



Loss Control Department
Technical Information Paper Series

Emergency Preparedness Planning: *Media Relations*

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Emergency Preparedness Planning: *Media Relations*

Media Relations

The news media are an organization's liaison to the general public. The media form an established and powerful communications network that can disseminate emergency information quickly. An organization must have an effective media relations plan in place. An effective plan will help the organization to swiftly defuse an emergency, instill public confidence, and maintain a company's reputation and good standing within the community. The plan should be thought out well in advance of the occurrence of an actual emergency. The following guidelines establish a sound, proactive media relations plan.

Planning the Media Relations Program

Develop a written policy statement that clearly reflects the organization's commitment to an effective media relations program. Define the purpose and objective of the program, identify roles and responsibilities of the media relations team, and ensure that the policy statement is fully endorsed by senior management.

Organize a *media relations team* to be responsible for rapid decision-making in emergency situations. In addition to members of the corporate relations department, the team may include senior management and members of the legal, security, and human resources departments. It is vital that all members of the team be key decision makers.

Designate a spokesperson (and a back-up) to speak formally to the news media on behalf of the organization, throughout an emergency. The spokesperson, who is a member of the media relations team, should have in-depth knowledge of the company's operations and should have excellent communication skills. Only designated spokespersons should communicate with the media about the emergency and the company's response to it.

Communicating with the News Media

Provide a press kit to the news media *before* an emergency strikes. This will help to establish a mutual trusting relationship, and will provide positive, accurate background information about the organization. The kit should include a general overview of the organization, the latest annual report, descriptions of achievements, civic contributions, and information about the person who has been designated as the company's media contact.

Get to know members of the news media. Invite them to informal meetings, corporate functions, open houses, and when the Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) is tested during a full-scale exercise.

Should an emergency occur, provide a press release immediately. Stick to the facts (What, Who, When, Where, Why and How). Determine appropriate and alternate ways of communicating this information. Promptly follow up with members of the news media. Ensure that all promises to provide information have been fulfilled.

Upon the conclusion of the emergency, issue a final statement which outlines the company's actions, remedial steps, and future actions.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Company Spokesperson

The company spokesperson has multiple responsibilities at all stages of the emergency preparedness process:

Before an Emergency

- Understand the needs of the news media (e.g., types of information, deadlines, etc.).
- Maintain current information about the organization (photographs, site plans and maps, videos, and other written materials).
- Retain a clipping service to monitor local, regional, and national newspapers and magazines, and radio and television broadcasts.

During an Emergency

- Meet with the Emergency Coordinator to obtain current information about the emergency.
- Consult with the media relations team to determine which statements can and should be made to the media.
- During the press conference, provide clear, concise, and accurate information.
- Handle the emergency professionally and in a concerted fashion.
- Accentuate the positive in all statements.
- Be prepared to bring in independent experts (e.g., special investigators, chemist, physicians, etc.) swiftly, to address issues raised by the media, and to augment information provided in the company's statements.

After an Emergency

- Take steps to rebuild or enhance the company's reputation and to stabilize community relations.
- Deliver a press release, and possibly an advertisement, to offer condolences to those killed, injured or displaced by the emergency; to thank rescue personnel; to acknowledge acts of heroism or kindness; or to promise a thorough investigation to ensure a similar tragedy does not reoccur.

Other Aspects of the Media Relations Program

The media relations team should also ensure that these other aspects of the media relations program are in place:

Facilities and Resources

- Provide facilities and resources that will support effective communications with the media during an emergency.
- Ensure access to photocopying and facsimile machines, overnight mail envelopes, and a debriefing area.

Documentation

- Develop a mailing list of news organizations. Incorporate the mailing list into the company's facsimile and e-mail distribution lists.
- Be sure to update the mailing list at least every six months.
- Keep accurate records of all media inquiries. Document the reporter's or editor's name, telephone and fax number, e-mail address, the nature of the inquiry, and the company's response.
- Annually, review media relations policies and procedures, news media communications, roles and responsibilities, facilities and resources, documentation, and education and training techniques.

Education and Training

- Distribute media relations policies and procedures to all company employees.
- Hold periodic training sessions for the media relations team, the company spokesperson, and the spokesperson backup, to review roles and responsibilities.

References

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4. Fennelly, Kevin P. "Public Relations and the Media." Chapter 39 in *Handbook of Loss Prevention and Crime Prevention*, 3rd ed., ed. by Lawrence J. Fennelly. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, c1996.

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Emergency Preparedness Planning

Media Relations: Effective Planning

Planning the Media Relations Program

- Develop a written policy statement that clearly reflects the organization's commitment to an effective media relations program. Define the purpose and objective of the program, identify roles and responsibilities of the media relations team, and ensure that the policy statement is fully endorsed by senior management.
- Organize a *media relations team* to be responsible for rapid decision-making in emergency situations. In addition to members of the corporate relations department, the team may include senior management and members of the legal, security, and human resources departments. It is vital that all members of the team be key decision makers.
- Designate a spokesperson (and a back-up) to speak formally to the news media on behalf of the organization, throughout an emergency. The spokesperson, who is a member of the media relations team, should have in-depth knowledge of the company's operations and should have excellent communication skills. Only designated spokespersons should communicate with the media about the emergency and the company's response to it.
- Retain a public relations firm to assist with media relations when personnel within the organization are not available, or when the organization's PR personnel have limited emergency communications expertise.

Communicating with the News Media

- Provide a press kit to the news media *before* an emergency strikes. The kit should include a general overview of the organization, the latest annual report, descriptions of achievements, civic contributions, and information about the person who has been designated as the company's media contact.
- Get to know members of the news media. Invite them to informal meetings, corporate functions, open houses, and when the Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) is tested during a full-scale exercise.
- Provide a press release immediately after an emergency. Stick to the facts (What, Who, When, Where, Why and How). Determine appropriate and alternate ways of communicating this information.
- Consider providing a video news release (VNR) to send a well-rehearsed, taped message to thousand of broadcasters worldwide.
- Promptly follow-up with members of the news media. Ensure that all promises to provide information have been fulfilled.
- Upon the conclusion of the emergency, issue a final statement which outlines the company's actions, remedial steps, and future actions.

Facilities and Resources

- Provide facilities and resources that will support effective communications with the media during an emergency.
- Ensure access to photocopying and facsimile machines, overnight mail envelopes, and a debriefing area.

Emergency Preparedness Planning

Media Relations: Effective Planning

continued

Documentation

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- Be sure to update the mailing list at least every six months.
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- Annually, review media relations policies and procedures, news media communications, roles and responsibilities, facilities and resources, documentation, and education and training techniques.

Education and Training

- Distribute media relations policies and procedures to all company employees.
- Hold periodic training sessions for the media relations team, the company spokesperson, and the spokesperson backup, to review roles and responsibilities.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Company Spokesperson

Before an Emergency

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- Consult with the media relations team to determine which statements can and should be made to the media.
- During the press conference, provide clear, concise, and accurate information.
- Handle the emergency professionally and in a concerted fashion.
- Accentuate the positive in all statements.
- Be prepared to bring in independent experts (e.g., special investigators, chemist, physicians, etc.) swiftly, to address issues raised by the media, and to augment information provided in the company's statements.

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Emergency Preparedness Planning

Media Relations: News Organization Mailing List

Develop a mailing list of news organizations. Incorporate the mailing list into the company's facsimile and e-mail distribution lists. Be sure to update the mailing list at least every six months.

Sample mailing list:

MEDIA GROUP	Contact Name	Telephone	Fax	E-Mail	Mailing Address	Comment
News-papers						
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
Television						
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
Radio						
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
Others						
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			
		W: H:	W: H:			

Reviewed or Revised (Date): _____

Emergency Preparedness Planning
Media Relations: Press Release

Press Release

Date		Time	AM/PM
Company Name			
Company Address			
Primary Company Media Contact	Name: Work Phone: Home Phone: Fax: E-Mail:		
Alternate Company Media Contact	Name: Work Phone: Home Phone: Fax: E-Mail:		
General Company Contact Information	Phone: Fax: E-Mail: Website:		

Headline:	
Text:	

Emergency Preparedness Planning
Media Relations: Press Inquiry

Press Inquiry

Date:	Time	AM/PM
Person receiving call		
Name of person making inquiry (reporter or editor)		
Inquiry received from (organization name)		
Contact information for person making inquiry	Phone: Fax: E-Mail: Website: Mail Address:	

Question/Inquiry:
Response:
Notes: