners to complete with information needed to customize the approach for the partner.

III. Appendix – a wealth of material including hints for handling the media, drafting prepared statement and press releases, and a very brief speakers training outline.

We hope you find this plan helpful in crafting your own crisis communications documents. Please let us know if you have questions or need additional assistance.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The recent wildfires in Sonoma County and across the state of California have rocked the foundation of tourism-related and hospitality organizations, threatening the livelihoods of those employed within the industry across the region. With the complexity of the travel industry, intersecting with both internal and external customers, domestic and international visitors and myriad communications channels, requires a crisis plan specific to the needs of tourism businesses.

Crisis situations vary in scale from fairly small to monumental, making it critical for organizations to be prepared to manage and respond to any type of crisis. While the response to the crisis may vary, the approach is generally a process that can be used in most crisis situations.

This crisis plan outlines a broad-based blueprint that can be customized to meet your needs and help you and your constituents better manage the crisis. To apply this to your situation, you will likely need to adjust some components and add your own information. Our hope it that this plan provides a vital overview of how to effectively handle a crisis and offers options you might consider if and when you are in the midst of a crisis and need help. A solid plan is the first defense.

To be most effective, all aspects of this blueprint should be completed while the organization is not in crisis mode. While it's nearly impossible to predict when a crisis may occur, it is wise to have this information updated and at the ready to help ensure efficient implementation.

By definition, a crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of your organization or community, or threatens people involved with your organization or community. These situation can range from a legal dispute, theft, accident, natural or manmade disaster, attack by a person or persons with the aim of doing harm to your organization or community. It can also be a situation where in the eyes of the media, influencers or social commentators, your organization did not react to a situation in the appropriate manner. No matter the type, seriousness or duration, proper management is critical to successfully handling a crisis.

Because this plan is geared for the hospitality and tourism industries, the focus is on communications and ensuring all stakeholders are well-informed and the integrity of the brand remains vital. This plan should live with other crisis plans that cover emergency management services.

Careful preparation is the best tool for helping you and your organization skillfully handle a crisis situation.

If you fail to plan, you can plan to fail.

Crisis Management generally falls into three categories:

- Pre-crisis Planning
- Crisis Response
- Post-Crisis Recovery and Review

This plan will provide an overview of how you and your organization might prepare for a respond to a crisis using this three-phase approach.

BEGIN TO DEVELOP A PLAN

No organization should go without a basic template outlining how staff should respond in crises. Following are general guidelines for building the plan.

1. Identify the level of crisis for which the organization will activate a crisis plan.
2. Outline a step-by-step crisis response plan.
3. Identify the Crisis Management Team.
4. Ensure all organizational foundation pieces are in place.
5. Develop a comprehensive contact list.

POTENTIAL CRISIS SITUATIONS

Each destination and/or organization will face its own set of challenges. Questions to consider:

1. What crisis situation has your organization previously faced?
2. What are situations that have not yet occurred, but could in the future?
3. Where is your organizations most vulnerable?
4. What stakeholders – inside and outside the organization will you need to contact during a crisis?

Do Your Research

The planning process is a good opportunity to research other situations destinations and/or organizations such as yours has faced. Analyzing social media posts and media statements that illustrate how other organizations responded in various crises will help inform your ow organization's response.

Natural Disasters – Natural disasters have the potential to bring local economies to a halt. Natural disasters require destinations to play an active role in information sharing as well as serve as a resource for local businesses and stranded visitors and residents.

Public Health Emergency – Whether it is a bad flu epidemic or some other form of contagion, pandemics can cause panic among residents and travelers alike. In partnering with local public health officials, a destination marketing organization can play an important role in delivering a coherent message to visitors on how best to ensure their health and safety during the emergency.

Acts of Violence/Criminal Acts – In a criminal event, such as a terrorist attack, an organization's key responsibility is to gather and share official information from public officials and law enforcement. In this case, the organization's own messaging is replaced by communications disseminated by law enforcement/emergency management. As the destination begins to emerge from the fallout from the attack, the organization may revert back to its own messaging to ensure stakeholder/customers understand how the organization will function following the situation.

Social Unrest or Protests – Any event that causes social unrest – be it a sensitive piece of legislation like a travel ban, unruly protests or disruptive boycotts – has the potential of impacting a destination's reputation as a safe, welcoming environment. As a destination leader, it is your job to monitor these situations as they occur and ensure residents and visitors inquiring about the incidents quickly receive informed, accurate responses.

Tourist Accidents – No destination is ever 100% safe. Tourism-facing organizations should be prepared to field media inquiries about everyday accidents that involve tourists and express concern and sympathy for those involved.

Organizational Mismanagement – In the increasingly transparent corporate, political and social environment, the impact of having an executive or other key public facing employee conduct themselves in a way that does not align with the organization's mission, vision and values may result in a crisis. Potential issues that could cause a crisis may arise from:

- Sexual misconduct/harassment
- Posting an image, opinion or other social media element that is damaging to the organization
- An illegal act of an executive

Death or Incapacitation of an Organization's CEO – All organizations should have a succession plan in place should the leader die or become incapacitated. This will help ensure this situation does not become a crisis and all stakeholders are informed of the succession plan.

PRE-CRISIS PLANNING

Preventing a Crisis

While some crises cannot be prevented or pre-empted, many events that subsequently cause a crisis can be avoided. Crisis prevention requires that safeguards are in place, e.g. equipment is properly serviced, policies and procedures are in place and supported by all, and staff members are adequately trained on all physical and intellectual components required to do their jobs.

Identifying the Crisis Management Team

Assembling a crisis management team is critical. This group is comprised of general management and governing body representatives. These representatives, while not directly involved in communicating with the public, must be empowered to act on behalf of the organization in preparing for and managing the planning the identifying the approach. (See Team Responsibilities in the Appendix).

The job of this group is to set direction for the plan, identify the approach and ensure the proper constituents are included in the outreach portion of the plan. This group crafts both the strategies and tactics surrounding management of the situation and ensures the approach aligns with the organization's mission and vision.

The Crisis Communications Team is comprised of individuals directly responsible for communicating with the various publics. The team should be comprised of individuals who are skilled a public speaking and can represent the organization in media interviews. While this varies per organization, consider including the Executive Director/CEO/President; the head of Public Relations; a Media Liaison Team including senior management involved with external communications to both key constituents and the media.

The job of this group is to ensure the messages for each portion of the plan are those that will best connect with each stakeholder group. Because this group will be under pressure to speak on behalf of the organization during a challenging time, media and speaker training should be conducted integrating the type of questions that will be asked during a crisis.

Once the crisis communication team is selected, a list should be made of the people on the team and what each team member is responsible for. Include the following information on the list:

1. Name
2. Title
3. Cell phone number
4. Home or alternative phone/cell number
5. Role and definition, e.g. writer, press materials distributor, public speaker, media interviewee, etc.

In addition to the crisis communications team, the Public Relations or Communications department should be supported with competent people who can answer phones, post on social media, host media, ensure the communications tree is efficiently managed, etc.

One individual should be designated as the primary spokesperson to represent the organization. If the organization has a number of stakeholder groups and a complex organizational structure, more than one person can be designed, but each should have specific publics. This individual is designed to make official statement and answer media questions throughout the crisis. A back-up spokesperson(s) should also be identified to fill the position in the event that the primary spokesperson is unavailable.

In addition to the primary and back-up spokespersons (should the organization warrant), individuals to serve as technical experts or advisors should be designated. These resources might include a financial expert, an engineer, an industry leader or other influencer deemed as credible and necessary during a specific type of crisis. This may take some brainstorming by the crisis management team as what is needed may not be readily apparent. This authority or technical expert will not need to engage in general public speaking, but should be able to answer technical questions during the crisis.

Criteria for the primary and back-up spokespersons are:

1. Comfortable in front of a TV camera, audio microphone and with general handing of interview situations;
2. Skilled in handling interrogating media;
3. Speaking in clear and concise sound bites;
4. Integrating key messages;
5. Speaking credibly and without reverting to jargon; and
6. Respectful of the public and media.

In addition to the designated spokesperson(s), it can be anticipated that other parties involved in the crisis such as first responders (police, fire, health officials, etc.) also will have a spokesperson. It is critically important to identify those individuals as early as possible so all statements and contacts with the media can be as coordinated as possible. If staffing levels permit, appoint a liaison to coordinate with each of these parties. It's also a good idea to share the organization's crisis plan with key contacts in each of the response organizations. Most have a Public Information Officer (PIO). This person will be a critical contact during a crisis.

Each organization will want to consider having the following types of equipment and services designated for use only during a crisis.

1. Back-up cell phones (or satellite phone[s])
2. Land-line phone
3. Lap top
4. Generator
5. Walkie-talkies

Preparing Your Organization - Technical/Operational

For crises that happen based on internal issues, having the proper information about the organization or the area in which the crisis has occurred can be helpful in informing the media, customers, influencers, or anyone else seeking information about the organization.

In some cases, it might be necessary to create materials that explain technical systems or in-house procedures. If technical systems or operating procedures are outlined and the point of breakdown is identified, there is less change of the reporter or constituent interpreting the situation erroneously. The key is to make a complicated and potentially chaotic issue as simple as possible for all publics. As part of the crisis planning process, assess the potential issues that could face your organization. Identify equipment, policies, corporate mandates and other standards that may be the foundation for a crisis. For example, a boating outfitter should have schematics of all vessels used in the operation and updated service records. A lodging property should have the policies for all staff. A tour company should have mandates regarding the third-party groups/sub-contractors it works with. The key is to identify the types of crises that may impact the organization and ensure it is prepared with materials that can show the organization operates at the highest standard.

This information can be made available via a Website, but written materials should be available during any crisis outreach.

Compile key organization information:

1. Organization mission statement
2. Operating statement(s)
3. Key public financial information, including banking/investment account numbers (this is essential information that not everyone on the team needs to have, but to which a designated person must have access. This is primarily for an internal crisis, but should be available for any crisis.)
    a. Insurance policy numbers and contacts
    b. Human resources employee handbook
    c. A general organization/community factsheet to include:
    d. Organization historical information
    e. Product/service offered
    f. Audiences/stakeholders served, key contacts and outreach channels identified for each
    g. Public financials
    h. Executive management team list, contact information for each
    i. Media contact information
    j. Key influencers contact information
    k. Other information you deem necessary for the public to know
4. Key contact phone numbers, e.g. emergency rooms, attorney, mayor/city administrator, water department, electric/gas company, etc.

Identifying Key Audiences

It is essential to determine a list of key audiences, the people and organizations that must receive information and be able to lend support. Below is a list of potential publics that you may consider including as key audiences. When you are working on a crisis, consider the most effective communication method for each group. Ensure each group know you will contact them and what you will require of them during a crisis.

- Employees, families of employees
- Union officials (if appropriate)
- Government Leaders – state, county, city, community elected officials, associated agencies
- Community organizations, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors' bureaus

Ensuring Organizational Positioning is Complete

A crisis plan assumes organizational positioning is already in place; a mission, vision and set of values has been established and operating policies and procedures have been developed. If this is not the case, this should be completed prior to developing a crisis plan as this will guide messaging and procedures for any crisis.

During a crisis, you will want to integrate your mission and overall positioning with the situation. While the crisis positioning will be situational, the overall positioning of the organization is more stable and will set the foundation for all situations.

Developing Media Policies and Procedures

Policies:

Proper communication with the media is essential or handling a crisis. The media can be a tremendous ally or skilled foe. For any organization or destination, media relations should be an ongoing effort. Establishing a solid working relationship with the media in your area and influencers within the trade and social media space is a m important aspect of a year-round communications strategy. The potential for mitigating negative coverage is much higher if you are dealing with people you already know than if the media has not been connected with your property or destination.

The media will closely watch the way the organization handles the crisis and if not properly communicated with, may interview people not designated as spokespersons. This will adversely impact the organization's ability to control the situation and the recovery process.

Just as is the case with key internal stakeholders, the rules for message dissemination must be carefully designated and administered. It is absolutely imperative that the entire communications team (both internal team and external advocates) speaks with one voice. Controlling the interview process is key to managing the crisis.

Maintain the rules you have already established for the media. If special circumstances occur that would require media to be escorted (such as a safety hazard), advise prior to taking a media representative into the situation. Any change in the way the media is dealt with during a crisis may change the view of the report ad the outcome of the story.

Depending on the degree of the crisis, media from outside the area may also be involved. For the media that may not be onsite such as the travel trade, the immediate statement should be sent via email or social media channels, ensuring the most appropriate media are part of the communications chain. Ongoing communications to out-of-market journalists may be done via a website or social media channel (s) and updated as new information becomes available.

Procedures:

Select a place to be used as a media center that is away from the center of the crisis. If should be some distance from office of the crisis communications team, or ground zero for operations staging area. Determine a location that is easy for the media to find and appropriate for the organization.

Holding Statement - As soon as possible, a prepared statement should be drafted and ready for delivery by the spokesperson. At this point, any and all requests for information should be directed to the spokesperson – no responses should be given by anyone else answering phones, developing social media content or any other external communications person.
This holding statement does not need to convey detailed information. It can be a simple as: "Facts are still being gathered and will be distributed when information is available."

Contact Log – retain a contact log of all media connections. This will help ensure that during subsequent follow-up information distribution, no one is overlooked. The contact log should contain the following information (A form is included in the Appendix):

- Interview/Contact Date
- Reporter's Name
- Reporter's Media Outlet/Affiliation
- Reporter's phone number and email address
- Name and title of person interviewed
- Questions asked
- Additional follow-up needed
- Genera, response of interviewee to the interview, e.g. tone, general direction, talking points included
- Other persons being interviewed (within the organization and other impacted organizations)

Crafting Preparatory Press Materials/Statements

You will want to have on hand, or prepare as needed, the following materials for use as appropriate with both internal and external audiences. (Examples of these materials are included in the Appendix):

- Talking points – the positioning and statement the organization want to communicate
- Potential Q&As – refined as actual Q&As come in
- Prepared statements – these must be drafted to match the needs of each of the audiences
    - Internal: employees, Board of Directors, etc.
    - External: Consumers/visitors, industry influencers, media, local government, etc.
- Press releases – most updated one first
- Status reports depending on the length of the situation – as often as needed for as long as needed
- Post-crisis/back-to-normal or open for business release

APPROACH

For organizations that promote or market an entity, it will be important to assess the phases through which the core components of business operations and collaboration with key stakeholders will take place. In general, the response encompasses a three-phase approach and incorporates three platforms:

- Support – the extent to which the organization shows support for those involved in the crisis or helping to manage through and mitigate the crisis.
- Educate – the level to which the organization is responsible for educating its constituents and customers regarding the crisis and its impact on each of the target audience.
- Sell – The timing for which the organization can return to its core function of marketing/promoting or selling the product or brand.

Phase 1

- Support – provide the emergency management workers, employees, visitors and anyone else impacted by the situation both emotional and physical support.
- Educate all internal and external stakeholders about the situation through honest, updated, consistent messages via all communications channels
- Sell – Halt selling until the situation is fully contained.

Phase 2

- Support – Continue to support the emergency management personnel, visitors and employees on the property/in-market.
- Educate – Provide updated messages to visitors and media out-of-market to ensure the facts are conveyed in a way that allows for clear and truthful information and allows potential visitors to make informed decisions.
- Sell – When appropriate, begin marketing messages. Depending on the crisis, the messages may need to change from the normal marketing campaign, but it will be important to get visitors back to the property/destination and generate business.

Phase 3

- Support – continue to show leadership by supporting the internal stakeholders and creating opportunities for others to learn from the crisis.
- Educate – Continue to monitor information being broadcast about the property/destination via all communications channels. Correct misperceptions should they arise.
- Sell – determine if marketing messages can evolve back to normal.

CRISIS RESPONSE

When a crisis strikes, it may seem like your organization's response needs to happen immediately and all at one. But, this is not possible, nor advisable.

I. Analyze the Situation

When a crisis first arises, your team will need to quickly determine what happened, who was involved and whether anyone was harmed. In some instances, it may be that your organization does not have a role to play in the response effort.

One of the first questions to answer is whether any of your organization's employees of their families have been impacted by the incident. Ensuring employee safety and security must be paramount among your concerns. Training staff alternates on the crisis plan become more important if an affected staff member is part of your Crisis Management Team.

Always Verify the Events with Authorities - Once your organization is well prepared for a crisis, there is a potential of overacting to any crisis. Hoaxes and false alarms occur that may seem to require your attention, but beware. First verify events with emergency management teams to ensure the situation is real and requires your involvement.

Information gathering is critically important. Your organization should have someone on staff who can gather and disseminate up-to-the-minute articles, blogs, tweets and other pieces of information to the rest of the team. This will ensure the organization con continue to make the most informed decisions.

II. Initiate the Organization's Crisis Plan

If your organization must respond to the crisis, convene the entire Crisis Management Team to discuss the response and team members' responsibilities.

Determine the source for the first responds – it may not be your organization's role to be the first statements distributed. It may be best to defer to city or state officials to field questions from the media in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Focus on amplifying official statements and sharing accurate information with your publics as soon as it becomes available.

That said, do not underestimate your organization's platform and the important role it can and should play in a response effort. Whether your organization ultimately decides to respond publicly or not, it must play a role in outreach to the local government and the broader community. Your contacts can play a vital role in not only ensuring a smooth crisis response, but in the recovery efforts as well.

The Process

1. **Summarize Key Takeaways –** After the initial meeting, the head of the Crisis Management Team should send a summary of action items detailing next steps.

2. **Communicate with Direct Reports** – Each member of the Crisis Management Team should then begin to coordinate the response effort with staff members responsible for carrying out next steps. For example, staff member may begin collecting information to share with

the public, e.g. road closures, hotel openings, emergency management procedures) and begin to prepare communications for key stakeholders.

3. **Remove Paid Advertisements** – In some crisis scenarios, it will be necessary to quickly pull paid advertisement publicizing the organization or destination. It is good practice to have a working list of all outside public relations and ad agencies on hand to they can be contacted quickly.

4. **Update the Staff and Crisis Communications Hotlines** – If your organization has a staff phone hotline or a crisis communications hotline, it is good practice to update the message to ensure employees, local residents and visitors receive the latest information.

5. **Confirm the Website and Email Delivery System are Working** – In some situations, the organization may lose access to it website or email delivery system. A member of the Crisis Management Team should communicate with the organization's IT team to understand the backup plans in case of an outage. The IR staff should ensure backup options are available. You might want to place back-up servers in other locations in the U.S. Additionally, you organization should consider adopting a cloud-based storage service like Dropbox so that your team can access files from various locations.

6. **Take Stock of Social Media and Determine Updates to the Organization's Website** – When a crisis hits, it is often necessary to cease all promotional social media posts about the destination. Instead, the organization's social media should communicate official information from city or state officials.

   Social Media
   Social media must be an integral part of any organization or community crisis response plan. For example, during Hurricane Harvey in Houston in 2017, many residents had trouble getting through to emergency officials via traditional channels like 911. They turned instead to social media to call for help. Social media channels, like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Instagram became information clearinghouses for essential information and virtual meeting points for people stranded by the storm.

   Following is a suggested approach to consider during and following a crisis.

   - Press Pause
     - When a crisis occurs, normal social media postings should cease. Social media channels and associated messaging should be managed by the crisis management team. When the crisis first occurs, release a message on social media indicating your organization is monitoring the situation and will provide regular updates as it evolves.

   - Adjust Content and Schedule
     - In some cases, it will be necessary to reschedule planned social media posts for a later date. In other, it would be wise to completely revise or delete planned social media posts. During the October firestorms, Sonoma County Tourism completely halted its social media postings during the first several days of the fires. Once the extent of the fires was better understood, Sonoma County Tourism used its social media channels to clarify misperceptions and provide updated information.

- Incorporate Social Media into Messaging Strategy
    - Your communications team should draft statements and potential social media posts simultaneously. This will ensure the messaging is consistent across channels and it also will help your team get its message out more quickly when it is time to release a statement.

- Ensure Social Media Presence is Appropriate
    - Your employees are extensions of your organization and they need to be mindful of that. They can help reinforce important messages, but they can just as easily undermine the organization's message. Remind them to post with caution, especially if they have credentials for your social channels.

Take Action
During a crisis, use social media to share accurate information with visitors and local businesses. When you are ready to begin communicating on social media, keep a few things in mind:

- When posting information, ensure it is fully consistent with official sources. As a situation unfolds, some items posted on social media may prove to be mere rumors or entirely false. Take care not to repost any information that has not been verified.

- Avoid reposting information from general news and media outlets unless it is verified by trusted sources. "We're hearing reports" and "sources tell us" do not constitute valid information.

- Refrain from posting travel recommendations or attempting to forecast the outcome of the situation.

- If you receive an inquiry about the situation and the destination's conditions, refer the person to official statements and materials.

Resume Normal Communications
This question is more art than science. The organization can generally resume regular social media posting when the incident is no longer a dominant topic of conversation, is no longer a prominent headline in the new cycle and adequate time has passed since the initial incident.

7. **Finalize Internal and External Messaging –** Get approval on external messaging from key stakeholders identified during the pre-crisis planning phase.

III. <u>Continue Key Stakeholder Communication</u>

1. **Keep Leadership Updated on Crisis Management Team Activities and Decisions –** In the hours and day following a crisis, it is critical for the Crisis Management Team to communicate regularly with organization leadership and key stakeholders. Schedule regular meetings to ensure all parties have the latest information.

2. **Consider Establishing Regular "Check-In" Conference Calls or Partner Meetings** – These meetings are designed to give the organization an opportunity to share updates information

with local partners and other business leaders. While they may no longer be critical once the crisis has passed, regular calls and/or meetings could prove valuable in the recovery phase. Additionally, organizations should consider sharing regular email updates with members to shine light on the evolving situation and tourism recovery efforts.

IV. Return to Normal Business – Continue to Monitor

1. **Continue to Monitor Stakeholder Communications and Media Coverage** - As your organization returns to its normal business operations, continue to monitor key stakeholder communications as well as traditional and social media coverage/conversations. As effective an organization is in communicating throughout the crisis, there will be some audiences who do not have the full story. Oftentimes an organization will need to reiterate its messages regarding the crisis, without reliving the event, but rather in a moving forward message to its stakeholders for a long time after the crisis has (physically) concluded.

2. **Prepare for Key Milestones** – If you know particular anniversaries or other milestones will become news, ensure messages are prepared based on the tenor of all stakeholder groups during the particular time period. Preempt potentially damaging media coverage by distributing positive information prior to these milestones.

   Be sure to have all information regarding the organization's response and achievements following the crisis ready for media inquiries. Create a prepared statement and ensure all potential spokespersons are prepared with the appropriate message points.

More about post-recovery in the next section.

CRISIS RESPONSE TIPS

While the crisis management team serves as the leader during a crisis, other staff members will necessarily be engaged in responding. Ask the team…

1. **How do you know which staff members are actually necessary?**

   - What are the ripple effects of the crisis?
   - How might it impact the organization
   - What departments and staff member have access to essential information that will be needed during the response?

2. **Stay on Message**
   Many crisis communications professionals stress the importance of coordination during any response effort. Many organizations host daily public relations calls, which gather all members of a particular group – for example, the PR staff of stakeholder groups – to discuss the crisis at hand and make sure everyone is aligned on messaging.

   This will work best if this group is consistently updated and communicated with to ensure when a crisis hit, it is operating on all cylinders.

   Finding ways to stay in regular contact with local law enforcement and public officials also is good practice. Doing so will allow your organization to anticipate official statements and ensure your messaging aligns with these authorities.

3. **Focus on Keeping Visitors/Guests Calm**
   Ensure visitors are aware of the situation and know what to expect next, Visitor-facing organization have an obligation to tell visitors/guests the truth about the situation, but this must be done in a level-headed manner.

   Statements should be straightforward and matter-of-fact. In some cases, it may be good practice to collaborate with other organizations and agencies when developing messaging and statements.

   Bu collaborating, organization can serve as a check on one other and ensure that neither is distracting from the overall response effort.

4. **Avoid the Phrase "No Comment"**
   If the organization finds itself fielding questions it is not yet prepared to answer, the spokesperson should avoid saying "no comment." Alternative in this situation includes:

   "Our team has just learned of the situation, and we are trying to gather more information. We will give you an updates as soon as we have more to share."

5. **Don't Delay**
   In some instances, organizations have delayed their response to a crisis situation, ultimately hurting their credibility with their publics. Given the nature of the crisis, it may not always be possible to disclose information or speak publicly immediately, but organization should also consider the risk in waiting too long.

Organizations with ownership groups or parent companies should be fully in sync with these overarching entities to ensure the crisis planning is aligned with expectations of the owners. The timing of a crisis response can be critical, especially if waiting for approval causes a delayed response.

TEN COMMON MISTAKES MADE DURING A CRISIS

A crisis can throw normally well-organized organization and clear-thinking individuals into a chaotic maelstrom where confusion reigns. The long-term affects of improper communication during a crisis can be devastating. When deadline with a crisis, these ten pitfalls should be avoided:

1. Over-reacting
2. Failure to act
3. Bending the facts/lying
4. Lack of concern/empathy/sympathy
5. Affixing blame to another organization or person, or to your organization if not needed
6. Communicating too much or too little
7. Rushing to judgement
8. An absence of teamwork
9. Restriction of information to the internal audience
10. Failure to plan

The key to proper management of any crisis is to have all component in place when a crisis occurs. Because this is impossible to predict, the sooner the effort is instituted, the better you'll be. Also, it is critical to frequently revisit the plan, e.g. quarterly, to ensure all information is updated and the team remains prepared.

POST-CRISIS RECOVERY AND REVIEW

As the community begins to absorb the shock of a crisis in the days following the event, destinations and tourist-facing organizations have an opportunity to help cultivate a sense of communitywide strength and unity.

Given the distinct voice in the community, destination marketing organizations and tourism-facing businesses can help set the tone for the recovery. Destination leaders are well-positioned to send the message: the destination is safe, businesses are open, and visitors are welcome.

When to Reengage with the Public: Timing is Everything

Many destinations and tourism-facing organizations will limit their public communications during a crisis, rightly deferring to public officials and law enforcement for official statements and helping to share official information. This is a wise strategy during an initial outbreak, but it should not be indefinite. Eventually a destination marketing organization or tourism-facing organization should weigh in on the situation.

How to know when the timing its right…

1. **Track the Conversation Within the Media** – After a crisis, many will want to know how to help. Given a natural disaster, violent episode or event that impacts travel to the destination, may people will turn to social media to ask how they can get involved. This is an opportunity to thank the public for it ongoing concern and share ways they can help. This may be through making donations, or some other form of charity.

2. **Don't Pretend it Didn't Happen** – Jumping right back to business as usual will come across as detached or callous. In many cases, crises become a part of your destination's story and change to emerge stronger. Give yourself a transition period to return to your normal content, with stories, quotes and moments that inspire and remind people of why your destination or organization is great.

3. **Leverage Relationships** – Reaching out to your organization's customers and/or key stakeholders, including local business associations or colleagues in the private sector, will provide a window into the challenges they are facing and what role your organization can play in the recovery effort. Be sure to also check in with local business leaders outside your sector and government and emergency management officials to discuss ways you can create new partnerships to improve the overall response effort.

What to Say: Gauging Public Sentiment and Crafting the Right Message

As destinations and organizations prepare to relaunch their marketing and communications efforts, knowing what to say, how to say it and who should say it is critical. Depending on the crisis, some advertisement and message may no longer be appropriate. As your team begins to consider new messaging and statements, it is important to continue to assess the impact of the crisis and calibrate statement based on public sentiment.

Reaching out to residents and visitors – perhaps even through surveys and message testing can provide answers to key questions and help inform the destination's messaging, advertising, social media and public statement in the weeks and months ahead.

Here are some questions to consider as you reach out to the public:

- What do customer and residents think of the destination or organization?
- How has this opinion changes since the incident?
- What was the customer's/resident's response to the crisis?
- What do people know already about the crisis and what more do they want to know?
- What are residents' and visitors' top concerns or questions?
- What tone do they think local leaders should take?
- Who is best to carry that message? Who does the public want to hear from?
- What is the best platform to disseminate the message?

In the wake of a local crisis, destination and tourist-facing organizations have used answers to these questions to develop constructive ways to encourage visitors to return.

While there is no one "correct" response to a crisis, engaging with residents and taking stock of their concerns and questions will go a long way in helping the organization develop a compelling response and message that resonates with the public.

Reassessing and Improving the Crisis Plan

Once your organization develops a crisis plan, it should not be placed on the shelf only to be pulled out again the next time a crisis occurs. A crisis plan should be a living document and updated regularly.

1. **Review the plan frequently** – To ensure the plan stays update, the organization should identify a core group of staff members responsible for reviewing the plan. The team should meet a few times a year to analyze the plan, discuss what they have learned from recent incidents (in the destination or in other destinations) and decide what part of the plan need to be reconsidered.

2. **Make sure your plan includes a comprehensive list of contact information** – During the crisis, did you speak to any groups or individuals that were not on your original contact list? Now is a good time to add them. Make sure you have someone on a staff responsible for updating the contact list.

3. **Do not develop you plan in a vacuum** – No crisis plan should be developed in isolation. Countless destinations, tourist-facing organizations, law enforcement official and corporations have experience developing plans. Reach out to local partners and ask for their input and feedback on your organization's plan. Sparking a conversation about planning will leader to greater coordination during an actual crisis.

CREATE YOUR PLAN

II. YOUR PLAN

Now it's time for you to craft your own plan. This template will walk you through the steps required to develop your crisis communications plan.

PRE-CRISIS PLANNING

Background

Outline your organization's background and general industry information that will lay the foundation for the plan. We hope this method will be easily customizable for you- and that's the key. Please use this document as a first step to designing your crisis plan. You will surely have items you want to add and possibly delete to ensure this plan is right for your organization.

Start with an introduction that provides some information about your organization, its mission and how your organization interacts with the overall industry.

Select the Crisis Management Team

Remember this team is compromised of general management and governing body representatives. These representatives, while not directly involved in communicating with the public, must be in charge of preparing for and managing the crisis situation from an organizational perspective. Prepare your list in a way that best suits your needs but is also easily read.

GENERAL – the General is the person in charge. Ideally this person is not the media spokesperson as this role is to ensure all crisis response mechanisms proceed without interruption. The General can update stakeholders and be the point person at key meetings.

Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number ______________________________ Home cell number ____________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

SCRIBE – The Scribe takes notes at every meeting and works with the crisis communications team to ensure facts are correct and the general response of the team is recorded. The Scribe and the General should work hand in glove to ensure the process is fluid.

Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ____________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

COMMUNICATIONS LEAD – this person is the one who amalgamizes the information into messages for the stakeholders and media. This person manages the media outreach and constructs the messages delivered via social media. This person is not the spokesperson, but may act in that capacity should a secondary spokesperson be needed, or the size of the organization requires one person handle both responsibilities.

Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ____________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

ORGANIZATION SPOKESPERSON – this person speaks on behalf of the organization during media interviews, in public meetings and in conversations that occur with any of the publics during the crisis response. Ideally this person handles this responsibility only, however, should the size of the organization require a person to do double duty, this person also can be the Communications Lead.

Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ____________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

TEAM MEMBERS
Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ____________________

Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

Crisis Team Member – An organization can choose to have additional team members that will benefit, rather than hinder, the response. Each should be given a specific responsibility or stakeholder audience to manage. Should the entire Board of Directors be included, their role(s) should be very clearly outlined.

Name of team member ____
Title of team member ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ___________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

For each of communications, the Crisis Management Team should be included as a standalone text message group. Should text messaging not be available due to cell service outages, the group may be housed together throughout the crisis to ensure fluid communication.

Select the Crisis Communications Team

Name of key contact (media spokesperson, organization/organization CEO) ________________
Title of key contact ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ___________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

Name of secondary contact (public relations manager)
Title of secondary contact ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ___________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

Name of team member (additional manager/organization leaders)
Title of secondary contact ____
Work/day phone number____
Work Cell number _____________________________ Home cell number ____________________
Home Email Address ____
Alternative Contact Channel ____
Role definition ____
____

Add up to ten team members as necessary. Be sure that this list is updated as information and personnel changes. This team should be included as a text message group.

Create an Effective Public Presence

Select the Key Spokesperson

Base your selection on having the most appropriate person speak on behalf of the organization Is he/she?:

_________ Comfortable in front of a TV camera and with reporters

_________ Skilled in handling media

_________ Skilled in identifying key points

_________ Able to speak without using jargon

_________ Understanding and respectful of the role of the reporter

_________ Knowledgeable about the organization and the crisis at hand

_________ Able to project confidence to the audience

_________ Sincere

_________ Straightforward and believable

_________ Accessible to the media and to internal communications personnel who will facilitate media interviews

_________ Able to remain calm in stressful situations

…great, then you've picked a perfect spokesperson. If there are one or two areas in need of improvement you many want to get that person in front of a camera, so he/she can see and example of how they interview. You can then discuss how to improve.

Identify Key Audiences

Who do you want to get your message? This will vary somewhat depending on the nature of the crisis, however, you'll always want to include your key constituents and local media.

Key Constituents:

- Employees
- Employees' Families
- Board of Directors
- Membership
- Organization - related Committee heads
- City government
- County government

Local Media:

- City desk – or the editor that covers local news
- Business, Travel, Lifestyle, General editors – only communicate with if necessary to communicate your "back to normal" information. Your local – nearby major market – lifestyle, travel editor should, however, be kept apprised of the situation. You want to ensure he/she feels part of the loop – this to continue to maintain your relationship.
- TV stations' assignment editors
- Radio stations' news directors.

Secondary constituents:

- Sonoma County Tourism (we added this, so you won't forget us!)
- 400 Aviation Blvd. #500
- Santa Rosa, CA 95403
- cvecchio@sonomacounty.com

- Travel-related properties in your area

Secondary media (generally contact when situation is resolved): These outlets should be contacted only if the situation is large enough to warrant using them to relay your "back to normal" information to your target consumer audiences.

- Monthly lifestyle magazines
- Nearby major market media, if in a smaller market (ONLY if the situation warrants, otherwise contact when situation is resolved)

Compile Critical Organization Materials

You may want to designate a crisis folder that holds all these materials. That way they are all handy if needed. This will also help you determine your overall corporate positioning, so you are well prepared for questions about the foundation of your organization. Within the confines of a crisis, this information is for internal use. While many of these documents are ones you will offer to appropriate audiences, some of this information is confidential and should be shared only when necessary.

__________ Organization Mission Statement

__________ Organization Values Statement (if appropriate): Intrinsic values outlining organization's existence.

__________ Operating Statements (those statement of how the organization operates, i.e. operating days, hours, mechanical systems incorporated, etc. This is physical operations rather than intrinsic values.

__________ Key Public Financial Information: Banking/financial information. This is particularly important if the crisis involves the death of the president or COO. Locating these documents is imperative. This does not/should not be distributed freely, but on hand, just in case.

__________ Insurance organization contacts

__________ Organization fact sheet

__________ Human resources employee handbook

__________ Prepared general statement of concern

__________ Schematics of facilities, individual roles, etc.

Create Sample Press Materials

Do you have or are you prepared to draft?:

__________ Talking points – the positioning and statement the organization want to communicate

__________ Questions and answers

__________ Prepared Statements

__________ Internal audience – employees, Board of Directors

__________ External consumer

__________ Industry constituents

__________ Customers (as needed)

__________ Initial informational press release

__________ Status report depending on the length of the situation – as often as needed for as long as needed
__________ Post-crisis/back to normal press release

Create Critical Contact Lists

Do you have contact information for your local emergency management offices. Are you and is everyone on both the Crisis Management Team and Crisis Communications Team on the emergency notification systems?

__________ Local/State CalFire office(s)
__________ Local Police
__________ Local City Government
__________ County Government
__________ State Government
__________ U.S. Department of Homeland Security – local/regional offices
__________ News push alerts (local/statewide/national)

Be sure to have a contact list of all your key partners:

__________ Board of Directors
__________ Local/Regional Industry Associations
__________ Local Destination Marketing Organization
__________ Statewide Destination Marketing Organization

Do not rely on access to a computer for this information. Have this printed in an easily accessible folder in a location outside the office – the Crisis Management Team "General" should have all information at his/her fingertips.

Analyze the Situation – When is a crisis important enough to get involved?

As your organization considers its crisis plan, gaining agreement on when a situation will be escalated as a crisis is an imperative part of the planning process. While this will vary depending on the organization, key considerations may be:

__________ Does the situation impact visitors (both leisure and business) within the destination?
__________ Does the situation impact visitors who have plans to visit the destination?
__________ Will the situation have long-term impact on the destination or organization's brand?
__________ Does the situation involve serious physical injury or death to the staff or a visitor?

__________ Did/will the situation seriously and adversely impact investors or funding agencies?

__________ Would not responding seriously and adversely impact the organization's ability to achieve its core mission?

__________ Is responding at some level the "right thing to do?" ensuring alignment with the organization's mission, vision and values

At the onset of a situation, determine if it is:

Level 1:

__________ Illegal action against your organization or constituents (involve law enforcement agencies in handling crisis)

__________ Natural Disaster

__________ Public Health Emergency

__________ Act of Violence

__________ Incident of Terror (as identified by emergency management agencies)

__________ Death or Incapacitation of the Organization's CEO

Level 2:

__________ Social Unrest (if this results in significant loss of life, elevate to a Level 1 crisis)

__________ Accident or Death Involving a Visitor or Group of Visitors

__________ Human error

__________ Operational/Equipment Error or Malfunction (if this results in significant loss of life, elevate to a Level 1 crisis)

__________ Misuse of confidential information

__________ Errors of judgment

__________Other – explain

____

____

____

This will assist you in determining how you will react to the situation.

Remember: as you are examining the position it is important to consider the wide range of consequences (e.g., legal, financial, public relations, effect on administration, effects on operations).

CRISIS RESPONSE
PHASE 1
The First 24 Hours

The steps below will help you think through what your crisis plan should include. These steps are applicable in several situations, but it is recommended that you map out several scenarios so you are better prepared to respond. Each bullet represents a specific component to consider including in your own plan.

1. **Alert the Communications Management Team to review the situation**
   The first person to watch wind of a crisis situation could be scanning Twitter or taking a phone call, so be sure employees are trained on what to do if they suspect a crisis situation may be developing. The internal communications process will ensure the Crisis Management Team is informed as quickly as needed.

2. **Take stock of the situation – Bring together available members of the Crisis Team.**

   Key Staff: Crisis Management Team

   Meeting location and conference line information for the Crisis Management Team

   Questions for the Crisis Management Team to review may include:

   - What happened when and where?
   - Who is involved?
   - How involved should our organization be?
   - What is the current situation and how can we be helpful?
   - Are employees or their families affected?

   Confirming the lay of the land through additional questions helps ensure your answers to the above are as reliable as possible.

   - Do we have all the facts we need?
   - Are those facts confirmed by law enforcement, government sources or another official source?
   - If not, what were the sources of the information and is the information consistent across several agencies?
   - What information are we missing?

The Crisis Management Team should come away from the meeting with an idea on what the organization's public message should be. While it can finalize an official statement later, having a message it can share with key staff and other employees can help build alignment internally.

3. **Initiate the Crisis Plan**

At this point, you are putting your plan in motion. Keep in mind that sometimes the best response is not response, or a wait-and-see approach. Getting multiple viewpoints from the Crisis Management Team will help make a more informed decision about how to proceed.

Key Staff: Crisis Management Team

Conduct a first meeting of the Crisis Management Team.

Draft Meeting Agenda:

- Run through confirmed information and outstanding questions
- Discuss the organization's involvement
- Assign staff responsibilities on next steps
- Set next meeting or check-in of the Crisis Management Team

4. **Conduct Internal Outreach**

Your employees are your great asset in a crisis. Make sure everyone on the team has awareness of the current situation, where the organization stands, and what their responsibilities are.

Key staff: Crisis Management Team Scribe, Human Resources, Managers

Procedure for sharing notes from the Crisis Management Team meeting (share only with the Crisis Management Team, include additional staff as needed)

Outreach plan for all staff:

- Phone or text tree if email is down
- Staff expectations (don't just relay information, be clear about what you expect the team to do with the information)
- Attach crisis plan to any outreach so it is at their fingertips as a reference
- Crisis assignments, as determined by the Crisis Management team and department heads

5. **Remove Paid Advertisements/Social Media Outreach/Email Marketing**
   Destination marketing is almost always positive, aspirational, and fun – qualities that will feel tone deaf in a crisis scenario. Avoid becoming a victim of Twitter ire by removing any advertising that contradicts appropriate sentiment.

   Key staff: Marketing

   - List of current and planned advertising (digital, TV and radio, Print, out-of-home)
   - Contacts for advertising agencies or companies who have ability to update, pause or remove ads
   - Pause all social media activity
   - Based on recommendation from the Crisis Management Team
     - post acknowledgement message and/or repost content from official sources
     - determine what emails should be sent as initial/holding statements
     - update website homepage to reflect the situation
   - Put all scheduled marketing emails on hold

6. **Update Crisis Communications Hotlines**
   If your website or emails are not working the hotline function takes on more importance. With a small staff, a phone tree or group text is another option. Ensure all the numbers are stored in your phone.

   Key staff: Communications, Human Resources, Receptionist

   - Hotline number/email and instructions for updating the hotline
   - Draft hotline message for internal and external hotline numbers and main line voicemail
   - Draft text for automatic email message (response to inquires that go to any general inboxes)

7. **Confirm Website and Email Delivery Are Working**
   Many of the crisis response steps are moot if your website or email are down. Ensure all channels are working properly and that the communication you are sending are being received.

   Key staff: Website lead and backup; Email lead and backup

   Revert to prepared backup plan in the event office internet, website or email are down

8. **Finalize Initial Internal and External Messaging, Potential Timing of Subsequent Messaging**
   Do not start messaging from scratch in a crisis. It is much easier to update or edit existing language or already prepared statements, than to craft something out of nothing in the chaos of the moment.

   Key staff: Crisis Management Team Lead; Spokespersons; Communications; Marketing
   Draft holding content:

   - Media holding statement
   - Social media posts
   - Talking points for spokespersons
   - Website message

SUPPORT – Support local first responders, crisis management workers and organizations/individuals impacted

EDUCATE – Begin educating stakeholders, customers and other key constituents on the situation, ensuring truthful, updated information.

SELL – Halt all selling/marketing programming

PHASE 1

DAY 2 – END OF CRISIS

1. **Review website, Email and Social Media Channel Content**
   Your digital profile is where most audiences will see your responses. Ensuring you have timely, appropriate content is important for your brand. Cross-training employees in these areas and ensuring passwords are accessible to more than one person is critical if the lead is unavailable.

   Key Staff: Team to scan social channels for updates and new information (recommend more than one person, if possible); Web Update Lead and Backup; Email Update Lead and Backup.

   Action steps for social channels:

   - Continue to pause all planned social media activity
   - Based on the Crisis Management Team decision, continue to post progress via social and digital channels

2. **Reach Out to Local Stakeholders**
   Local stakeholders will have begun their own crisis response programs, so waiting a day until communicating offers a chance for all to get their plans determined and underway.

   Key Staff: Crisis Management Team; Communications/Community Engagement

   Identify stakeholder most applicable given the crisis
   Set-up communications timing and channels
   Determine ongoing connection

3. **Reach Out to International Offices**
   Check in with international offices to see how the situation is being reported in overseas markets. Your contacts there may have advice on how nest to communicate with international visitors.

   Key Staff: Crisis Management Team; International Sales/Marketing Team

   Begin communicating the appropriate messages via the appropriate channels.

4. **Reassess and Adjust as Necessary**
   After the first wave of responding to the crisis has passed, keep track of what worked, what didn't and what wasn't worth the time or energy. Continue to communicate according the most effective messages across the most efficient channels.

   Key Staff: Crisis Management Team

   Gather the Crisis Management Team to assess:

   - What new information have we learned and how does it affect what we are doing?
   - What is and is not working?
   - Are we spending time on the things that matter?
   - Should we relocate staff resources based on changing needs?
   - Are we being helpful or adding to the noise?

5. **Establish Regular Check-in Calls/Meetings With Stakeholders**
   These meeting will give your organization a change to share updated information on the crisis with local constituents

   Key Staff: Crisis Management Team; Leadership Team; Communications/Community Engagement

   - Invite local emergency management/first responders to the meeting/call to share updated information.
   - Allow opportunities for other tourist-facing organizations to share what they are doing to manage and mitigate the impact of the crisis.
   - Share local and national media coverage.
   - Provide your organization's next steps to help ensure everyone is working in lockstep.

6. **Identify Timing for the Open For Business Message**
   This will be mandated by the crisis. While others in the community may move to this sooner than you feel appropriate, ensure you enter this phase when it is most appropriate for your organization and your customers/stakeholders.

SUPPORT – Continue to support local first responders, crisis management workers and organizations/individuals impacted

EDUCATE – Erase any misperceptions/incorrect media reports. Continue educating stakeholders, customers and other key constituents on the situation, ensuring truthful, updated information.

SELL – Determine timing for the Open for Business Messaging. Craft marketing pieces/messages so they're ready to go when appropriate.

PHASE 2
Containment through Date TBD

After a crisis situation has stabilized, it may feel like your work is done. But, destinations and visitor-facing organizations pay a role in the recovery and renewal of their communities. Destinations can tap into a network for visitors who know and love the area to help rebuild. From donating supplies to sharing positive messages and images, these highly engaged visitors/brand champions are assets that your organization should engage.

1. **Disseminate Open for Business Messages Across all Marketing Channels**
   While continuing to correct any misperceptions, distribute Open for Business Messages across all communications channels. This can be done through paid, earned and owned channels.

   Key Staff: Marketing; Sales

   Disseminate the Open for Business messages determined in collaboration with the Crisis Management Team. Ensure all audiences are included:

   - Consumers
   - Meeting Planners
   - Travel Agents
   - Tour Operators
   - Industry Influencers
   - Consumer Media
   - Business Media
   - Trade Media

2. **Continue to Support Local Crisis Responders/Emergency Management Services**
   Create opportunities for your team/local industry members can contribute to rebuilding your community.

   Key staff: Communications

   Identify opportunities for connecting with local services aligned with reconstructing the physical and emotional components of the impacted community.

   - Provide or work with existing volunteer opportunities.
   - Generate fundraising programs.
   - Monitor ongoing opportunities and needs.

3. **Survey Customer/Partner Sentiment**
   Identifying ongoing perception of customers and local business is imperative to informing "Phase 3" marketing programming. Survey questions may include:

Customers:

What impact do customers perceive occur as a result of the crisis?

How has this opinion changed since the incident?

How have travel decisions been impacted by the crisis?

What do people know already about the crisis and what more do they want to know?

What are visitors' top concerns or question?

Local Businesses:

Has business been impacted by the crisis? If so, to what extent?

What questions have been asked by customers?

How is the business being portrayed via social and digital channels?

What platforms have been used to disseminate information regarding the crisis?

Have bookings changed due to the crisis? If so, how?

SUPPORT – Identify ways to give back to local first responders, crisis management workers and organizations/individuals impacted

EDUCATE – Continue to educate stakeholders, customers and other key constituents on the situation, ensuring truthful, updated information. Survey customers and local businesses to inform marketing/communications programs.

SELL – Disseminate the Open for Business Messaging. Identify timing for "back to normal" sales and marketing programming.

PHASE 3
POST-CRISIS RECOVERY AND REVIEW

After the situation has been resolved, the destination and organization are ready to return to normal business, don't forget to do two critical things: continue to monitor and assess organization performance.

1. **Continue to Monitor**
   The organization should continue to monitor media coverage and business performance for the next appropriate time period. Respond to the coverage if needed.

   Anniversaries may mean the media will again cover the crisis, so be prepared to pre-empt and manage that timeframe.

   Continue to survey local businesses to determine if activity has returned to normal. If not, support the business through specific social media, promotions or other communications outreach to generate awareness of that business sector.

2. **Assess Organization's Crisis Management Performance**

   Review your organization's performance a convene stakeholders to get their feedback on your organization's response (ensure this is an open process where people cab delivery critical feedback.)

   Questions might include:

   How well did your each your target audiences and what could you have done to communicate more effectively?

   Did you messaging work as intended? Are there elements that were misinterpreted or that resonate well?

   How has your brand been influenced by the crisis? Did your actions:

   - Improve brand perception
   - Adversely impact brand perception
   - Make no impact on brand perception

   Analyze available metrics to understand how the public/target audiences engages with your destination during the crisis. Evaluate this through:

   - Social media metrics
   - Google analytics
   - Anecdotal feedback from local businesses/partners

3. **Assess Media Coverage**
   Revise communications materials in your crisis plan accordingly and run spokespersons through media training again based on what you learned.

   What did they quote/cite that disseminated from your organization?

   What were the key elements picked up most by the media?

   At what point did the media pick-up your key messages and use your spokesperson(s) as destination leaders?

   What are the opportunities to communicate better with the media?

4. **Recognize the Efforts of Staff and the Crisis Management Team**
   Members of your team were likely logging long hours and going above and beyond throughout the crisis. Find a way to show appreciate you and recognition of their efforts.

5. **Revise the crisis plan based on experience.**
   Don't take too much time to review the plan and revise it based on the experience gained during the most recent crisis.

   Be sure to review the plan, update the information and train staff at least annually.

SUPPORT – Determine ongoing communication opportunities with local emergency management and first responder teams.

EDUCATE – Monitor continuing media coverage and social media conversations. Educate customers on any misinformation.

SELL – Return to normal sales, marketing and communications efforts.

APPENDIX MATERIALS

<u>SAMPLE CHECKLIST AND CONTACT SHEET</u> (for employees) this sheet, customized for your situation, should be at every employee's workstation.

If you encounter an emergency, please follow the instructions below:

EMPLOYEES

1. Remain calm.
2. If physical injuries have occurred, contact the proper authorities:
   Emergency rescue
   Local Police (insert number)
   Local Fire Department (insert number)
   Local Poison Control (insert number)
3. Notify immediate supervisor (insert name) at (insert all contact information)
4. Gather information quickly. (What happened, when and to whom. Injuries. Damage. How did this situation happen?)
5. Provide facts to authorities and authorized associates only. Do not give information to anyone you don't know or any external callers.
6. If the press calls or reporters arrive direct them to the organization's spokesperson. He/she will have a prepared statement to release.

MANAGERS (and employees as appropriate)

1. Report the incident to the Crisis Management Team General (insert name) at (insert all contact information)
2. Provide facts to authorities and authorized associates only. Do not give information to anyone you don't know or any external callers.
3. If the press calls or reporters arrive direct them to the organization's spokesperson. He/she will have a prepared statement to release. Do not speak to the media without the presence of a spokesperson.

TALKING POINTS GUIDELINES

Talking points are succinct statements that an organization wants to make to the public regarding a situation. In general, when speaking to any public, these are the positioning statement that put the organization in its best light. Crafting talking points will help any spokesperson remain focused during what might be an uncomfortable or nerve-wracking situation.

You may want to consider writing crisis talking points that include the following:

1. The general facts of the situation
2. How the situation will impact/has impacted operations
3. General message of concern
4. The timeline for information dissemination
5. How other entities are involved
6. What the organization is doing to overcome/combat the situation

As you can tell, this is almost identical to the information found in the prepared statement and press materials. Talking points give you a chance to put a face and feeling into the information disseminated.

HOLDING STATEMENT

With as much analysis as time allows, the Crisis Team should develop a company position on the situation. The Crisis Communications Team will then draft position statement that briefly describe where the organization stands on the issue (and why it has taken that stand) and outlines how the company will address the issue.

____________________ is currently investigating reports that a ________________ has taken place at _______________________.

(Name of Organization) is in contact with ___________________ and its representatives to establish the fact of the incident. ______________________ has full contingency plans to deal with such situations, and these are now being activated.

______________’s primary concern is to help resolve the issue at minimum (disruption) to (the public/employees/customers) and we will publish a statement once the facts are known.

Quote: “We are investigating the (situation) right now and assure you that we are doing everything to address it. The company is committed not only to protecting the health and safety of its employees, immediate neighbors, and community, but also to maintaining an open flow of communication to internal and external groups, to alleviate concerns about the situation.”

SAMPLE PREPARED STATEMENT – SAMPLE CRISIS

(Organization) has taken (Action) at the request of the County Combined Health District, the State Department of Health and the State Department of Agriculture. There is a potential food borne illness that may be linked back to our ___________.

Twenty people came down with food poisoning the same day they visited ______________. It is not known how, or if, these people are ill because of something that happened here, but to be safe we are taking this precaution.

As of Tuesday, December 17th, both an independent lab and the State Department of Agriculture show negative results on tests we have done on our _____________________ products. We continue to test products and every member of our staff.

_____________________ is working closely with public health officials to find and isolate the cause of the food borne illness if it originated with us, and immediately correct it if a problem exists. We are in contact with the public health officials on a daily, and even hourly basis. It's a lot of work to isolate a potential problem, and we are doing everything we can to help.

_________________ has provided________________ to our customers for nearly 50 years and have never had a problem with food safety. The Smith Family wants everyone to know we are working hard to earn and keep our customers' trust. We maintain high standards and strict practices in food safety. The safety of our customers will remain our highest priority.

If you have any questions, please contact John Smith at 555-555-1234 or jsmith@companyname.com

John Smith
CEO

SAMPLE FORMAL STATEMENT

___________________ has confirmed that an incident (situation) has taken place at ________________. The known facts of the situation are (who, what, when, where and nature of the organization's involvement.)

The company is currently working with (name of organization[s]) to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, __________________________ is taking steps to notify all its customers and a special hotline has been set-up at (phone number) for inquiries about employees or visitors. All employees and emergency officials are responding, and full contingency procedures are now in place.

(Quote): "You have my assurance that we are doing everything in our power to resolve the situation, and we will continue to provide detailed reports as the facts are confirmed." stated (company spokesperson, title, organization).

PRELIMINARY EMPLOYEE STATEMENT

_________________ has confirmed that an incident has taken place at ___________________. The known facts of the situation are (when, where and nature of the incident or the organization's involvement.)

The organization is currently working with (appropriate agencies) to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

In situations such as this, the company's priority is the health and safety of its employees, immediate neighbors and our community. We will keep you fully informed as new information becomes available. This situation (describe how it relates to the employees, i.e. 'poses no threat to your safety or operations, 'will require changes to our operating schedule.' etc.) Please (describe action employees should undertake, i.e. 'continue work as usual' or 'see your supervisor for your new work schedule,' etc.)

As a reminder, employees should not discuss this situation with anyone outside the company. This includes family members, media, visitors, neighbors and friends. Please refer all inquires to (insert name and title) at (numbers/e-mail addresses).

SAMPLE ORGANIZATION FACT SHEET

COMPANY NAME Background information

COMPANY NAME, Inc.

Locations:	XXXX Main St, Santa Rosa, CA – Headquarters XXXX East Main St., Santa Rosa, CA – East Side Location XXXX Main St, Santa Rosa, CA – Marketing Building
Business:	Insert company information/overview. (1-3 paragraphs providing company overview, summary of current operations and description of various sites.) May also include hours/seasons of operations.
Senior Management	Name, Title Name, Title
Employment	XXX Employees at XXX locations (nationwide, statewide)
History	Insert brief company history. (1-2 paragraphs)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE – A CRISIS HAS OCCURRED

Company Letterhead

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: John Doe
Acme Toy Company
Phone: (xxx)-xxx-xxxx
Cellular:(xxx) xxx-xxxx

(HEADLINE HERE)
Insert subhead here, if necessary

Santa Rosa, CA (month 11, 2018) – A _____________ at ___________________ involving ____________________ occurred today at ________________________. The incident is under investigation and more information will be forthcoming.

(For instance):

An explosion at 1210 Market street, the main plant for Acme Toy Company occurred today at 3 p.m. Acme is working closely with the local authorities. The incident is under investigation and (company name) will provide more information as it becomes available.

You could put down a definitive time for the next news conference or release or information if you know it, but it is not necessary. This will not solve your problems but may buy you enough time to prepare for the next news conference or release.

You could also add information if it is available such as the number and degree of injuries, what hospital injured guests/workers were taken to and any other pertinent information that is available.

Once again, this information should be definitive and not speculative, verify everything you say. This will help your credibility in the long run.

BACK TO NORMAL/POST EVENT RELEASE

Company Letterhead

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: John Doe
Family Winery
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
Cellular:(xxx) xxx-xxxx

(HEADLINE HERE)

Winery Tasting Room Reopens After Water Main Break

SANTA ROSA, CA (Month XX< 2018) – Family Winery will reopen Monday following a water main break that forced the park to close Friday afternoon.

(Details): The tasting room was closed Friday after a water main break. Employees worked throughout the weekend cleaning all public spaces. The city has repaired the water main and Department of Health inspectors have assessed the water quality and approved the tasting room for re-opening.

(Quote): “We are very thankful to the members of our community and various city agencies who teamed up to help us quickly fix the problem,” said winery owner Bob Smith. “We are grateful that no one was injured in the incident and are now ready to get back to business.”

(Boilerplate/Company description): Family Winery, headquartered in Geyserville, CA, is a family-owned business that has been creating world class wines since 1998. The company operates three wineries in Sonoma County with a tasting room, special event space and offers seasonal wine dinners and other special events. Family Winery employs 50 individuals.

Be sure to include contact information for where individuals may call with any further questions.

###

SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

It is important to anticipate likely questions from the media and third parties and be prepared with appropriate answers in advance**. It is also important that your spokespersons recognize when it is unnecessary or inappropriate to answer questions.**

Following is an outline of many of the most likely questions, along with suggestions for handling them.

Q. **What Happened? When?**
 your answers short and factual. Provide limited detail. Stick to the standby statement until verified information is available. Do not speculate!

Q. **What caused the incident?**
It's generally best to avoid answering the question directly. Many lawsuits have been based on erroneous statements made to the media during a crisis. Instead, say that, "We're investigating the situation carefully, and we'll provide complete details as soon as they're available."

Q. **Were there fatalities? Who? How many?**
Confirm if there were fatalities. Keep the reply short, but be sure to express the company's sincere sadness at the tragedy. Out of concern and respect for the privacy of the family members, do not divulge names of victims until families have been notified. Do not admit guilt or wrongdoing on the company's part. Do not suggest that the employee was somehow at fault.

Q. **Were there any injuries? What Kind?**
Keep your answers general in nature; describe injuries as minor, moderate or severe. Do not provide names of victims until families have been notified. Do not attempt to downplay any injuries; you'll be forced to change your story later and the media will question your credibility.

Q. **Was there an evacuation? Why or Why not?**
Keep the response factual and low-key. Emphasize that your top priority is to protect the health and safety of its employees. Established procedures were followed.

Q. **Were the neighbors or the community in any danger at the time of the incident?**
(Company names) has comprehensive risk assessment and emergency procedures in place. If the safety of the neighboring community had been a concern, proper

notification and evacuation procedures would have been followed in full cooperation with local fire, rescue, and police emergency services.

Q. **Are (company's name)'s employees/the public currently as risk? Will there be an evacuation?**

(Company name) has comprehensive risk assessment and emergency procedures in place. If the safety of the company's employees had been a concern, proper notification and evacuation procedures would have been followed in full cooperation with local fire, rescue, and police emergency services.

Q. **What government agencies are involved?**

(Company name) followed all required procedures for reporting the incident to the appropriate authorities. The agencies involved included (detail).

Q. **What has been the amount of damage? Can we bring our cameras in? Why not?**

Do not provide a dollar figure. Briefly outline the area affected without a great deal of detail. Simply refer to the fact that there will be an assessment of damage to the area. For security reasons, cameras are allowed in designated areas of the building only (e.g., media center).

Q. **Has anything similar ever happened before? Describe the company's record.**

If possible, put the answer in the proper context. For example, if there is a fire or explosion, refer to the number of years worked without an accident. It may also help to speak in terms of industry-wide standards, practices and incidents.

Q. **What are you doing to address the situation?**

Be reassuring. Explain that the company is doing everything possible, has implemented the correct procedures using highly trained and skilled employees, and is fully cooperating with the appropriate authorities and emergency services.

Q. **Has the facility been shut down? How long will it remain closed? When do you expect normal operations to resume?**

Provide limited detail. Do not provide a date whereby normal operations will resume; this sets an expectation and immediately triggers media to note a follow-up story.

Q. **When will the crisis be resolved? When will you have an answer?**

Refuse to speculate. Do not give any sort of time frame as to when the crisis will be resolved or when further details will be provided. Promise to keep interested parties informed "as soon as we can," Then, be sure to follow through on that promise.

Q. **What safety/security measure and precautions were in place to prevent this from happening? Why did it happen then? Are these measures standard for the industry?**

Provide details on safety/security measures in place and emphasize that these measures exceed government regulations and general industry practices. Cite (company's name)'s history of safety in all aspects operations. Assure that (company name) is working closely with the appropriate authorities and emergency services to ensure the health and safety of all involved.

Q. **What would happen if … (speculation)???**

Calmly but firmly refuse to speculate! It serves no purpose, and it can damage your credibility if you later must revise the story.

Q. **What are you going to do to ensure that this doesn't happen again? How safe will this facility be in the future?**

(Company name) will conduct a thorough review of the situation and our response. In addition, prevention measures and procedures will be reviewed with all involved. As needed, procedures will be modified and there will be additional investment in training and equipment to prevent a future incident.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS: THE GROUND RULES

These are the ground rules of handing media interviews. All company media spokespeople are advised to use these as refresher notes in the five minutes before going into an interview.

1. Listen carefully to the question and answer it.

Not as obvious as it seems. Most interviewees are too busy thinking of their own answer to listen closely to the question. Having answered it, always look to "bridge" to a point in your own favor if the question is along a line that permits it.

2. Answer the question without waffling.

The question deserves as direct and answer as you can muster. Get to the heart of the matter. It is the best way to get your information across. Don't be evasive it shows.

3. Ask for clarification or to have the question repeated.

Some questions are tough, not because the answers are difficult, but because they are unclear or ambiguous or put in the context of a statement. Don't be intimidated and try to wade your way through. Ask the questioner either to repeat or restate his question more clearly.

4. When faced with the multiple question…

When a question has a number of parts – or may in fact be several questions – answer the <u>one</u> that is most relevant from your standpoint, then let the interview re-ask the others.

5. If you don't know the answer to the question, simply say so.

Opting out by saying "I don't know but I'll find out" is perfectly valid, but you must be as good as your word and follow through with your promise.

6. If you get a question you don't wish to answer, say so.

Occasionally, there will be one or more reasons why you choose not to answer a question (for instance, commercial or legal sensitivity). Respond directly, without batting an eyelid "I'm sorry but I am not in a position to give you that information" and explain why.

7. Tell the truth, even if it hurts. And stick to the facts.

Concealment or lying will neither be forgotten nor overlooked. If there is truth to tell, tell it. If you can't answer truthfully – that is, you have the answer but can't give it – respond as if it were a question you don't wish to answer. "I'm sorry bit I am not in a position to give that information" – and explain why.

8. When the truth may be damaging to your interests…

Try to put perspective on it by mentioning something positive that relates to your answer. For example, "yes, this is a tragic incident. Our health and safety procedures are very stringent and nothing of this nature has ever happened in our 10-year history". Or "We have personally contacted the x, 000 people affected by this."

9. Score positive points whenever you can.

While you should always come directly to the point and not "beat around the bush," always look to tag on a point in your own favor where appropriate. Additional information is always welcome, as long as the main question is dealt with squarely.

10. "No Comment" means "You are absolutely right."

Not only is "no comment" a high-handed way of dealing with the question, it is almost always a dead give-away that the premise of the questioner is absolutely correct.

11. Avoid "in my personal opinion."

Prefacing an answer by this qualifier does not protect you. It can be deleted in editing and what follows becomes an "official" answer.

12. Don't be intimidated by a questioner.

If interrupted in mid-stream, or contradicted, stand your ground! Politely but firmly tell him that you would like to finish the thought before dealing with another question. But make sure that you are dealing with the original question in a direct, concise way. Don't get into a miniature speech.

13. Let the interviewer worry about "dead air".

When you have answered the question, stop. If the interviewer is slow with the next question, h/she may be trying to provoke you into saying more than you had intended. Remember to speak in "sound bites." Most sound bites last :05 or less. Remember your talking points and stick to these. Don't be tempted to say more than is needed.

14. Say the most important things first – then expand.

As obvious as that may sound, bear in mind that we are conditioned to do just the opposite; to develop our reasoning and then make our point. In dealing with a question, it is the point you make first that will be remembered and, hopefully, quoted. Any necessary supportive reasoning should therefore follow the point.

15. Challenge innuendo before answering the question.

Questions are often prefaced or "loaded" or "leading" by innuendo, or faulty or prejudiced percepts. Get rid of such innuendo first so that the question is tailored to the terms on which you can answer it.

16. Don't repeat offensive phrases or words contained in the question – even to deny them.

This gives credibility to the offensive phrases and words – and becomes a part of your answer. The answer may even turn up in print without the question. You've been duped into allowing words to be put in your mouth.

17. Stay within your field of knowledge.

Don't hazard an answer if the question is clearly outside your area of knowledge. Even qualifying yourself as a non-expert and offering "an opinion" may backfire.

18. Speak from the standpoint of the public's interest, but don't duck your self-interest in the matter.

Your audience knows that while you may be acting and serving the public interest, there is always self-interest in what we do or claim to do. If challenged, admit it or, at least, don't sneak it under the rug.

19. If you don’t want a statement quoted, don’t make it.

“Off the record...” has a way of coming back to haunt you in the form of further questions, or in the form of providing a peg on which a story angle can be developed, or in the form of a report where the source is obvious, though unnamed.

20. Don’t argue with a questioner – and never lose your cool.

You can easily find yourself giving out much more information than you had intended and, at the same time, provoke hostility that will undermine your position with the audience – or provoke a sharp questioner or media representative into keeping you off balance with potentially disastrous results.

HANDLING MEDIA INTERVIEWS

As has been said throughout this plan, finesse in handling the media is one of the most important aspects of handling a crisis. This is not an effort that one becomes an expert at overnight. If you feel nervous about working with the media, you may want to practice interviewing with a co-worker until you feel confident at answering probing questions.

Preparing for the interview:

- Prepare talking points in advance of any interview. Select points you want to communicate and feel very comfortable in discussing in several different ways.
- You'll want to stick to these points throughout the interview (see Talking Points in this Appendix)
- Ensure all materials are readily available and can be easily located during a crisis
- Practice answering tough questions and develop likely questions and answers (see Questions and Answers in the Appendix)
- Determine your timeframe/time limits
- Be familiar with the room/space that will be used
- Do meet with the crisis team to ensure talking points are well understood by all

Interview Follow-up:

- You can ask to check technical points, but do not ask to see advance copy of the story
- Never try to go over reporter's head to stop a story
- Ensure information is given to reporters, however a thank you note is highly acceptable

Media/Spokesperson Timeline:

Interaction with the media will vary depending on the severity of the situation. You will not always have to conduct a press conference, for example. In situations deemed as a low-level crisis, you won't want to open your organization to the scrutiny of a press conference. Information can be disseminated to the media via e-mail or fax.

1st media contact – as soon after the crisis as is appropriate and possible

- Read prepared statement
- Show concern for all audiences involved (employees, visitors, other organizations, etc.)
- If possible, give dates/times/locations for upcoming press conferences

2nd media contact – within 24 hours of the crisis (you may have several similar press conferences within 24 hours of the crisis depending on the size of the situation)

- Provide both verbal and written updated information (only as detailed as necessary) about the crisis and its cause(s).
- Instruct the media on gathering visual images. Provide file images of the organization as needed.
- Relate how information will be disseminated, give the media a timeline as to the information that will be available and when
- Offer interviews to the media

Additional media contact at this level will continue until the critical phase of the crisis has passed.

3rd media contact – or upon completion of the crisis

- Provide wrap-up press release
- Discuss how organization successfully handled the crisis

Follow-up

- Track media clips
- Have internal meeting to discuss how the crisis was handled – look at both positive and negative aspects. Craft improvement plan.

TELEVISION INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Following are tips for handling TV interviews. All company media spokespeople are advised to glance through these before going into a television interview situation.

In the Studio:

- Treat taping the same as live, assume no editing.
- Assume you are always on camera when in the studio before and after the interview.
- Always look to the interviewer and not to the camera.
- Remain seated at conclusion of interview until asked to leave.
- Avoid “defensive” body language of folded arms or crossed legs.
- Avoid fiddling with hands or nervous jittering of legs, etc.
- Neat appearance - avoid loud colors.

On- site Confrontation:

- Don’t look at the camera directly, instead refer to the reporter.
- Try not to look grim. A relaxed face helps offset a crisis.
- Be very polite. Answer brief questions if an organized location cannot be set up and if scene permits.
- Tell media that a news briefing will be held later if you are not prepared.
- If the media is covering a confrontation, the best course of action is merely to carry out your duty and then have a news conference in another location to avoid a shouting match.

The basic rule is to try to shift the scene of the interview to a quiet location away from the crisis and possible interveners.

RADIO INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Following are tips for handling radio interviews. All company media spokespeople are advised to glance through these before embarking on radio interviews.

Over the phone:

- Arrange a callback time that's convenient and which allows for advanced preparation.
- Tape your answers to questions.
- Have an issues/answers list before you with any exact wording written down for difficult subjects.
- Block other telephone calls.
- Have someone ensure you are not disturbed.
- Speak slowly and distinctly.
- Have a pad and pencil handy to note any questions.
- Assume that everything, including the preliminary discussions, may eventually be part of the interview
- Be prepared for an interview lasting up to five minutes and perhaps later edited to 2-3 minutes.
- Always assume the interview may be "live".

On-Site Confrontation (in addition to the above):

- Suggest an organized conference if large numbers.
- Indicate when and where a statement will be made to give you time to prepare and defuse the crisis atmosphere.
- Be very polite.

PRINT INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Following are tips for handling newspaper and magazine interviews. All company media spokespeople should use these as a "crib sheet" in advance of interviews.

Over the phone:

- Call back for the actual interview at the agreed time after your preparation is complete.
- Tape your answers.
- Repeat important information such as figures.
- Have complete and correct spelling of key names and other briefing notes (key messages) ready at hand.
- Invite the reporter to call back later if there is more information needed or offer to call back yourself if you need to obtain some new facts.

On Site Confrontation:

- The same rules apply for radio or TV at crisis locations.
- Be polite, answer a few questions, but while being co-operative, indicate that you wish to give more time to them by holding a briefing session later at a certain time and place.

SPOKESPERSON PREPARATION/TRAINING

Dealing with the media can be challenging, especially during a crisis situation. Therefore, an initial training and subsequent rehearsals are necessary to help the spokesperson(s) prepare.

It is important, at the onset of the crisis, that the spokesperson, backup and advisors spend some time rehearsing prepared statements and answers to possible “tough” questions that may be asked by reporters. If possible, similar rehearsals should be conducted prior to each media interview, briefing or news conference. It is also important to anticipate and practice new questions as the story evolves.

It’s better to over-prepare than to be surprised by the depth of questioning by the media. If other issues facing the organization are also present at the time of the crisis, be prepared to answer these as well.

The Communications/Public Relations staff should prepare questions and answers for the practice sessions. These questions and answers should be for internal use only and not for distribution outside the organization. You can use the same questions and answers that you’ve prepared for the media interview, as appropriate.

One word of warning in your role as spokesperson: remember that you are the face of the organization and first impression are critical. As an information conduit, if you do nothing more than show concern for the public and for your employees in your first press interaction, you are already on the right track. The outcome of expressing concern and generating good will at the consumer level is securing the loyalty of your customers and employees by taking the initiative to share information with them. If your employees and customers don’t feel like insiders, they are going to act like outsiders.

Have your prepared statement on hand so it can be used to make an initial general response to the media when knowledge about the crisis first becomes known on a widespread basis or by reporters.

As the crisis progresses and new information and facts become available, it is also advisable to develop prepared statements to be made by the spokesperson at the onset of any media interview, briefing or news conference.

These prepared statements also be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information but are not represented at news conferences or briefings. The statement can also be set by FAX or e-mail upon request.

HINTS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE SPOKESPERSON

Do's

- Use a full script with LARGE TYPE for easy reading
- Leave wide margin for notes for yourself
- Leave pages unstapled for easier handling at podium
- Highlight and mark your script to guide your delivery
- Time your presentation to fit the program schedule of the group you will address
- Practice: Read it aloud using a mirror and tape recorder until it sounds like you are talking, not reading
- Be sure you have the facts about your audience-size, contact person's name, facility, etc.
- Based on your audience and your presentation, determine what, if any, equipment you will use. If you are not familiar with the equipment, contact the communications department to arrange a briefing on how to use slide projector, video players, or overhead equipment
- When you arrive at your engagement, be at least 15 minutes early
- Check lighting to podium to be sure you can read
- When you are speaking, stand erect and direct voice toward audience
- Speak loudly, slowly and distinctly
- Establish eye contact (or appear to do so) with audience from time to time
- When you are answering questions, remain friendly, cool-headed and confident
- Answer only the questions asked and do so as succinctly and clearly as possible
- Remember that you do not always have to know everything. You can say "I will have to check that out for you, please see me after the meeting"
- Avoid allowing one person to dominate the questions by moving on: "Thank you for your interest. I'll be glad to talk to you about your concerns after the meeting. Right now, let's see if anyone else has questions for the group."
- When you are finished with your presentation, remain long enough to give individuals an opportunity to talk with you
- Ensure arrangements are made for distributing information materials to the group, if requested/appropriate

Don'ts

- Decide you are better "off the cuff" – almost no one is
- Use type that is too small to read with a dim light and margins too narrow for notes
- Leave too little time to practice adequately
- Be late

- Fail to check your equipment
- Mumble your remarks to the podium
- Avoid eye contact with your audience
- Speak too loudly into the microphone
- Allow yourself to wander away from your prepared text
- Tell an unprepared anecdote or joke, or make “top of mind” remarks
- Speak longer than time allotted
- When you are answering questions, become defensive or emotional
- Assume that tough questions are personal
- Answer more than the questions posed
- Allow one person to dominate the questions period

GUIDELINES FOR CUSTOMER/TRAVEL INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION

Communicating with external audiences (such as customers and the travel industry,) is important, however, such communications should be dealt with differently than with the media and the key public. It is not important that these constituents know the extent of the details, and the level of communication will depend on the seriousness of the crisis. In many instances, it is not necessary to notify these audiences of the situation at all. Use your best judgement.

One of the guiding principles of any crisis policy is that the human dimension is more important that the immediate business implications. With that in mind, below are some guidelines to follow when communicating with customers and the travel industry.

Draw up a customer statement and ensure it is cleared by the Strategist and Team Director.

Make sure anything you say to customer/industry member is in line with media statements. Journalists may pose as customers to see if the company knows more than it is saying.

Be honest with customers. If there is a problem, let them know. If the timing of the resolution of the problem is not known, promise to keep customers and the travel industry informed.

If the police, or another key entity, are dealing with a matter, be sure you know that all parties are in agreement prior to releasing any information.

Only make promises you know you can keep. This may be a proviso that something will take place once the current situation has been resolved.

Keep all customer/industry communication carefully logged so follow-up actions and agreements with customers are carried out as accurately as possible.

TEMPLATE FOR WRITTEN CUSTOMER ALERT

Customer relations are paramount in a crisis – depending on the crisis, the level of communication can vary. However, if visitors are directly impacted, timely information is imperative. A visitor help-line, set up within the first couple hours of a crisis will help alleviate immediate concerns. Depending on the flexibility of the organization's website, this information can be relayed there as well.

It is important that within 24-48 hours all visitors and potential visitors (local, national and international as appropriate) should have received notification. This notification should:

Reassure them that the situation is under control.

Demonstrate the same high quality of customer services and care that is shown in normal working conditions.

Give accurate advice on any change to service.

Indicate where visitors can go for further help.

Those that you will want to ensure receive notification include: season ticket holders, meeting planners, group tour planners, etc. as suit your needs.

While you want to be sure information is clearly communicated, you also do not want to scare visitors planning an upcoming vacation or business trip to your area, provided safety is not an issue. If the crisis is such, i.e. a flood, that prevents visitors from traveling to your area for a specific time, it is best to notify them of that timeframe.

SAMPLE CUSTOMER LETTER

The following letter is designed to be the basis for a customer notification letter and will generally only be sent to those such as meeting planners, or group tour operators with planned travel to your area:

Company Letterhead

Date

Dear xxx,

You probably have heard reports in the media about (situation.) As a valued customer of (organization), you may be concerned about these reports. I am therefore writing to reassure you personally that (organization) has the situation under control.

We have full contingency procedures to deal with such an occurrence and these have now been activated. (State if appropriate)

If, for any reason, further development occur that mean we cannot fulfill our normal standard of service obligation to you, I will ensure that you are informed immediately.

In the meantime, if you have any other questions or concerns, we have also set-up a special customer support help line at (number).

Thank you for your continued support.

Name
Title

EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR SONOMA COUNTY TOURISM INDUSTRY
KEY TIPS

Crisis management is best done when a few key tips are observed:

Prevent

Asses your site and your facility. While you may know every inch of your property, it is essential to carefully assess you site periodically with specific scenarios and/or threats in mind.

Conduct regular inspections of your site, paying close attention to accident hazards, locations where packages may be left out of the siteline of employees, dead ends, hiding spaces for potential trespassers, chemical hazards, etc. Take these vulnerabilities into consideration when developing your emergency plan.

Prepare

Develop and practice an evacuation plan. Work with local emergency management experts to identify and create efficient evacuation routes and procedures.

Appoint a crisis team. One of the most important factors in managing a crisis is having an appointed leader and spokesperson in case of emergencies. This leader (or team) is responsible for executing the crisis plan and responding to media inquiries. Establish clear roles and responsibilities for executing the crisis plan and responding to media inquiries.

Train the crisis team. Because this team will be visible to media and in control of emergency situations, be sure they know what to do in all imaginable scenarios. Not only should this team be required to memorize emergency numbers, but should also have necessary training for working with media and answering difficult questions.

Make arrangements for an alternative location for crisis management in case your facility is destroyed or evacuated by officials.

Establish internal and external communication mechanisms. Formulate phone trees, email chains and social media protocols that include names, titles, email, phone and fax numbers. Keep these lists current. You want to be able to access these within minutes.

Evaluate your current policies, procedures and security measures. After consulting local and statewide agencies, you may deem it necessary to increase your site's security procedures or implement new policies to keep employees and visitors safe.

Develop a comprehensive plan and steps for contacting public safety officials in the case of a traditional crisis such as a fire or accident, as well as biological, chemical and other terrorist activities. This plan also should include emergency evacuation procedures.

Develop an emergency checklist to be circulated among employees. (See Appendix A). Plan frequent employee briefings regarding procedures to follow in a crisis.

If you already have an emergency and/or media plan, review it and use practice drills periodically to ensure effectiveness and familiarity. Also consider conducting a vulnerability audit of your current plans to identify any threats being overlooked.

Ensure your property has the proper levels of insurance to sustain operations and, if needed, to rebuild given current market conditions.

Develop crisis procedures for visitors including evacuation, communications and emergency management/hospital locations. Post in a place that is easy to find, but does not provide a constant reminder of the potential threat. Gauge this for each business.

Consider developing a management succession plan. Should the crisis result in the loss of a leader, the organization cannot lose time determining leadership. This should include having all essential records – banking, insurance, personnel and associated passwords stored in the cloud so accessible should they be needed.

Meet with law enforcement and emergency preparedness officials including police, fire and your area's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) to assure your plan is consistent with their response policies and procedures.

Respond

The first 24 hours following a crisis incident is the most critical. Because of the likely emotion and stress surrounding the crisis, the response should be one that is well practiced and informed.

Remain calm.

Assess the situation (refer to Appendix A).
Identify if anyone is injured. If so, take care of that person(s) first.
Notify the crisis team – allow team to carry out crisis procedures.
Notify family members of those injured.
Assess the extent of the damage.

Recover

Return to normal business as soon as possible. Regaining a sense of normalcy will be important to both employees and visitors.

Ensure all communications channels (traditional media, social media, employee talking points) are monitored. Correct misinformation as soon as it occurs. Preempt continued misinformation by assessing the messaging and determining the next iteration. Deliver messaging that continues to position your organization or destination as “in control.”