

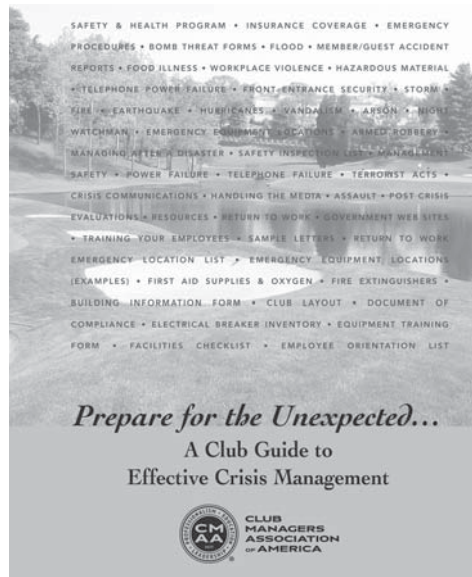
SAFETY & HEALTH PROGRAM • INSURANCE COVERAGE • EMERGENCY
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CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS • HANDLING THE MEDIA • ASSAULT • POST CRISIS
EVALUATIONS • RESOURCES • RETURN TO WORK • GOVERNMENT WEB SITES
• TRAINING YOUR EMPLOYEES • SAMPLE LETTERS • RETURN TO WORK
EMERGENCY LOCATION LIST • EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT LOCATIONS
(EXAMPLES) • FIRST AID SUPPLIES & OXYGEN • FIRE EXTINGUISHERS •
BUILDING INFORMATION FORM • CLUB LAYOUT • DOCUMENT OF
COMPLIANCE • ELECTRICAL BREAKER INVENTORY • EQUIPMENT TRAINING
FORM • FACILITIES CHECKLIST • EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION LIST

Prepare for the Unexpected...

A Club Guide to Effective Crisis Management



**CLUB
MANAGERS
ASSOCIATION
OF AMERICA**



Crisis Communications – Handling the Media

Handling the Media

Crisis Communications

Controlling a Crisis: Preparing for the Media (White Paper)

Sample Letter 1: From Leadership Team

Sample Letter 2: Club Crisis Management Team

Sample Letter 3: To Club Members

Sample Letter 4: To Club Employees

Sample Letter 5: Red Cross

Handling the Media

The Official Spokesperson should be the only person talking with the media. The Crisis Management Team should supply him/her with all the details and information needed to answer questions and should be kept up-to-date on all developments throughout the crisis situation.

The Spokesperson should not talk to the media until all the facts of the situation have been thoroughly assessed. When the Spokesperson does talk to the media, he/she may choose to make a statement but refuse to take questions at that time. This will help the Spokesperson avoid saying “no comment” or “I don’t know” to any of the reporters’ questions.

In general, the public views the private club industry as exclusive and discriminating. For that reason, clubs and club managers are more easily prone to negative press on a regular basis than other industries, let alone in a crisis situation. It is very important to inform the media as timely as possible. If the media cannot get the story and facts from you, it will find another source that may not be as reliable.

The official Spokesperson and the public relations person should both be familiar with the media. If the Spokesperson is the Club President who is elected each year, it may be advisable to include a professional media training session with your club’s board orientation program. The public relations person should make a point to know the local media. The public relations person should know what to expect from the editor or reporter of the local newspapers by reading back issues of the various publications. He/she should also make an effort to periodically listen to all local newscasts and radio programs. This will enable him or her to prepare the Spokesperson for interviews.

The Spokesperson should rehearse beforehand. Both the Spokesperson and the public relations person should prepare difficult questions a reporter may ask along with answers. You should both practice carefully so you will feel comfortable during the interview or news conference. Also, rehearse the important points you want to make and plan to state them early.

Crisis Communications

A crisis is any situation, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention, that threatens your club or chapter's integrity or reputation. These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or man-made disaster that could be attributed to the club or chapter. A "crisis" also can be a situation where, in the eyes of the media or general public, your club/chapter did not react to a particular situation in the appropriate manner.

Any organization that is in the public eye for a long period of time is likely to have something bad happen or have something negative said about it. Those who are prepared are the most likely to weather this type of occurrence.

Advance Preparation

Establish a crisis communication team. Assign specific duties to each team member. At a minimum, the team should consist of:

- the general manager/chief operating officer to oversee critical decisions;
- a media spokesperson to serve as single point of contact for crisis information;
- legal counsel to assess liability concerns and offer legal advice;
- fact-gatherers to gather and verify all facts related to the crisis; and
- an administrative support person to handle the flow of duties.

Discuss possible crises that may occur in the club environment. Consider all possible issues and determine how the media/community will see each. Possible crises include member/employee/director injury, disasters (gas leak, fire, flood) and legal issues (theft, unsafe food handling, drug/alcohol abuse).

Prepare for such circumstances by developing an informational kit and a policy that will provide direction for the tactful handling of sensitive subjects, yet still allow you to take action.

Rehearse your key staff in how to implement your response plan and update it at least annually.

Actions in Crisis

Although no club can prepare for every contingency, it should be ready to immediately initiate its Crisis Management Plan as soon as the event or crisis is discovered. Following is a checklist to assist in preparing an effective Crisis Management Plan.

Contact and brief your public relations person

(Assuming this is your spokesperson) The GM/COO should also be notified at this time. All details of the incident should be given.

Initiate the already-established Crisis Alert Procedure

Gather together all employees, department heads and representatives of the Board of Directors and instruct them NOT to speak to anyone on behalf of the club.

Refer all inquiries to the spokesperson

Make sure that anyone on the switchboard or answering telephones is notified to direct all media or other calls related to the crisis directly to the spokesperson.

Determine what the facts are

The fact gatherers, the GM/COO and the PR person should meet immediately to quickly and accurately determine what the facts are and what should be told to the press. Above all, never try to hide any facts or rush out an announcement prematurely.

Inform the media

Once the facts have been gathered, a release should be drafted, reviewed by legal counsel, then released to the media.

Establish a Media Center

If it is the type of crisis that calls for the media to be on site, establish a media center.

The media should be guided to a central location so they can watch the progress and receive the most up-to-date information on the crisis situation. It is to your advantage to work with the media as much as possible.

Log all information that is released

Keep careful track of what information is known, when it is known and when it was released.

Keep clippings of all newspaper stories

Whenever possible keep clippings of newspaper stories to document the details of the crisis. They may be needed for legal and insurance purposes.

Consider a follow-up publicity campaign

A follow-up publicity campaign may help to overcome negative impressions due to the crisis.

Post-Crisis Evaluation

Assess your performance. Evaluate how well your club handled the crisis. Interview members and employees, meet with your crisis management team to get their perspective and revise your crisis plan accordingly.

Media Management

Because of the nature of the club management industry and its perception of exclusiveness, clubs and managers are many times a natural target for bad publicity. Larger properties, especially, are more likely to attract reporters and sometimes from a not-so-major crisis. This is why it is important to always be prepared and call the media before they call you and work with them in any way possible. Remember, they can get information elsewhere. It's just better if they hear it from the most accurate source.

In the private club environment a crisis can occur at any given time or an issue may be blown out of proportion, causing major concern. When this occurs it might call for a **considered** response from the club. The *lack* of a considered response might well turn an unpleasant situation into a highly damageable one.

The members of your club look upon the club as a place of privacy and a safe haven away from prying and negative publicity. It simply is not in their interest to have their privacy, policies, social habits and other privileged information exploited in the media.

Although it seems that all we remember is "bad" press, there has been much positive press relating to private clubs as well. Many articles have been written on the tremendous value private clubs offer in their communities, such as charity outings, scholarships, employment (both direct and indirect), environmental concerns, etc. The more positive information you keep about what your club

provides can help you diffuse negative images when questioned by the media and help aid your community image.

Attention by the media can be drawn to the club in many ways that you may or may not be cognizant of; wedding announcements, hosting charitable organizations, garden clubs, Rotary, publication of tournament winners, insensitivity and lack of sophistication of other area clubs (private or public) land tax issues, etc., can all affect your own privacy.

Whatever the reason, your goal should always be to turn the media attention to a positive one, make it work for you.

Media Dos and Don'ts

DO

- Provide factual information—never speculate or give an opinion as to the cause of an accident, casualties, amount of damage, etc.
- Provide the media with a press or property kit describing your property and safety features.
- Have a media center (on-site) predetermined in the event such a crisis requires the media to be at the location.
- Have on staff personnel assigned to the media center at all times. You may wish to also assign a secretary.
- Speak calmly and concisely to convey the image that you are in control of the situation.
- Let reporters know when they can expect updates.
- Start your interview with a specific message in mind so that the interview can allow you to say what you want to say.
- Make all statements from the public's point of view—how does this affect them, not how does this affect our club's operation.
- Use experts if the situation calls for them.
- Discuss the commitment you have to protection and safety. If appropriate, discuss your property's record in detail.
- Take control, use positive approach; use the media as if you both are on the same side.
- Make it an OPPORTUNITY **not** a LIABILITY.
- Be prepared—plan your words.
- Impression is critical. Use:

Eye Contact	Friendly
Energy Level	Engaging
Dress	Well Informed
Mannerisms	Gestures
- Tape all interviews to prevent misquotes, etc.
- Diffuse—"Yes, we had that situation; however, it has been corrected."
"What really is at issue here is —"
- Clarify—"If I understand what you are saying."
- Know your local officials personally—Mayor, Fire Chief, Police Chief, etc.

- Appoint a media spokesperson. Preferably someone on the Board of Governors other than the President. Always “save” the President as the last authority in case something is misconstrued.

DON'T:

- Minimize the effects of an incident.
- Go off the record.
- Give shocking or sensational descriptions.
- Answer any questions with a “No comment.” If you don’t know the answer, tell the media so and let them know you will answer the question once you have all the facts.
- Use the industry or technical jargon.
- Blame anyone or anything for the crisis before all of the facts are known.
- Repeat negatives—it stays with people longer.
- Take a telephone interview on the first call. Explain that you are busy right now, but if they will give you a list of questions and now that you know what the call is about that you will call them back. CALL THEM BACK. (“I am unable to respond at the moment, if you would provide me with a list of questions so I can answer them all.”)
- Be intimidated by silence.

When to Decline an Interview

Should you ever decline an interview request? Possibly. Don’t accept any interview request without carefully screening the reporter’s anticipated questions. Also, assess the reporter’s track record. In particular, use care in selecting media when your topic can’t easily be paraphrased without risk of misinterpretation.

Turning a Crisis Into an Opportunity

To put it simply, if you are prepared, truthful and candid, the public will not only be impressed by your good planning and efficiency, but they will be on your side during any crisis situation. In the event of a crisis...

Just remember to be:

- Willing to talk to the media;
- Readily accessible;
- Knowledgeable;
- Factual; and
- Under control

Be sure to:

- Move fast and act rapidly;
- Be concerned—give the media what you can;
- Not let the media go elsewhere to speculate;
- Set up a media room/let them use phones;
- Provide assistance.

Careful planning and preparation should not be viewed as a luxury, but as a necessity. Saying “It will never happen to me” could be your invitation to a disaster.

If you do all these things, at least you will be on a level playing field!

Dealing with the Media

It’s never easy to deal with the media in a crisis situation. Following are some tips to help you get through this demanding and challenging time.

- Prepare a press release indicating the facts of the crisis/issue and what action you plan to take in response.
- Write down a response, go over it several times, then take the media calls. If the issue is big enough, you may wish to host a news conference. If not, press releases and articles may suffice.
- Assume the media will ferret out and publish damaging information. Preempt it by explaining what you are doing to correct the situation.
- Always maintain a bias towards honesty with the media and be rigorously so, especially when facing a crisis.
- Never say “No comment.” You can say you’ll have a statement faxed out later that day or that you’ve been advised by your legal representative not to answer the question.
- Media thrives on emotion—check yours at the door.

Dealing with Employees

It is important to keep employees and members apprised of a crisis situation and provide them with new information as it is available. Senior management should be briefed and they, in turn, should pass the word on. Employees should be aware of who the crisis management team is and that they should not answer any questions put to them by the media. Instead, employees should refer media to the designated spokesperson.

Post-Crisis Evaluation

Assess your performance. Evaluate how well your chapter/club handled the crisis. Interview members and employees, meet with your crisis management team to get their perspective and revise your plan accordingly.

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This paper is provided as an SHRM Member benefit. If you have questions or comments, please call the SHRM Information Center at (800) 283-7476.

CONTROLLING A CRISIS: PREPARING FOR THE MEDIA

By Bob Baughn, SPHR

July 1998

Reviewed July 1999

Have you ever stopped to think how you would respond publicly to a disaster, such as an explosion, major chemical spill, fire or a cave-in, that occurs on your company's premises? Not having a publicity game plan could be costly to your company, especially when the media can report it immediately on the news for the community to see and hear.

News reporting has intensified over the last few years. When news stories break, such as the O.J. Simpson trial, the media turns the episode into a news event and each news organization tries to be the first to report a breaking story. In today's high tech world of satellite transmission, a television station can respond to a community disaster and be broadcasting live in a matter of minutes.

Reporters may seem intrusive during a crisis, but they are trained professionals. They are seeking enough information to explain the following to their audience:

- What happened (what burned, exploded or caved in)?
- Was anyone hurt or killed?
- Why did it happen?
- How is the community affected?
- What is the employer doing to fix it?

Employers should have a written crisis control plan in place. They should be prepared not only for controlling the crisis, but also for the intense situation of working with the media during a crisis. The crisis control plan should:

- Assign responsibilities
- Control access to the property
- Designate an area for reporters
- Foster cooperation with the media

The crisis control plan should consider the following functions, as they relate to media exposure and assign someone in the company (usually the Public Relations and/or Security staff) the responsibility for handling the function:

- controlling access to the property, including designating an area for reporters and limiting their access to that area
- being the spokesperson for the company and providing reporters the information they need

Receiving some training on handling the media is important for the spokesperson. It is safe to assume that the actions and statements on behalf of the company will be reviewed in the event litigation should occur.

You should train the spokesperson:

- to avoid discussion of liability or other legal issues. All questions of a legal nature should be referred to the company attorney. Don't accept blame or responsibility for the incident
- to avoid speculation or guessing. Give only the facts which are known to be accurate
- to avoid using inflammatory words such as "holocaust," "catastrophe" or "inferno" in describing the crisis
- to avoid giving personal opinions
- to tell what positive steps the company is taking. Be prepared to tell reporters what the crew members are doing to control the crisis.
- to avoid hypothetical situations. Point out that the company cannot discuss or respond to a situation that has not occurred

- to tell the media that the investigation is still under way and the company does not have enough facts yet to make a comment, provided that is the case.

If your work force situation will not allow the luxury of a media spokesperson, you should train the highest ranking official on the premises in handling the media, since that is the person the media will attempt to interview. Typically, the highest ranking official on the premises is also the one responsible for controlling the actual crisis. This person should be courteous and helpful to the media but they should feel confident in asking the media to wait a few minutes if the situation will not permit an immediate interview. There is nothing wrong with asking the media to wait a few minutes in order for you to gather your thoughts. If you ask that the media wait, be respectful and get back with them in the time frame promised.

You should conduct a review of your facility for security. If the property does not have a fence or is not designed in such a way to keep the public out, some thought should be given to how to limit access onto the property during an emergency. It is a good idea to create an area on the premises for the press to gather whereby they can film or take pictures of the crisis as it happens without placing themselves in danger.

Dealing with a crisis that occurs on your premises can be disastrous without a plan. Do not create another disaster by mishandling media exposure. The press has a job to perform and an obligation to the public to report the story. Cooperate with reporters, control the situation and provide clear concise facts. By following your company's crisis control plan, you can avoid the additional problems caused by being unprepared for media attention.

July 1998

Reviewed July 1999

Thanks to Bob Baughn, SPHR, of the SHRM Workplace Health and Safety Committee, for contributing this paper. This paper is intended as information and is not a substitute for legal or other professional advice.

Sample Letter 1: From Leadership Team

This morning our country has been hit by [noun]. We want you to know that our hearts go out to the families of victims and we are praying for a rapid resolution.

Our leadership team has met and we want to convey the following important messages:

We have taken an accounting of our personnel. To the best of our knowledge, no company personnel have been injured in the incident of [date].

Please be responsive to the needs of your employees. If an employee expresses the need to leave work, if possible, let them do so.

Local management teams should rely on local law enforcement and disaster relief officials to advise them on facility closings and evacuations. Local managers have the authority to make the best decisions based on that information.

All employees should suspend travel till further notice.

We are making arrangements with our EAP provider, to make counseling available to employees who request it.

Our emergency response system has been activated to help those affected by the tragedy.

We are working on setting up communications channels to provide updates to you and allow you to report back to us what we need to know. We will provide information as it becomes available.

Sample Letter 2: Club Crisis Management Team

The [name of club] Club Crisis Management Team continues to assess the impact of [this morning's] [terrorist attack] on [the United States/Oklahoma]. Although we do not see a direct threat to our club, we are taking proactive actions for the protection of our associates, our members and our club.

- We have cancelled business air travel for associates for the next 48 hours.
- We have increased club security monitoring at club entrances.
- We are increasing club security staff.
- We have contacted our vendors to determine orders and delivery status.

At present, all club operations are continuing on a normal schedule. The club operation status telephone message (xxx-xxx-xxxx and xxxx) and website (www.xxx@xxx.xxx) will continue to be updated as necessary.

Sample Letter 3: To Club Members

To all [name of club] Club Members:

We have been in constant communication with a number of organizations, including the Federal Office of Emergency Preparedness, the City, the County and area school districts in the wake of the horrific tragedy that has befallen our nation today. We are putting contingency plans in place and coordinating with other organizations and businesses in the area.

First, we want to reassure you that there is no reason to believe that our members, employees or the club itself is a target of terrorist acts. Information is constantly changing, but at this point, we are unaware of any harm to our members, our employees or the club. We will keep monitoring the situation and provide information as we receive it. We will remain in constant contact with local law enforcement authorities to ensure the safety of our members and employees.

Specific to today, we will not be closing any of our facilities. We understand that there may be employees who feel the need to be at home with loved ones today. Those who need to leave, with the permission of their supervisor, may do so as personal time without pay.

This tragedy has clearly gripped our attention. It is slowing communications systems at this facility and elsewhere. It is imperative that we use communication systems strictly for urgent business needs. We appreciate your cooperation in this time of crisis.

Lastly, we ask all members of the club to remember in their thoughts those who lost their lives today.

Sample Letter 4: To Club Employees

To All [Name of Club] Employees:

In light of the events of [noun/date] and the aftermath, we would like to emphasize the necessity for religious and racial/ethnic tolerance. Religious values and teaching have been the source for peacemaking, reconciliation and co-existence for thousands of years. However, some people may direct their anger toward other employees or colleagues who are [religion], look like they are from [specific area] and have accents that sound [foreign language].

Let us pull together to value both our differences and similarities to create an environment where all people feel safe. By doing this, we can reduce the negative impact of religious hostility and advance inter-religious understanding.

Sample Letter 5: Red Cross

All of you have heard about the tragic events of today and our hearts and prayers go out to all the families who have suffered through these senseless losses.

This certainly may prove to be one of the worst personal tragedies in our lifetimes. To the best of our knowledge, all Club associates and their families are safe.

In light of the circumstances, we are asking that all meetings requiring air travel over the next 48 hours be suspended.

While each of us would like to personally help those who are suffering, this is not always possible. However, we can help by providing financial resources through the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. Therefore today, the Club is committing to contribute \$ _____. Additionally the Club will match dollar for dollar all other funds donated by our members and employees. The volunteer coordinators will be putting out information as to how you can help.

The Red Cross is also asking for blood donations and information will be provided through the Club website as to how you can help. This is a very sad day for all of us. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those innocent victims.

POST-CRISIS EVALUATION

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