



# **American Public Transportation Association**

## **Crisis Communications Plan Template**

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**APTA Public Information Officer Task Force**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The chaos of a crisis can affect an organization, therefore, it is essential that organizations, especially public organizations, have a crisis communications plan and related tools prepared to be able to respond quickly and appropriately to the incident or emergency situation. This document is not a crisis communications plan but is intended to be used as a tool to develop and implement crisis communications planning appropriate to your agency and the community you serve.

This document highlights the elements of effective *communications activity* during a crisis but is different from a crisis manual which supports resolution of a crisis via crisis classification, resource identification, staff roles, and the integration between communications and other incident response functions.

This Communications Template has been prepared by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) via its Marketing & Communications Committee. We encourage the broad distribution and use of this document in support of crisis communications planning for public transportation providers throughout the United States and beyond.

**APTA Crisis Communications Template**

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## BACKGROUND

A crisis is any incident or circumstance that potentially poses a serious problem to an organization's customers, operations, employees, public reputation, financial or political health, or the community or industry in which that organization operates. Public transportation-related crisis communications can be unique and deserve special planning. There are often large numbers of people involved when an incident occurs. And, as a visible public agency, the crisis usually plays out on the public stage – for better or worse. The role of the communications/public information officer is critical to effectively managing communications and conveying accurate and timely information to the news media, general public, employees and other affected stakeholders. Employing a thoughtful, professional and scalable approach to messaging and agency response is a key element of surviving – or even thriving – under difficult circumstances.

Being prepared to respond in a crisis is critical in minimizing disruption to your service, stakeholder relations, and/or damage to your organization. Although you cannot be fully prepared for every situation, having a well thought-out communications plan ready to activate in the unfortunate event of a crisis will help guide you and your agency effectively and more quickly through what are usually chaotic and difficult circumstances.

*“When you’re not at the table, you may be on the menu.”*

In addition to minimizing the negative impacts that can come from a crisis situation, an effective communications plan will help enable you and your agency to maintain or regain control during incidents that are usually unexpected and difficult to manage. Benefits of good crisis communications include:

- Providing vital information to stakeholders in a timely and effective fashion
- Displaying the organization's authority and capabilities and acting responsibly
- Maintaining the organization's operations and credibility while mitigating losses
- Using the media and other key contacts to aid in response, recovery and public information management

## DEFINITION OF A CRISIS

In its broadest terms, a crisis may be defined as a major interference with daily operations. It is a sudden, unexpected event or situation that could affect, or has affected the health, safety, or welfare of passengers, employees, the general public, stakeholders, the environment, service operations or the reputation of the system and *requires immediate attention*.

Some examples of a crisis might be: a bus or train accident, the release of hazardous materials, a natural disaster, a severe storm or weather event, a labor strike, criminal action, equipment failure, spread of the pandemic flu, acts of violence or terrorism, or any other factor that could impact service, jeopardize operations, affect the reputation of your agency or the public transportation industry. Crises are often externally based but can

also have a major effect on internal operations, impacting employees, board members and volunteers.

## **TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND**

In the event of a crisis, the organization has two primary responsibilities.

- To resolve the crisis
- **To communicate the organization's actions, position, response and principles as soon as possible to all appropriate audiences, including traditional and new media; local, state and federal officials; legal representatives, board members, employees, stakeholders, customers and the general public.**

This document is intended to address the second of the two responsibilities outlined above.

Following these basic tenets will help preserve your organizational credibility, protect its image and enhance its ability to serve customers and other stakeholders:

- Protecting the safety and health of all employees, customers and the general public is always a top priority
- Complying with all pertinent federal, state and local regulations is essential
- Minimizing the impact on service disruption to customers
- Providing all constituencies and the press with accurate and timely information about a crisis situation and how the organization is responding
- Protecting the property, resources, and mission of the organization
- Documenting and learning from the crisis situation and updating the crisis communications plan and related elements accordingly

Tips to keep in mind when preparing and implementing crisis communications include:

- Communicating the problem early on and staying on message
- Setting and sticking to a strategy, adjusting if necessary but always maintaining control of communications
- Always telling the truth
- Managing both facts and perceptions
- Using all channels to communicate with stakeholders
- Being transparent
- Remaining visible and accessible
- Doing no harm – to the agency, victims, stakeholders, etc.

## **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

The roles and responsibilities of the point person and members of crisis teams may vary depending on the size and structure of a transit agency, but is important to have clarification of who is responsible for activating a “crisis response” and what the responsibilities are for each member of a crisis team.

In a crisis situation, remaining calm is essential. Having a plan in place can help reduce the amount of stress that inevitably will happen. Designate a point person – usually the CEO or GM of the agency or designee when CEO/GM is unavailable – who can immediately assess the situation and determine whether a communications response is warranted. The CEO (or other designee) is ultimately responsible for agency decisions made in an emergency situation. He/she will determine whether an incident/situation rises to “crisis” level and, if so, assemble the crisis teams. In crisis mode these teams should have defined duties, implement an action plan, communicate that plan to employees, emergency responders, passengers, the general public, board members and the media. They will also constantly monitor the emergency incident/situation and update communications assignments as needed.

Proactive organizations should have tools and templates already in place such as contact information, description of equipment, maps, sample scripts and press releases, hot line, web and social media resources. Make sure staff in every department is aware of where to find these materials and what their responsibilities may be in the case of an emergency. Also, it is useful to have contact information readily available for agency board members and key stakeholder contacts for immediate access or assistance.

## **DESIGNATION OF DUTIES**

It is a good practice to designate responsibility teams upfront before an emergency occurs. The Crisis Management Team will be responsible for:

- Providing critical decision making prior to, during, and after the crisis.
- Providing information to customers, employees, other stakeholders prior to, during, and following the crisis.
- Documenting the crisis.
- Notifying all governing entities, local officials, and other agencies as appropriate.
- Ensuring that the agency Crisis Management Plan is reviewed on a regular basis with the entire Crisis Management Team.
- Ensuring that at least one member of the Crisis Management Team is readily available for contact at all times. Some crises stretch into days or weeks and no crisis is limited to 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays!

Again, depending on the size of the organization and caliber of the emergency, different structure to a crisis team can vary. What’s important is that it is scaled to your agency and has the right positions and roles defined so the team can function well. Larger agencies may divide teams by departments and create a color-coded organization chart. This could include:

- An Executive Crisis Management Team (i.e. incident response team or senior management staff)
- A Communications Crisis Team designating a spokesperson for the media (i.e. communications/public affairs staff)
- A Customer Service Crisis Team, complete with a phone script and information on where to call for more information (i.e. call center)

- An Information Crisis Team for gathering and disseminating information to customers (i.e. communications/marketing staff)
- A Media Monitoring Team, to monitor and track media accuracy and story reporting, and (i.e. communications/community relations staff)
- A Documentation and Follow-Up team (i.e. planning/operations/executive staff)

*Note that the above list is not all-inclusive; there will be other groups involved, such as at an incident command center. And in cases of larger emergencies (train derailment, evacuations, etc.), some, if not many, of the individuals working on a crisis team may be from outside – rather than inside – your organization.*

Team leaders for each team should be appointed and briefed on the situation. Meeting and gathering locations should already be identified along with the general duties and responsibilities outlined for each group. Back up plans for working remotely should also be identified and resources readied (i.e. team members may not be able to get to the designated geographic location and need to work initially from home or another location instead). A crisis communications tool kit, contact information, etc. should be accessible to members of crisis teams at locations other than the office (i.e. home, automobile) for handy access.

General training and plan familiarization should be an ongoing part of organizational readiness. In addition, practice drills and specific training (i.e. for web/social media coordination, call center personnel, media spokesperson) should take place at least once a year depending on the size of the organization. Templates for web alerts, Twitter updates, sample scripts and phone logs should be ready ahead of time and adjusted to the circumstance of the specific incident.

If at all possible, there should be a legal counsel whose responsibilities would be to assess the situation in terms of federal, state and local laws and explain ramifications to the Executive Crisis Team leader. They should also provide guidance to media representatives regarding questions of a legal nature. After the crisis, they should help assess the situation and review with possible claims and/or insurance liabilities in mind.

## **INCIDENT COMMAND CENTER**

Establishing an incident command center both at the location of the incident and off location is very important. The command center **on location** would probably be established by the fire and rescue team, Federal Railroad Administration if on a railroad, and the law enforcement. They would be in charge of all emergency personnel on the scene and would NOT talk to the media. Any crew member or operator of equipment should be instructed to follow orders from the incident command center and to NOT talk to the media. In the event of an accident involving a train or a bus, the bus operator will likely be the first employee to interact with the emergency responders. The operator's first priority must be the safety and security of passengers, equipment and the accident site. However, media are likely to be present asking for comments and information as the operator fulfills their responsibilities.

As transit operators or other personnel discuss the circumstances of the incident with emergency responders or other officials, they must be aware of the media's proximity. Although these employees are not spokespersons, their comments may be used by the media, even if obtained by eavesdropping. If not already happening, transit staff should request that first responders set up an incident scene tape perimeter to separate the media and contain the initial area of activity.

Should transit staff be approached directly by the news media, they should deflect all questions to the Executive Crisis Management team. An example of a proper statement:

*"The organization's spokesperson will be happy to answer your questions. Please contact them at (phone number). I apologize, but my responsibility is to immediately secure this site for our passengers, personnel and equipment. Please stay clear of this area for your personal safety and to assist others with their emergency work."*

An external staging area including designated parking for authorized transit employees and other key stakeholders with properly identified vehicles is most helpful in these situations. Make sure employees on the scene are equipped with proper identification credentials (i.e. badges, uniforms, business cards). Key supplies include a camera, recording device, notepad and pens, tape, umbrellas/jackets (if raining/cold), radio, cellphone or other mobile device with charged batteries. A waterproof tarp is also useful in lieu of a tent. A "Go Kit" of basic supplies for people anticipating to be on site for a period of time, especially for people likely to be in front of news cameras and reporters, can be helpful in keeping personnel comfortable and functioning well under stressful conditions. (A "Go Kit" could include water, protein snacks, toiletry items, comfortable shoes, phone/laptop charger, etc.)

The incident command center **off location** should be established by the CEO of the organization and staffed by the Executive Crisis Management team. This would be the primary contact point for receiving and disseminating information to the other team leaders. This location could be at the office headquarters, in a conference room, CEO's office or other practical location.

## SEQUENCE OF ACTION

The first step in any crisis (immediately following 911 notification and receiving word of the emergency) is to convene the Executive Crisis Management team to explore various facets of the crisis (this may happen over the phone if all team members are not available in same geographic location):

- Decide whether or not the emergency should trigger crisis communications procedures and if so, whether the crisis should be made public (if it isn't already).
- Determine when and how agency representatives (and possibly others like law enforcement, first responders) are responding.
- Confirm who will be the spokesperson. If the event is a larger crisis event, confirm who will be the primary spokesperson among multiple stakeholder

agencies and determine transit's communications point person, who will act in a supporting role.

- Determine how much information can and should be released initially.
- Define who needs to receive the information and the most immediate, effective way to share it to those audiences (riders, press, employees, area jurisdictions, etc.)
- Address whether to hold a news conference or press briefing, or if a news release or media advisory is sufficient.
- Decide whether to bring reporters to transit office, hold the news conference in a neutral site, or at a designated area near the scene.

Other duties assigned to the Executive Crisis Management team would include:

- Notification of board members and employees.
- Writing or approving social media alerts, news releases, phone notification to media contacts or employees, and if needed, material for a news conference.
- Providing an up-to-date Fact Sheet about your organization and its operation. This should include a profile of the types of equipment used, jurisdictions traveled through, station locations, age of equipment, number of average daily passengers, date of inception, vehicle miles traveled, number of employees, operating budget, etc.
- Making sure that the spokesperson is fully informed and prepared to answer any and all questions. The spokesperson will need ready access before and following press inquiries to "experts" to gather, refine, and clarify information regarding the emergency.
- Notifying proper legal authorities, stakeholders, and public officials.
- Send out updates to board members and employees preferably by e-mail or text messages informing them what is being done, the key messages of the agency and whatever else may be relevant to these groups.
- Directing the posting of information as soon as it becomes available on the organization's web site, social media, recorded telephone hotline and/or automated voicemail system, as well as electronic e-mail. If applicable, approve train station/transit center announcements and posted signage with direction to update regularly.
- Informing all staff and providing customer service representatives a script for answering the phones. Provide them with a referral to call (such as a professional Hot Line crisis trained call center) if applicable. Refer all incoming media calls to designated Public Information Officers only. **Make sure customer service – or other staff – do not attempt to answer media questions on their own.**
- Making sure all key staff is provided with cell phones, charged batteries, and a phone tree with a list of contacts. Laptops or other mobile devices can also be helpful in expediting communications.
- Tasking a staff member to take photos and/or videos at the scene. This can be useful to telling the story but also in documenting response and evaluating effectiveness after the fact.



## USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Today, companies live and die by the perceptions of them generated through social media – especially in a crisis! Therefore management and use of social media needs to be an integral part of crisis communications.

For transit agencies, this is very important because our customers may be using our service when a crisis hits, and they may know more about the situation initially than transit staff back in the office. Customers may likely be Tweeting or posting pictures to Facebook about what is going on, and any misinformation that comes out “officially” will be immediately countered. Sometimes using posts from customers can help get good information out in an emergency (i.e. snowstorm delays specific transit routes) but can also be dangerous in spreading misinformation or causing confusion.

Social media continues to evolve and your agency may – or may not – have the dedicated staff to manage social media adequately. Investing in training and advance preparations for the use of social media during a crisis can be time and effort well spent.

Before a crisis hits:

- Inventory your “real-time” communication channels (e.g., website, Facebook, Twitter, GovDelivery, etc.) and prioritize which ones you will use in an emergency. This way you can focus your resources on those channels and let customers know where to go for the best information.
- Identify whether there are applications you can use to streamline your use of social media. For instance, with HootSuite you can consolidate and even schedule posts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. GovDelivery allows you to send out messages simultaneously to Facebook and Twitter. Identify which communication channels you can access remotely. If you can only post items to your corporate website from behind a firewall, be sure you have remote VPN access in case you are not in your office when a crisis hits.
- Set up a “dummy” website that you can access from the Internet if yours is behind a firewall.
- Identify which communication channels can be accessed through a smartphone. This may be vital in an emergency as you or your co-workers may need to post updates on the go.
- Let employees know that in an emergency they should check your website or social media for information, including whether or not to come into work. Establish this through regular communications channels, e.g. newsletters, employee meetings, posters.
- **Learn how to use your applications BEFORE a crisis hits!**

**For tips on social media use during a crisis, see appendix.**

## **CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS**

Customers will want to know how their commute/service will be affected. Decide on a plan of action and communicate that plan to the customers as soon as possible. If there is a contingency plan already in place for this type of emergency, implement it and let the customers know right away. Have a list of providers available if extra buses or cabs need to be called on to respond in an emergency. Allow for response time. Thank them for their assistance after the event.

## **INFORMATION UPDATES**

Provide immediate updates to media, staff and local officials periodically throughout the crisis. Let them know if anything changes. Updates should come directly from the Executive Crisis Management team. Number them. Put the time, date and type of incident on all updates.

Above all, tell the truth. The first key to managing bad news is to admit that the news is bad. Bad news happens. Handle bad news with candor and professionalism and you can keep bad news from becoming worse news. Resist the urge to combine good news with bad news, smokescreens are not effective. Instead, delay the good news and release it as a stand-alone story later on.

Sometimes there are conflicting opinions on what should be announced to the public and what should be kept within the agency. If possible and time permits, run statements by a legal counsel if there is one available.

Keep copies of all updates in an incident file. The Documentation and Follow-Up team can handle this responsibility.

## **MONITOR MEDIA COVERAGE**

The Media Monitoring team or designated person should be in charge of monitoring all media coverage and keep copies of everything including copies of any video coverage if possible. Copies of the incident and interviews may be ordered from a video monitoring service however, these requests must be made within 24-48 hours of the interview. This team can also be in charge of collecting any photography that was taken. Keep everything in a labeled file.

## **POST CRISIS REVIEW & WRAP UP**

After the crisis is over but within the next day or so if possible, convene a session of all teams to review and debrief. Designate someone from the Documentation and Follow-Up team to keep notes. Document what went well, what did not, how things could be improved next time and any new ideas or suggestions. This includes evaluating the Crisis Communications Plan itself and modifying it if necessary. It's also important to keep in mind what caused the crisis. Include a review of agency or operations processes and

recommendations for any changes. Communicate these changes to the public to keep reputation intact and to provide assurance that your agency is being responsive. Keep a copy of all notes and recommendations in the crisis file.

The Documentation and Follow-Up Team should also be responsible for sending out "Thank You" letters to all who helped during the emergency situation. Include police, fire and rescue, staff, County EPA if involved and any media representative who was particularly helpful getting the word out to the public.

Not all crisis situations can be averted or prevented in any public transit environment. Eventually something unforeseen may happen at your agency and you may be called upon to react quickly. Having a document readily available and rehearsed beforehand with everyone on staff can be a big help and relieve some of the inevitable stress. Use this document as a guide and alter it to fit your agency.

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## **APPENDIX: TOOLS FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Defining Communications Response**

Usually, a communications professional is notified of a transit crisis from someone in a different area of the transit agency (i.e. operations, maintenance, safety personnel). Sometimes the crisis is not with service delivery or an operational issue but rather a political, external or other internal issue. In the case of some emergencies, the responding law enforcement agency will assume control of the dissemination of information while there is an on-going investigation.

However notification of an emergency incident or situation gets to the communications officer, and regardless of whether an incident response team is activated, the following steps can be useful in defining an appropriate *communications* response. Employing the following checklist *will vary based on circumstances*, but is intended as a guide:

### **Seven-Step Communications Checklist**

1. Notify/Assemble your crisis communication team
  - a. Assign communications duties to team members
2. Gather and verify incident information
  - a. Dispatch team member(s) to site (media spokesperson, photo/social media, researcher)
  - b. Send out staff to act as information liaisons to operations center, stakeholder, partners, subject matter experts
  - c. Monitor news media and social media coverage
3. Assess the gravity of the crisis
  - a. Determine emergency level: one-time event, ongoing crisis, public safety implications, organizational involvement, overall severity/impact
4. Identify key stakeholders
  - a. As it pertains to messaging and emergency communications, notify key stakeholders: customers, law enforcement and/or other first responders, board members, agency employees, elected officials, etc.
5. Implement a communications strategy
  - a. Develop key messages scaled to incident
  - b. Work with Joint Information Center partners, if appropriate
  - c. Define which communications mechanisms will be used (i.e. twitter, web page, press release, phone line, call center, press conference, media interviews)
6. Develop external materials
  - a. Write and approve press statement/press release/fact sheet, etc.
7. Inform partners, stakeholders, and media

- a. Explain incident response actions to affected stakeholders and listen to concerns/needs
- b. Distribute press release/external materials
- c. Conduct media interviews, press briefings

Continue to assess and evaluate crisis communications response needs for as long as necessary (repeat some or all of above steps as appropriate)

## **PARTICIPATION IN A JOINT INFORMATION CENTER (JIC)**

The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a central location that facilitates operation of the Joint Information System (JIS). This is where personnel with public information responsibilities perform critical emergency information functions, crisis communications, and public affairs functions. JICs may be established at various levels of government or at incident sites, or can be components of Multiagency Coordination (MAC) Systems. A single JIC location is preferable, but the system is flexible and adaptable enough to accommodate virtual or multiple JIC locations, as required.

A Joint Information System (JIS) provides the mechanism to organize, integrate, and coordinate information to ensure timely, accurate, accessible, and consistent messaging across multiple jurisdictions and/or disciplines with non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

### **Primary role of PIOs:**

- Getting the right information to all of the right people at the right time.

### **Modular Organization:**

Incident command organizational structure is based on the

- Size, type and complexity of the incident
- Specifics of the threat posed by the incident
- Incident planning process and objectives

### **Joint Information Center (JIC)**

Where you may be located:

- At the scene
- In a vehicle
- In a building
- In a mobile unit

You need equipment that supports your effort, among them telephones, Smartphones, IPAD/laptops, fax, computers, AV equipment, notepads, pens, desks, food and other basic needs.

### **Joint Information Center (JIC)**

Tasks to be identified and assigned:

- Personnel involved
- How info is processed
- Dissemination methods

- Rumor control
- Roles of staff
- Strategic planning
- Coordination

### **Joint Information System (JIS)**

Assessment of resources and actions to be accomplished:

- Establish policies that guide the group
- Group dynamics
- Helping one and other
- Knowing strengths and weaknesses
- How critical issues are uncovered
- How critical information is distributed
- Speakers Bureau
- Video/Photography

### **Characteristics of a Successful JIC**

- One Agency has no authority over another
- JIC members work together and support one and other

### **Why Strategic Communications Matters**

- It can save lives
- It can reduce injury
- It can protect property and the environment
- It can communicate an agency's mission to the public
- It can raise the public's awareness and preparedness

### **Selecting a Spokesperson**

The person taking on this role should:

- Have the capacity to communicate empathy as well as authority
- Have the ability to make commitments on behalf of the organization
- Have a good understanding of the crisis and organizational response capabilities
- Have enough technical knowledge to avoid embarrassing mistakes
- Have the ability to stay calm under pressure
- Have past experience with news media and other stakeholders
- Have the capacity to operate in a highly fluid and unstructured situation
- Sound like a 'real person' and be able to avoid jargon and corporate speak;
- Be willing to listen as well as talk

In addition to the above, a spokesperson should have completed media training.

### **Messaging & Sample Statements**

As a crisis is unfolding, it is important to 1) get information – often limited information – out quickly, but 2) be cautious with what information gets shared when. Communications professionals need to share only what is accurate and appropriate information to the situation. Especially an emergency situation is unfolding, it can be useful to have some language to share publicly while more information is being gathered. This might include:

- We are working to make the situation safe
- Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families
- We will cooperate with investigations
- We will communicate as the facts become available

Sample statements could include a variation of the following. Consider the kind of emergencies your transit agency is most likely to need to make.

#### **Accident:**

\_\_\_\_\_ regrets that this unfortunate incident has occurred. The details and cause of the accident are being investigated at this time, but what we do know is that at (time) \_\_\_\_, train or bus No. \_\_\_\_, en route from (origin) \_\_\_\_ to (destination) \_\_\_\_\_ at (location) \_\_\_\_\_. The authorized speed limit in the area of the accident is (MPH speed). We have crews on the scene assisting local authorities, and officials from our headquarters in \_\_\_\_\_, have been dispatched to the scene as well. We have begun to reroute other passengers via (location) \_\_\_\_\_. Officials are (en route/on the scene) to help determine the exact cause of the accident.

#### **Drug Testing:**

The TSB requires that testing be done following major accidents, certain collision type accidents, certain hazardous material accidents, certain passenger train accidents and fatal accidents.

#### **Passenger/Employee Fatality:**

This is a terribly tragic accident and our deepest sympathies go out to this (passenger's) employee's family. Company policy prohibits me from releasing the (passenger's) employee's name without the family's consent, but I can tell you that he/she was employed by \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_ years. His/or her position with the company at the time of the accident was \_\_\_\_\_. Our number one priority at \_\_\_\_\_ is safety. It's critical that we determine how this accident occurred so we can take steps to prevent something like this from happening again. Our goal is to return every passenger and employee home safety every day.

#### **Explosion/Sabotage:**

At this time, \_\_\_\_\_ received word that a (suspicious package) bomb had been placed (specific location) \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ has been in contact with local authorities, and they are investigating this matter. Operations in the area have been suspended until further notice,

which will affect (number of trains or buses) \_\_\_\_\_. If anyone has any information concerning this situation, they are asked to contact local authorities immediately.

**Terrorist Strike:**

We express our heartfelt condolences to all the victims who have been injured or killed by this brazen attack on our transit system. The agency is cooperating with authorities on the investigation, and is deploying all resources necessary to help customers recover as well as return the system to normal operations as quickly as possible. We will update riders with replacement transit services as soon as they become available. Transit riders are encouraged to report information they may have witnessed that will help identify suspects responsible for this incident by immediately calling law enforcement at \_\_\_\_\_.

**Grade Crossings:**

This incident is a tragedy, and we extend our deepest sympathy to the families of those involved. At present, the incident is under investigation by \_\_\_\_\_ officials and the local authorities. What I can tell you is that the incident occurred at (time) \_\_\_\_\_, and it involved \_\_\_\_\_ train or bus (number) en route from (origin) \_\_\_\_\_ to (destination) \_\_\_\_\_. The grade crossing is equipped with (type of warning device; flasher and gate, flashers, crossbucks) \_\_\_\_\_.

Highway-rail grade crossing collisions continue to pose a problem across the country. The Federal Railroad Administration has mandated that 25% of the nation's redundant highway rail-grade crossings be eliminated. \_\_\_\_\_ fully supports the initiative and works with localities to target redundant crossings for closure.

**Hurricane/Snow/Inclement Weather:**

\_\_\_\_\_ continues to monitor the track of (hurricane, snowstorm) as it makes its way to (location) \_\_\_\_\_. At (time now) we began implementing our inclement weather plan, which calls for (repositioning of equipment, change in schedule) \_\_\_\_\_. The public is asked to pay special attention when approaching highway-rail grade intersections. Customers (have been/are being) notified by our customer service department based in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Safety:**

At \_\_\_\_\_ is our #1 priority, for our employees, our customers and the general public. Since our inception in \_\_\_\_\_, no \_\_\_\_\_ train or bus has been involved in a major accident while serving \_\_\_\_\_ passengers per day.

**Trespassing:**

\_\_\_\_\_ deeply regrets that this incident occurred. Unfortunately, the majority of the public fails to recognize that railroad tracks, trestles, bridges, yards and equipment are private property. Trespassing continues to be a leading cause of rail fatalities across the U.S. In



2012, 440 trespassers were killed while trespassing on railroad property (according to FRA). Trespassing is illegal, and violators are subject to arrest and fines.

Trains aren't able to stop quickly. To put this into perspective, it takes more than 2/3 of a mile for a 150 car freight train moving 30MPH to stop, and more than 1-1/2 miles to stop for the same train traveling at 50MPH. Pedestrians should cross tracks only at designated pedestrians or roadway crossings, while observing all warning signs and signals. The public should always expect a train on any track, at any time, in any direction, because trains don't always follow set schedules.

One of the primary initiatives of the nation's railroads to prevent this type of tragedy from occurring is education. \_\_\_\_\_ fully supports Operation Life Saver, a non-profit, nationwide public education program, dedicated to reducing injury and fatalities along railroad right-of-way.

### **Vandalism:**

Like corporations and individuals, the \_\_\_\_\_ relies on local and state law enforcement services for individual and property protection. However, we supplement that service whenever we can with private security officers. But to describe in detail the numbers of attendants or organizations and their procedures would jeopardize our security system and expose ourselves to possible future incidents.

### **Initial Notice to All External Audiences**

At (time) \_\_\_\_\_ today \_\_\_\_\_ was notified that (incident) \_\_\_\_\_ occurred. \_\_\_\_\_ train or bus number \_\_\_\_\_ (derailed, struck) in (location) \_\_\_\_\_, en route from (originating) \_\_\_\_\_ to destination \_\_\_\_\_. We cannot comment at this time on the number of passengers on the train or bus at the time of the incident or the status of any passengers.

\_\_\_\_\_ officials are on the scene and are working with federal, state and local officials to help with and assess the situation.

For further information please stay tuned to our web site at: \_\_\_\_\_ watch your local news or you can call back and check our updated status report which is subject to change within the next 45 minutes.

### **Customer Communications**

Customer Communications are vital in any crisis situation. The Information Crisis Team should be the team responsible for informing and updating the customers. Tips:

- If you have an automated 1-800 number for passenger information, update that first.
- Then, if your agency has a web site, update that next and designate someone to keep it updated with the latest information as soon as it is known.
- Station and onboard announcements are next.
- If possible, post informational signage at the stations or bus stops.

- Hand-written signs are O.K. in an emergency.
- If your service is disrupted for longer than one day, perhaps a seat notice can be drafted and placed on the seats.
- If you have electronic message signs and an electronic newsletter e-mail list, update those as soon as possible.
- Keep the customers informed as things change, and let them know when the crisis is over.
- Thank them for their patience.

## **Talking Points**

The Communications Crisis Team is responsible for all media contact. A press release and media statement should be drafted and approved by the Executive Crisis Management Team before talking to any media or press and a designated spokesperson should be referred to at all times. Questions that should be anticipated are:

- What happened?
- When, where?
- Who was involved?
- What caused the accident?
- How many/what kind of injuries resulted?
- Does your agency have a safety management plan or emergency management plan to deal with this kind of event?
- What are the safety protocols?
- What will your agency do to prevent similar occurrences in the future?
- What is the identity of the injured?
- Who is in charge?
- Who is the lead staffer on site?

## **Social Media During the Event**

It is important to acknowledge the crisis as soon as possible. Immediately cease any social media, web or e-mail marketing campaigns to focus entirely on the crisis situation and avoid creating wrong impressions about agency priorities in a time of crisis.

Delegate assignments. Who will update the website? Who has Twitter? Don't stack too many responsibilities on each person as social media can blow up in an emergency. Divide and conquer.

During the crisis event, here are some tips:

- The person assigned to social media should have authority to establish messaging or be in close contact with communications manager.
- Communicate how your service is impacted and/or what customers should do.

- Use social media to direct people to primary messages and/or information on website or wherever you have it. Use this designated channel consistently for the duration of the crisis, if possible.
- Continue to use the same ‘voice’ in your ongoing social media. Be careful that your tone reflects the seriousness of the situation.
- Choose words carefully; do not speak in absolutes. (For instance, on day of snow, do not indicate “No snow impacts today.” Instead, indicate “No snow impacts at this time. Updates to follow.”)
- Apologize for any incorrect or inappropriate posts.

Basic rule of thumb actions for social media during a crisis should include:

- Send updates at least once each hour, even if there is no “new” news.
- Resend overarching message several times during an event. Someone may have missed that tweet or Facebook post earlier in the day. If it’s important, repeat it.
- Use video or still photos to send messages or statements. Consider this a video news release mechanism. Know how to use your smartphone to send video or photos.
- Establish a hashtag for the “event” on Twitter to index all comments and posts about that event.
- In important posts on Twitter, place a period “.” before your handle. This ensures it will show up on all followers’ newsfeeds.

## Sample Press Release

(Insert organization's logo, phone numbers, web site, and address)

### NEWS RELEASE

For Release: Immediate  
Contact: Name  
Phone Number

*(Name of Organization) Responds to (Insert Crisis Type)*

*(Name of City)– (Date), (Name of Organization) is responding to an incident at (location) following a (insert crisis type) that occurred at (time). "(Organization name) is taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety of passengers, the public and the resumption of service," said (name of CEO), (name of Organization) Chief Executive Officer.*

The accident occurred when bus or train *(number)*, enrooted from *(origin)* to *(destination)* when *(emergency type)* occurred at *(location)*.

The *(organization name)* is working closely with local emergency officials *(and federal agencies, if applicable)* to assess and contain the situation. The cause of the incident is being investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Railroad Administration. *(Name of Organization)* is cooperating fully with these agencies.

*(Name of Organization)* and its employees provide *(type of service)* on *(fill-in)* miles of *(highway or track)* leased from *(if applicable)* from *(name of cities)*, *(name of state)* to *(final destinations)*. *(Name of Organization)* headquarters is located in *(City and State)*.

Additional information will be provided as obtained by *(name of Organization)*.

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## Phone Trees

Before a crisis occurs, all staff should be provided with current up-to-date phone trees and contact lists. Team leaders should be responsible for contacting their respective team members and establishing a place to convene. Alternate staff may need to be brought into the team if a team leader is unavailable.

Other lists to be provided to all staff should be: a staff directory with current home, office, cell phone, e-mail addresses and pagers if available, police, fire and rescue numbers, media contacts, Board Member contact information, legal counsel, community leaders, and stakeholder information, etc.

## Information Hot Line

The Customer Service Crisis Team should be responsible for answering the phones and logging in callers. In most cases, callers will be referred to a professionally trained Hot Line service that is staffed with counselors who are experienced in handling crisis situations. This service can usually be outsourced. The Hot Line is the number that customers should call to find out information about their loved ones. The customer service staff tasked with answering the phones in the office should be provided with a phone log to document all incoming calls and a script with approved statements including any information that is available to give out to the public. Some samples are attached. Any updates should be provided to the customer service staff answering phones on a regular basis. These staff members are not allowed to give out names and medical information. They are to refer incoming callers to the Hot Line number or proper authorities at the hospital.

### Sample Phone Log

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Customer Service Staff Answering Call: \_\_\_\_\_

Caller's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Caller's Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Caller's address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Summary of Inquiry:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Our Response:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time Complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Further Action Needed:

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### Sample Incident Report

#### INCIDENT REPORT

Notification Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Notification Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Incident Occurrence Time: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Location

Milepost or intersection: \_\_\_\_\_ Which Line \_\_\_\_\_  
Nearest City or Community: \_\_\_\_\_  
Directions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Sensitivities

Other Involvement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Hazmat Involved? Yes No (Circle One)  
Materials Released? Yes No (Circle One)  
If Yes, What chemicals: \_\_\_\_\_  
Fire: \_\_\_\_\_  
Evacuation Required? Yes No (Circle One)  
If Yes, Status: \_\_\_\_\_  
Injuries to Passengers or Employees? Yes No (Circle One)  
If Yes, Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Derailed (if railroad involved)

Engines: \_\_\_\_\_  
Upright, Leaning, Turned Over: \_\_\_\_\_  
Position of Derailed Cars in Train: \_\_\_\_\_  
Damages: \_\_\_\_\_  
Equipment: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Track: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Signal: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Outside Party Damages: \_\_\_\_\_

Remarks: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_