



# Crisis Communication Plan

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## **SCOPE OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A crisis communications plan is intended to ensure that, in the event of a crisis, disaster, or emergency related to a Southern States Athletic Conference (SSAC) event, information about the crisis and the action being taken is disseminated appropriately, accurately, and clearly.

Generally, an issue requiring the use of this plan will fall into one of two categories:

**Emergency:** Any situation that may involve or threaten to cause loss of life or injury to student-athletes, fans or students at an SSAC event. Examples: fires, explosions, accidents, tornado. These will be handled in consultation with each SSAC Members individual crisis management plan.

**Non-Emergency:** Any situation that threatens the reputation or stature of the SSAC, poses legal ramifications, but does not pose a direct physical threat to employees, students, or property. Crisis communication about situations that are controversial or sensitive in nature, but are not crises or emergencies (Athletic Department scandal, negative conduct by a student-athlete, serious outbreak of illness/disease, negative news coverage, etc.) will be handled by SSAC member(s) involved and the SSAC Commissioner if necessary.

Both types of crises will make news. Whether a crisis is deemed an emergency or non-emergency does not necessarily reflect on the gravity of the situation, particularly in terms of long-term consequences. In all cases, the college needs to provide full disclosure of factual information as quickly as possible, communicate instructions if necessary, and make decisions with full regard to individual privacy and legal responsibility.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Crisis Response Plan is to serve as a guideline for implementing an effectual response to crisis situations at an SSAC event. No plan can cover all scenarios in which emergency action may be needed; therefore, the plan is fluid and adaptable.

## **CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM (CCT)**

Primary:

- SSAC Commissioner
- Board of Presidents Chair
- Athletic directors Chair
- SSAC Assistant Commissioner
- Campus(s) liaisons

Secondary:

- SSAC Athletic Directors
- SSAC SID's.

### **CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM - Responsibilities**

In case of an emergency, first priority should be given to notifying appropriate emergency response agencies, specifically police, fire, or ambulance departments.

If a crisis situation should occur on a home campus, the CCT will mobilize and decide all appropriate measures to be taken in response to the crisis. To this end, the CCT has developed its own detailed operational structure to guide its response.

The responsibilities of the CCT include, but are not limited to:

- Clarifying facts surrounding the crisis and their impact on personnel, students and campus operations
- Determining how to notify the campus community of the incident
- Deciding if additional support services are needed (for example, psychologists/counselors from community)
- Directing internal and external communications content during and after the crisis
- Circulating throughout campus to act as support liaisons during crisis response
- Reminding faculty and staff to refer all inquiries to the Crisis Communication Spokesperson

To the extent possible, the following information should be gathered:

- Nature and location of emergency/disaster
- Whether persons have been injured
- Extent of property damage
- Disaster potential

## **CRISIS COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES**

- 1) Have a pre-arranged meeting place for the crisis communication group that may be at the event or that may need to be brought into communication by phone.
- 2) Assess the situation – gather all the facts and verify them. (Initiate Crisis Management Checklist)
- 3) Initiate the Crisis press release template – minimizes potential mistakes in releasing information.
- 4) Designate a spokesperson – SSAC Commissioner or SSAC Member University Media Spokesperson.
- 5) Designate a media center – stabilizes the crisis area.
- 6) Do not release names of dead or injured until relatives are notified - Out of respect for families involved, this should be enforced during crises involving death or injuries.
- 7) Respond to all media inquiries, but if you don't know the answer, say so - It is better for you to respond with, "I don't know right now, but I will try to get that for you as soon as possible," then to try to make up any sort of response. The conference needs to maintain credibility. It is better to say, "I don't know" than to risk giving out the wrong information.
- 8) Do not speculate - Credibility during a time of crisis is extremely important. Speculation into something may ruin that credibility. Once again, "I don't know" is better than giving out the wrong information. Also, never speak "off the record" with the media regarding your situation.
- 9) Manage the information – We will control the flow of information to the media. Being as open and honest as we can at the time will minimize rumors and conjecture of the event. We will keep record of all media sources you utilized and stay in contact with your sources after the event. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis or managing the image of a conference, communications are critical. Being able to quickly reach media sources to manage the correct flow of information is critical in a crisis.
- 10) Monitor social media and disseminate all releases and info on social media channels. Do not engage with those just trying to get a rise, but answer real questions when they arise and utilize AD's and SID's when necessary to control incorrect info being posted by student-athletes.

## ATTACHEMENT – CRISIS COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Call the Crisis Management Team meeting ASAP
  - ☐ If time is of the essence:
    - ☐ Meet at the site of the incident, if necessary
    - ☐ Confirm time for follow-up CCT meeting as soon as feasible
- ☐ Call the Board of Presidents' Chair and Athletic Directors' Chair as a heads up if indicated by the situation
- ☐ Commissioner/Chair maintains order and collects names, phones, and e-mails of all present at meeting
- ☐ Review all available information from police / eye witnesses / best informants available
  - ☐ Hold questions until each person's report is complete
  - ☐ Confirm victim information and assign member to provide contact/outreach
  - ☐ Confirm offender or possible suspect information and assign appropriate follow-up
  - ☐ Confirm other affected parties' information and appropriate follow-up
  - ☐ Determine coordinator for crisis debriefing sessions
- ☐ Discuss and determine the primary issues of the situation
  - ☐ Is this a criminal case? What are the charges and possible penalties?
  - ☐ Is this a civil situation? Might the SSAC or Member university be negligent or liable?
  - ☐ Is this a Member university policy situation? What are the violations and the possible sanctions?
  - ☐ Is this a moral/ethical situation for the SSAC or Member university? What are the issues?
  - ☐ Who will be the important audiences for the SSAC or Member university's message(s)?
  - ☐ Will there be an outpouring of good will and who will coordinate that?
- ☐ Assign the primary spokesperson if SSAC Commissioner is absent
  - ☐ Identify experts who can be called upon to speak to the media
  - ☐ Identify individuals/groups for just-in-time media training and contact for them
- ☐ Determine the primary SSAC and/or Member university messages that will convey:
  - ☐ Facts known to the SSAC and/or Member university that can be made public
  - ☐ Concern and compassion for victims
  - ☐ Commitment to work with authorities or others to resolve the situation
  - ☐ Reasons the public can trust the SSAC and/or Member university to "do the right thing"
- ☐ Determine how the university's messages will be communicated internal/externally
- ☐ Anticipate information that will become available in the next 24/48 hours
- ☐ Discuss possible scenarios in the evolution of the incident and possible resolutions to the situation
- ☐ Decide when the next CCT meeting should be held and/or how the CCT will stay informed
- ☐ Continue communication to convey facts, offer assistance to those affected, and adjust messages
- ☐ Evaluate effectiveness of crisis management on a regular basis