

NCDNCR Crisis Communication Plan (Large Sites)

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1. PURPOSE

Any organization may be confronted with a crisis event about which staff, the public and the media are interested and want to be kept informed. What is a crisis? Any event that has the potential to disrupt our normal operations, such as severe weather (hurricane or winter storm), death or severe injury of a visitor/staff member/on-site worker, fire, terrorism, workplace violence, etc. The goal of a crisis communication plan is to establish guidelines and assist employees in communicating to the media and the public about a crisis event quickly and accurately.

2. FIRST POINTS OF CONTACT

Before speaking with the media about a developing crisis situation, you MUST CONTACT Assistant Secretary for Marketing & Communications Cary Cox.

CARY COX: 919-807-7388; Cell: 919-632-2599

BACK UP FOR CARY COX: Michele Walker: 919-807-7429; Cell: 919-696-5539; Fay Mitchell: 919-807-7389; Cell: 919-630-3285

This communications plan does not replace the facility crisis plan and procedures. This plan is to address how to communicate to the media and public in a crisis.

3. INITIAL RESPONSE

Think through and make decisions about some of the points below BEFORE the next crisis occurs (i.e., crisis communications team, media staging area, alternate work locations – see Appendix A).

1. **Assemble a crisis communications team.** The team for your division/facility should include the following staff members (if available):
 - Division/facility director and assistant or associate director
 - Public Information Officer
 - Section chiefs
 - Web content manager
 - Social media manager
 - Safety/Security staff
 - Additional staff as determined by leadership
2. **Designate a spokesperson.** In most cases, this will be either your public information officer or your facility director. Ideally your spokesperson will be someone with experience talking to media.
 - **All staff members** should be aware that reporters might call them to ask basic questions for background, without revealing that they are reporters. Staff members will be informed about the crisis, but **only authorized spokespeople** will respond to media inquiries. *(Make sure a consistent message is shared with staff in case they are contacted by the public)*
3. **Draft a fact sheet.** It doesn't have to be elaborate. The fact sheet should contain a short summary of the event along with bullet points of important details/facts that can be released to media and all quotes should include bullets from the fact sheet. The fact sheet should be shared with and approved by the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. *(Make sure a consistent message is shared with staff in case they are contacted by the public)*
4. **Alert the media as needed.** Work with your public information officer or the DNCR communications office to determine whether a press release is an appropriate method for conveying information to the media.
5. **Set up a media staging area as appropriate.** If several media outlets are covering an event onsite, try to identify and set up one area where you can speak to them and/or hand out information, or hold a press conference if needed. (See Appendix A)
6. **Post information to websites and social media if appropriate.** This is described in more detail in another section, but the web and social media are tools to use to immediately share information.
7. **Alternate work locations.** In the event your building or facility is evacuated, essential staff should go to pre-determined alternative work locations, such as a nearby DNCR building or facility, if available, to continue managing the event. (See Appendix A)
8. **Communicate with staff.** Don't forget about employees in your communications plan. They'll want/need to know what's going on, too. It can be helpful to maintain a list of staff emergency contact information so that you can reach employees as needed. *(Make sure a consistent message is shared with staff)*

4. RESPONDING TO REPORTERS

- Always be truthful.
- Explain what happened and what is being done to remedy the situation. Include how facility is keeping visitors and staff safe.
- Keep the message CONSISTENT. Give everyone the same information.
- Before meeting with the media, organize the three to five most important facts you want to communicate. This is the fact sheet. If time permits, prepare answers for possible difficult questions.
- Never respond with “no comment”; instead explain why you cannot answer the question. (*i.e.*, we do not have those details confirmed at this time, we will provide you with an update when we do have an answer to that question.)
- Do not guess, speculate or give your personal opinion. This is not about what you think, but what happened and how you are handling the situation. If you do not know the answer, say so and offer to track down the answer.
- Respect reporter deadlines. If you promise to get information, do so promptly. **If you are delayed, communicate to the reporter that you are still trying to get the information they requested.**
- Never speak off the record. If you don’t want it printed, don’t say it. The media can use any information released.
- If an injury or death has occurred, do not release the name(s) of the injured/deceased until all next of kin (immediate family) have been notified by local authorities. It is not your position to release names.
- Do not discuss illegal activity at any time. If it is assumed, say “Police are investigating. We are cooperating.” Refer all questions to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- It is **very important to express your care and concern**. Your empathy needs to come across. Sometimes your goal is to reassure people.
- Keep your answers brief, especially for TV and radio. Remember that you aren’t responsible for “dead air.” Say what you need to say and then stop.
- Do not volunteer information. Answer only what is asked. **Focus on any messaging designed for visitor safety or reassurance.**

EXAMPLES of RESPONSES instead of “no comment.”

- While I can’t address that specific issue, I can say that . . . ”
- We can’t reveal names at this time, and the appropriate local authorities will make those announcements.
- Refer the reporter to a vetted expert, if appropriate.
- Indicate if certain regulations or laws preclude revealing certain types of information.

Information NOT to release:

- Identification of injured or dead. Refer this question to the appropriate local authorities.
- Medical conditions – These questions should be referred to the medical facility.
- Statements attributing blame to individual groups.
- Speculation or opinion – Release **only facts**.

EXAMPLES OF GENERAL STATEMENTS

- We are deeply saddened by this event and are working diligently with the authorities to identify what happened.
- We are deeply concerned about those who were injured. We are working to address any concerns as quickly as possible.
- Our thoughts are with those who were injured and their families at this time. We are deeply saddened by this event and are working diligently with the authorities to address the situation.
- (Our facility name) is committed to the safety of its visitors, staff and others at all times. We are working to address any concerns as quickly and aggressively as possible.
- Our top priority is for the safety of our visitors, and we are doing all we can to work with the authorities to address concerns as quickly as possible.
- We are cooperating with the authorities to investigate exactly what happened. We will release any additional information as soon as we can.
- **Identify any measures you have taken in to minimize concerns or improve safety.**

GENERAL TALKING POINTS IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC SCENARIOS

Injury or major health issue

- We are deeply concerned about those who were injured. Our staff immediately called for (or provided) medical assistance, and the visitor (or employee) who was injured has been transported to the hospital. We are working to address any concerns as quickly and aggressively as possible. We don't know any more than that right now.
- This is the information we can confirm at this time. A visitor (or employee) was injured and has been transported to the hospital, where they are undergoing treatment. We are grateful to our employees and the local emergency agencies who responded so quickly and effectively to successfully control the situation. **DO NOT REPORT ON A MEDICAL CONDITION; REFER TO THE TREATMENT FACILITY.**

Accident

- We are aware there has been an accident onsite at our facility. We are currently working with the authorities and emergency responders.
- We strive to provide a safe working environment on our sites at all times. We do whatever is necessary to promote a safe environment.
- Our thoughts are with (insert name if appropriate) and his/her family at this time. We wish him/her a speedy recovery. **DO NOT MENTION NAMES.**
- This is the information we can confirm at this time. A visitor (or employee) was injured and has been transported to the hospital, where they are undergoing treatment. **DO NOT REPORT ON A MEDICAL CONDITION; REFER TO THE TREATMENT FACILITY.**
- We are grateful to our employees and the local emergency agencies who responded so quickly and effectively to successfully control the situation. At no time was there a danger posed to the surrounding community.
- At this moment, it is too early to determine the specific cause of the accident. Department personnel are cooperating completely with local authorities. The safety of our employees and

our neighbors is extremely important to us. We are committed to conducting a thorough investigation of the incident to learn what can be done to minimize the chance of anything like this happening again.

Death of a worker, visitor or staff member:

- **DO NOT MENTION NAMES UNLESS IT HAS BEEN APPROVED.** Our thoughts are with *(insert name if approved)* and his/her family at this time.
- We are deeply saddened by this event and are working diligently with the authorities to identify what happened. **DO NOT REPORT ON A MEDICAL CONDITION.**

Violence:

- Our security team *(if you have one)* is dedicated every day to promoting the safety of our visitors and staff. We have patrols and procedures in place to reduce the possibility of violence from occurring on our properties. If violence does occur, we are prepared to react immediately to manage the situation.

Theft:

- Thefts are typically random acts. We are glad that no one was physically injured **(if true)**. We are working closely with law enforcement authorities to apprehend the person(s) responsible for this act.
- If a museum, a theft over \$50 is considered a felony.

Fire:

- There was a fire on our property this morning/afternoon. Fortunately, everyone was evacuated safely and no one was injured **(if true)**. We are working closely with the local Fire Department to identify the cause of the fire and hope to resume normal operations as soon as possible or *(insert time frame)*.

Legal issues

- You should not discuss pending legal issues. Inquiries need to be referred to Cary Cox, DNCR Marketing & Communications Office. Back up is Michele Walker or Fay Mitchell.

Severe weather:

- The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources strives to give staff and visitors the most timely and accurate information available to us relating to potential damaging weather events. Please visit our website at www.ncdcr.gov for the most up-to-date list of facility closings and delays.

5. USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE WEB IN A CRISIS

If a crisis happens that affects your customers or visitors – for example, a bomb threat results in the evacuation of your facility – rest assured that most everyone on the premises will almost immediately take to social media to start talking about it.

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are quick and effective ways of communicating your message during a crisis, and of controlling rumors. Many of those rumors may get started on the social media sites themselves, by members of the public who are witnesses to the event.

During a crisis you should:

- Monitor social media sites to see what is being said by others. If incorrect information or rumors are being circulated, use the same social media outlets to correct the false information.
- Utilize talking points in posts.
- Quickly disseminate factual information about the event, and alleviate fear. For example, in the case of the bomb threat scenario mentioned above, a sample tweet might be:
#NCmuseumhistory evacuated this a.m. due to bomb threat. All staff and visitors safely evacuated from building.
- Use your facility's hashtag in all posts.
- Be factual and honest. Don't post speculative information.

WEBSITES

Post factual information on your website in a prominent location. This can help reduce the number of phone calls and emails you receive asking for information about the event and your response.

In the event of a widespread crisis event, such as a hurricane or winter storm, closures/delays will be listed on the DNCR website at: <http://www.ncdcr.gov/emergency-closings>.