



Crisis Communication Plan

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Module Summary

- In-depth discussion of the phases of a crisis
- Gaining acceptance for the role of communication
- Elements of your plan
- Nine steps of crisis response
- Surviving the first 48 hours
- Exercise: Consequences of an incomplete plan

Precrisis Phase

- Be prepared
- Foster alliances
- Develop consensus recommendations
- Test messages

All the planning, most of the work

Initial Phase

- Express empathy
- Simply inform public about risks
- Establish organization/spokesperson credibility
- Provide emergency courses of action
- Commit to communicate with the public and stakeholders

Reputations are made or broken here

Crisis Maintenance Phase

- Help public understand their own risks
- More encompassing is information needed by some
- Gain support for recovery plans
- Explain and make a case for public health recommendations
- Get and respond to public/stakeholder feedback
- Empower risk/benefit decisionmaking
- Requires ongoing assessment of event

Crisis Resolution Phase

- Provide educational opportunities
- Examine problems and mishaps
- Gain support for new policies or resource allocation
- Promote the organization's capabilities

Evaluation Phase

- Ongoing in various ways during all phases
- Integrate results into precrisis planning activities

Getting a Seat at the Decisionmaking Table

- Have a solid communication plan (linear thinkers want to see it on paper).
- Have that signed endorsement from the director at the front of your plan.
- Enlist third-party validators to make your case.



Seat at the Table

In the precrisis phase (don't wait for an event to make your case):

- Explain the benefits and risks of not including communicators.
- Show your expertise by training leadership.
- Do community relations so partners and stakeholders have an expectation of your involvement.



Seat at the Table

- While developing your communication plan, meet with other parts of your emergency response team in the organization and appeal for their help—get agreements on paper.

When Training Leadership About Communication

- Teach the organizational focus
- Teach the mistakes of past events
- Teach emergency risk principles

Developing Your Plan

- Start with a needs assessment
- Human resources
- Technological support
- Training
- Space
- Supplies
- Travel
- Funding mechanisms
- Planning needs



Your Plan Should Be

- The “go to” place for the “must have” information during a crisis
- The bones of your work—not a step-by-step “how to”
- Dynamic

Elements of a Complete Crisis Communication Plan

1. Signed endorsement from director
2. Designated staff responsibilities
3. Information verification and clearance/release procedures
4. Agreements on information release authorities
5. Media contact list
6. Procedures to coordinate with public health organization response teams
7. Designated spokespersons
8. Emergency response team after-hours contact numbers
9. Emergency response information partner contact numbers
10. Partner agreements (like joining the local EOC's JIC)
11. Procedures/plans on how to get resources you'll need
12. Pre-identified vehicles of information dissemination



Signed Endorsement From Director

- A must—signed and dated
- Provides accountability
- Integrates plan into overall EOC plans

Designate Staff Responsibilities

Command and control

- Directs release of public information
- Coordinates with partners
- Advises the director
- Knows incident-specific policy, science, and situation

Designate Staff Responsibilities

Direct media response

- Triage response
- Support spokesperson
- Produces and distributes materials
- Media monitoring
- JIC member

Designate Staff Responsibilities

Direct public information

- Manages public information delivery
- Manages Web site and links to others

Designate Staff Responsibilities

Direct partner/stakeholder information

- Manages prearranged information agreements
- Solicits feedback and monitors systems
- Organizes official meetings
- Maintains response contact list

Designate Staff Responsibilities

Content and material development

- Translates EOC situation reports into public/media materials
- Works with experts to create situation-specific materials
- Tests messages and materials for cultural appropriateness

Information Verification and Clearance/Release Procedures (In-house)

- Who MUST review for final approval (include higher authority)
- Need to know vs. want to know
- Three people—director, communication officer, subject matter expert
- Clear simultaneously and in person
- Get agreement from key staff before the crisis
- Coordination and courtesy copies should not slow down clearance
- Preventing the clearance headache: *No release is worse than an incomplete release*

Agreements on Information Release Authorities

- Who “owns” the information—scope of responsibility
- Get agreements on paper
- Remain flexible and work collaboratively
- Reality check: Preagreements may be thrown out the window, but they are a place to start

Media Contact List

- Critically important
- Nonduty contacts too
- No scraps of paper, please
- E-mails, fax numbers, and backdoor entries
- Fail rate, if not tested, can be astronomical

Designate Spokespersons

- Name them in an annex of the plan and designate backups
- Ensure that your organization agrees and plans for their absence from other duties
- Teach them emergency risk principles
- Practice media and public meetings

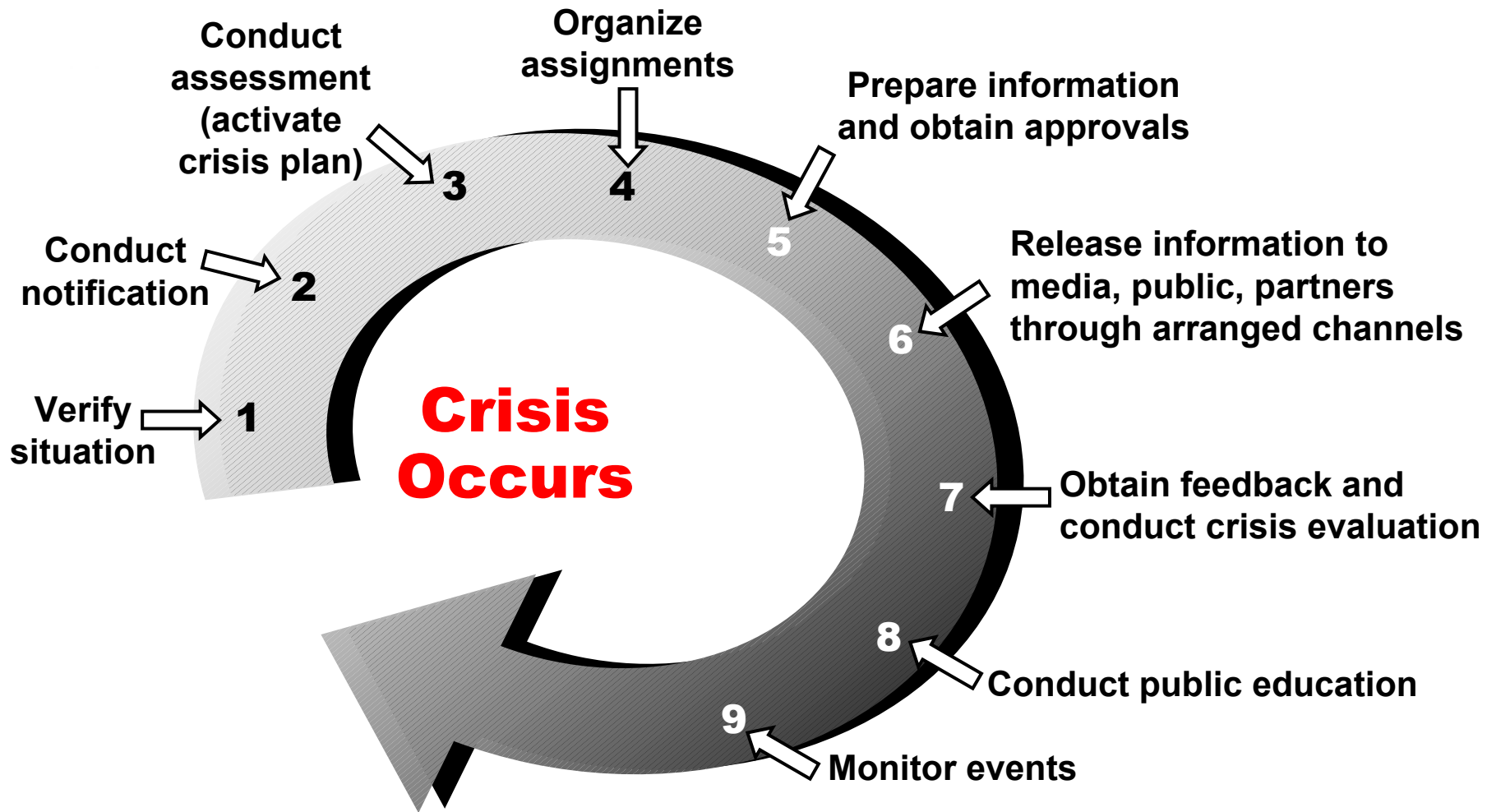
Partner Agreements (Like Joining the Local EOC's JIC)

- Who will be involved in what emergencies?
- What will your organization give back to partners?
- How many people from your organization will be committed to partner support?

Plan What You'll Need and How To Get More

- Include procedures to secure emergency resources
- Explore and set up contracts
- JICs may provide much of the support
- Work with savvy parts of organization for resources NOW
- Use results from needs assessment for justification

Nine Steps of Crisis Response



Verify Situation

- Get the facts.
- Judge validity based on source of information.
- Clarify plausibility through subject matter expert.
- Attempt to discern the magnitude of the event.

Notification and Coordination

- Notification is the official chain of command
- Coordination is with response peers and partners
- Procedures will vary at State, local, Federal levels and by event

Conduct Crisis Assessment and Activate Communication Plan

- Assess impact on communication operations and staffing
- Determine your organization's role in the event
- Activate media and Internet monitoring
- Identify affected populations and their initial communication needs

Organize Assignments (Constantly Reassess These Steps)

- Who's in charge of overall EOC response?
- Make assignments for communication teams.
- Assess resource needs and hours of operations.
- Ask ongoing organizational issues questions.
- Initiate partner involvement.

Prepare Information and Obtain Approvals

- Develop message.
- Identify audiences.
- What do media want to know?
- Show empathy.
- What is the organization's response?
- Identify action steps for public.
- Execute the approval process from the plan.

Public Information Release

Select the appropriate channels of communication and apply them:

Simply

Timely

Accurately

Repeatedly

Credibly

Consistently

Public Information Release

- Continue to monitor for feedback
- Execute planned steps with stakeholders
- Reassess these elements throughout the event

Obtain Feedback and Conduct Crisis Evaluation

- Conduct response evaluation
- Analyze feedback from customers
- Analyze media coverage
- Conduct a hot wash
- Develop a SWOT
- Share with leadership
- Revise crisis plans

Conduct Public Education (Post-event)

- Highlight related public health issues
- Consider audiences not directly involved in the crisis
- Institutionalize crisis materials

Monitor Events (Ongoing Throughout the Crisis)

- Conduct media and Internet monitoring
- Exchange information with response partners
- Monitor public opinions

Surviving the First 48 Hours

- Requires quick assessment
- Collection of facts
- Actions to secure resources
- Media and public response
- Rehearsal
- Alert key partners, as appropriate

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Sounds like a plan . . .



What the Public Will Ask First

- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?



What the Media Will Ask First

- What happened?
- Who is in charge?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning?



Media Beating on Your Door

- Alternatives to “no comment” that give you breathing room:
 - “We’ve just learned about this and are trying to get more information.”
 - “I’m not the authority on this, let me have XXXX call you right back.”
 - “We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about 2 hours?”



Need More Breathing Room?

Try this for an initial press statement

Response to Inquiries (you are authorized to give out the following information)

Date: _____ Time: _____ Approved by: _____

This is an evolving emergency and I know that, just like we do, you want as much information as possible right now. While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:

At approximately, _____ (time), a (brief description of what happened) _____

_____.

At this point, we do not know the number of (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.).

We have a system (plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency and we are being assisted by (police, FBI, EOC) as part of that plan.

The situation is (under)(not yet under) control, and we are working with (local, State, Federal) authorities to (e.g., contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again).

We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within (amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided. We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.



Assessing the Response

- Doing enough? Doing too much?
- Are we, should we be, involved?
- Is the department that should respond, able to respond?
- Who is managing the technical/scientific side?
- Risk matrix analysis helps with this assessment.

Assessment Helps Answer

- Hours of operations for public/media information
- Days of operation
- Staff expected to travel
- Release jurisdiction shared

How Would You Triage Media Response?

Incident Media Call Triage Sheet

Deadline ____ 2 hours, ____ today a.m., ____ today p.m. ____ ASAP, ____ other

Media outlet : _____

☐ National ____TV, ____Daily/Wire, ____Radio, ____Magazine, ____Other

☐ Local

☐ International

Caller's name (print first and last) _____

Caller contact information: phone(s) _____

Fax _____

Email _____

Request:	Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> SME* questions	Numbers _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Interview (by name request? _____)	Response/Investigation _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Background/b-roll	Health/disease issue/ Treatment _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Fact check	Hot issue 1 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Update	Hot issue 2 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Return call to press officer	

Action needed:

☐ Return call expected from press officer

☐ Return call expected from SME

Comments:

PA suggested triage priority:

☐ Level A

☐ Level B

☐ Level C

No action needed; call closed by:

☐ PA* answered question

☐ PA referred to Internet

☐ PA referred to CIO

☐ PA referred to outside CDC

☐ PA other _____

Taken By: _____

Time: am _____ pm _____

Date SMTWTFS _____

*subject matter expert
*press assistant

Next Media Response Step

- Get out cleared facts ASAP
- Include a statement of empathy and commit to “seeing it through”