

At-A-Glance Crisis Communications Guide

Our Guiding Principles –

- Compassion and concern for any injured parties/individuals and resulting situation
- Acknowledgement and ownership of mistakes
- Transparency and openness
- Stewardship of natural and financial resources
- Watershed responsibility to report to its constituents and taxpayers

Top five first steps employees can reference in a crisis:

1. **Assess the Situation:** Gather information about the crisis, including its nature, scope, and potential impacts.
2. **Communicate Compassion and Concern:** Show empathy and concern for individuals affected by the crisis in all communications.
3. **Activate the Crisis Communication Plan:** Follow the established protocols and procedures outlined in the crisis communication plan.
4. **Provide Timely Updates:** Keep stakeholders informed with regular updates on the situation and response efforts.
5. **Seek Guidance and Support:** Collaborate with colleagues, leadership, and external partners to coordinate the response and ensure effective communication.

Who to contact:

1. If a staff person witnesses what appears to be a crisis, they will contact their supervisor immediately. If their supervisor is unavailable, they will directly contact the District Administrator. If a board member witnesses a crisis, they will report directly to the District Administrator.
2. The District Administrator is responsible for determining and initiating action when there is a crisis and for activating (or not activating) the Crisis Communications Plan in a timely manner. See the Crisis Communications Plan for more info.

Dos:

1. Establish an on-going relationship with key media contacts prior to any crisis situation.
2. Communicate promptly and transparently about the crisis and its impacts.
3. Show compassion and concern for any individuals or parties affected by the crisis.
4. Take ownership of mistakes and communicate corrective actions.
5. Report regularly to constituents and taxpayers, providing updates on the situation and response efforts.
6. Prioritize stewardship of natural and financial resources in all communication and decision-making.

Don'ts:

1. Avoid withholding or minimizing information about the crisis or its impacts.
2. Don't shift blame or avoid taking responsibility for mistakes made by the watershed district.
3. Avoid using jargon or technical language that may be confusing to stakeholders.
4. Don't neglect to acknowledge and address concerns raised by constituents and taxpayers.
5. Avoid making promises or commitments that cannot be fulfilled regarding crisis response or recovery efforts.
6. Avoid using "no comment" when talking with the media. This can be seen as an admission of guilt. Instead say "We will get back to you when we have the details."

These initial steps provide a quick reference for employees to respond effectively to crises while aligning with the guiding principles and objectives of the crisis communication plan for the watershed district. FOR DETAILED RESPONSE REFER TO THE FULL CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN.

CRISIS SITUATIONS SPECIFIC TO WATERSHED DISTRICTS

Pollution Events: Pollution from various sources such as industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, sewage leakage, or accidental spills can severely degrade water quality in a watershed. This can harm aquatic life, affect drinking water supplies, and disrupt ecosystems.

Natural Disasters: Events like floods, droughts, hurricanes, or wildfires can cause significant damage to watersheds. Floods can lead to erosion, sedimentation, and habitat destruction, while droughts can reduce water availability, impacting ecosystems and human water supplies. Wildfires can increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation, affecting water quality.

Habitat Loss and Degradation: Urbanization, deforestation, and land-use changes can result in habitat loss and degradation within a watershed. This can disrupt the balance of ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and negatively impact water quality and quantity.

Invasive Species: The introduction of invasive species into a watershed can disrupt native ecosystems and biodiversity. Invasive species can outcompete native species for resources, alter habitat structure, and affect ecosystem function, leading to significant ecological imbalances.

Climate Change Impacts: Climate change can exacerbate many of the crisis situations listed above. It can lead to more frequent and severe extreme weather events, alterations in precipitation patterns, changes in temperature regimes, and rising sea levels, all of which can profoundly impact watersheds and the communities dependent on them.

OTHER CRISIS SITUATIONS

Human-Made Disasters: pollution, spills, fires, accidents, staff injuries, workplace violence.

Legal Situations: allegations of discriminatory practices, unethical or illegal conduct, or theft.

Political Situations: taxpayer grievances, political protests, social media attacks.