Practical Environmental Crisis Communication: Process and Procedures

Understanding the steps required to implement an effective crisis communication plan

Crises such as chemical spills or the discovery of contamination in areas of human habitation have the potential to attract interest and concern from the public, the media, and regulatory agencies. When an organization is in the spotlight because of a crisis, its reputation and public image are frequently at stake.

Not only will the media and other stakeholders scrutinize the handling of the crisis itself, they will also cast a critical eye on how well the organization handles communicating about the crisis. In fact, poor crisis communication can sometimes engender substantially more public anger toward an organization than the crisis itself.

Mounting an effective communication response to a crisis requires attention both to "the big picture" and to a seemingly endless number of details. Managers and attorneys may be acquainted with the broad *concepts* of effective crisis communication—such as providing only confirmed information, responding promptly to media inquiries, and the like—but they are often at a loss when it comes to practical application.

In this series, we discuss the actual steps required to implement a communication response to a crisis. We include procedures, checklists, and worksheets, which will help those who must communicate with the media and the public avoid many of the common mistakes we have seen throughout our years of assisting clients during and after crises.

Crises of an Environmental Nature

Some of the information we include in this series is of a general nature and would apply to any type of crisis. However, the main focus is on the unique challenges of responding to crises involving environmental issues. This means that we weave information on topics such as risk communication throughout the series.

The majority of environmental crises that most managers are likely to encounter are local in impact, originating at facilities or contaminated sites or from transportation accidents. So the discussion in this series focuses on working with local stakeholders and communities.

Why the Local Angle?

We don't neglect the national or international media, or national or international interests. However, we focus significant attention on local stakeholders because:

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- Facilities and contaminated properties typically exist within or near communities—and many, if not most, of the questions or concerns regarding minor or significant incidents or situations are likely to arise among local stakeholders. In addition, after the crisis is over, those who own or operate facilities or properties may find that their ability to continue operating or to obtain/renew environmental permits can be influenced by local stakeholders. Thus, facility managers/property owners will need to be able to rebuild local confidence through the crisis communication effort and follow-up recovery efforts.
- Many prominent crisis communication gurus give "local" work short shrift in their executive training programs. During a crisis, however, the news media (whether local, national, or international in scope) tend to seek out local officials, environmental advocates, and nearby residents to provide commentary and "sound bites" for their stories. As a result, we have found that working effectively with local stakeholders is a vital component of effective media management.

Facility managers/property owners will need to be able to rebuild local confidence through the crisis communication effort and follow-up recovery efforts.

What Is a Crisis?

Most of the crises we discuss in this series arise from unplanned or unforeseen incidents that create adverse effects, the potential for adverse effects, or the perception of adverse effects on people, property, or the environment. These events include spills, fires, or explosions at manufacturing sites and at facilities that handle waste storage, treatment, or disposal. They also include transportation accidents involving hazardous substances or wastes.

Crises can also arise from situations that involve no immediate trauma, but that can adversely affect an organization as they unfold. Examples of such situations include the discovery of a contaminated site, the detection of contaminants in drinking water or surface waters, the emergence of information regarding the likely or potential side effects of substances manufactured or used by a facility or organization, and the announcement of fines or enforcement actions by federal or state environmental or workplace safety agencies.

In such cases, organizations often have some lead time before the situation becomes known to the media and the public. This lead time allows managers to form a response strategy ahead of time and consider steps such as making proactive disclosures. However, it also may raise the stakes regarding what the public expects from the organization in terms of crisis communication. (A later article in this series will discuss the benefits and risks involved in proactive disclosures.)

When Environmental Concerns "Tag Along" Behind Nonenvironmental Crises

Some incidents or situations that aren't primarily "environmental" in nature, such as incidents of workplace violence or allegations of managerial or financial malfeasance, can give rise to environmental concerns that may require communication on an organization's environmental management practices.

For example, incidents involving workplace violence or sabotage may arouse public concern about facility security. If the facility stores, makes, or uses hazardous substances, these concerns can lead to questions about whether such substances could be released during future security incidents. Similarly, news about an organization's managerial or financial misdeeds can lead to concerns that its managers may also have cut corners in

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regulatory compliance, environmental protection, or safety.

Crisis Communication Planning: It Helps to Know What You Are Doing

There are many decisions that should be made before a crisis comes along, but preparing practical, useable plans typically requires substantial experience in crisis communication. The information in this series was developed and fine-tuned through years of helping clients mount crisis communication efforts in the wake of incidents or situations that ranged from relatively minor (e.g., a quickly extinguished fire at a facility that caused no injuries and little damage) to major (e.g., explosions with loss of life or chemical releases requiring mass evacuations or sheltering in place).

We use a "master planning checklist," which will be included in the last installment of this series. However, we find that the quality of the communication planning process is enhanced by first going through more basic checklists and worksheets, which we insert throughout the discussion. These checklists and worksheets can help managers better grasp the challenges they are likely to face. They can also be used within the organization's crisis communication plan (or before the plan is completed) to eliminate some of the guesswork when implementing an effective crisis communication response.

About This Series

For this series, we have broken crisis communication into three components: process and procedures, messaging, and review and recovery. These are described as follows:

- Process and procedures, covered in this article, includes the activities involved in gathering information related to the crisis and to stakeholder questions and concerns, and then ensuring that the organization's own messages are successfully distributed to all relevant stakeholders. Process includes necessary steps such as ensuring that draft news releases are routed to those people in the organization who must review and approve them—and making this happen in a timely manner. Process also includes tasks such as ensuring that local officials, key customers, or others who need to be informed of an incident before they see it on the news are contacted and briefed and that calls to the facility or organization about the incident or situation are logged and returned.

- Messaging, covered in the second article in this series, refers to the task of identifying effective, informative talking points and preparing news releases and other background information that will address public concerns about the incident or situation. In many cases, it also involves providing insights into the organization's crisis response. Good messaging involves conveying accurate (and confirmed) information, as well as communicating the competence and responsiveness of the organization in its handling of the crisis. This approach helps the organization allay at least some of the public's anxiety by providing insights into the crisis response.

> **Mistakes in process/procedures can cause the media and the public to view an organization as disorganized or incompetent. Thus, the many small tasks that comprise process are cumulatively very important to the success of the crisis communication effort.**

- Review and recovery, covered in the final installment of this series, involves reviewing both the crisis itself and the organization's crisis communication response to determine what it did right—and what it needs to do better in the future. Review and recovery also

involves conducting an assessment of stakeholders' views regarding the organization's handling of the crisis and crisis communication. This follow-up assessment is vital to ensuring that remaining questions, concerns, rumors, or false assumptions don't continue to fester among stakeholders. Such lingering issues can sometimes emerge years later (often accompanied by substantial anger) when the facility seeks to renew an environmental permit or pursue other activities where stakeholders can weigh in with their opinions.

When managers seek to determine whether an incident (or the emergence of information) may require a crisis communication response, they must consider more than just the potential for on-site or off-site effects.

Introduction to Process: Procedures That Facilitate Effective Crisis Communication

To facilitate effective communication planning—and the development of effective procedures—this article covers the following "process" topics:

- identifying a crisis;
- conducting a vulnerability analysis, which assesses the types of issues that could affect the organization;
- determining where, within an organization, a crisis communication response should originate (e.g., headquarters versus local facility);
- magnitudes of crises and the likely levels of effort required to handle the communications surrounding them;
- factors that can amplify a crisis and cause a minor incident to trigger significant public concern or media interest; and
- using a team approach to crisis communication, including descriptions and checklists of team members' duties.

Identifying a Crisis

Some incidents, such as explosions or fires at a facility, are easy to identify as crises. However, the "crisis potential" of other incidents or situations may not be as readily apparent, especially to organization managers at the operations or field level.

When managers seek to determine whether an incident (or the emergence of information) may require a crisis communication response, they must consider more than just the potential for on-site or off-site effects. They must also consider how the media, the public, or other stakeholders (such as customers or local environmental advocates) will view the incident or situation. In addition, managers need to consider the extent to which the public will expect the organization to speak out on the incident or situation.

Managers should not attempt to judge whether stakeholders' perceptions are valid. In many cases, stakeholder views may in fact be distorted or exaggerated. But one of the goals of crisis communication is to reshape invalid perceptions.

Exhibit 1 sets outs questions that managers should consider when determining whether a crisis communication response may be needed. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, then your organization will probably need to prepare for responding to inquiries from the media or other stakeholders.

Vulnerability Analysis: What Can Go Wrong?

After we discuss how one goes about identifying incidents or situations that may require a crisis communication response, we lead managers through an analysis of the types of issues that could affect their organization. The table in **Exhibit 2** addresses vulnerability analysis.

Conducting a vulnerability analysis can help managers understand the wide range of issues, both within and outside their control, that can cause public concern. Often, managers who do not work in the communications or public affairs pro-

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Exhibit 1. Crisis Identification

	Have you received inquiries about the incident/situation from the media, the public, or other stakeholders? (Yes/No)
	Have you heard rumors about the situation/incident? (Yes/No)
	Is there the potential for the situation/incident to draw negative attention to the facility or organization from the media, community, customers, or others? (Yes/No)
	If the incident or situation involves a facility, is damage and/or activity (such as remediation work) visible to passersby? (Yes/No)
	Is the incident or situation likely to require significant amounts of money to remedy? For private-sector organizations: Could the incident or situation harm the company's competitive position? (If so, customers, competitors, and the trade press may be especially interested.) (Yes/No)
	Could the incident or situation lead to a major fine or enforcement action from a government agency? (Yes/No)
	Does the incident or situation affect (or could it be perceived as affecting) people's lives in a negative way (by, for example, giving rise to health or safety concerns, property damage, or inconvenience and worry)? (Yes/No)
	Does the incident or situation have the potential to have a negative impact on the environment, especially in a visible or detectable way (e.g., contamination in nearby water supply wells)? (Yes/No)
	Is the incident/situation similar to any other incident or situation that has occurred at the facility or in the organization within the past few years? (Yes/No)
	Is the incident/situation similar to any other incident or situation that has occurred recently elsewhere and received news coverage (for example, shortly after a major oil spill is in the news, an oil spill at your facility enters a local creek)? (Yes/No) (If so, it is likely that the media may roll your incident or situation into a larger story as evidence of a more widespread problem.)

fessions, or who don't work with the media, are surprised when they begin to consider the many ways that their organization could end up in the news or as the object of stakeholder concern.

As we've already discussed, the boundaries between crises of an environmental nature and crises that are purely nonenvironmental can blur considerably. Thus, although this article is tilted toward crisis communication responses where there is a strong environmental component, the guidelines it puts forth are still valid for responding to questions or concerns regarding crises having little or no relation to environmental protection or management.

Where Should the Response Originate?

One of the factors we also consider during the vulnerability analysis involves where, within an organization's hierarchy, the crisis communication response should come from. This factor is based in large part on public expectations. For example, if a crisis involves a minor or significant accident at a manufacturing facility or a waste treatment, storage, or disposal facility, facility management will typically be expected to handle the crisis communication (with assistance from headquarters, if necessary). If a crisis is major, however, the public (and the media) often expect executive-level spokespersons to either lead the communication or figure prominently in the communication effort.

There is also a public expectation that crises involving highly sensitive issues (such as terrorism/suspected terrorism and workplace violence) or other workplace issues that may call management practices into question (such as sexual harassment or racial or other discrimination) should be addressed by spokespersons from the executive level.

Magnitudes of Crises and Typical Responses Required

During the planning process, we discuss what managers might expect, both in terms of

Exhibit 2. Vulnerability Analysis: What Can Go Wrong?

Type of Incident or Situation	Facility Involvement in Crisis Communication	Headquarters Involvement in Crisis Communication	Comments (Various Considerations, Including Level in Organization at Which the Communication Should Be Handled)
Spills, Fires, Transportation Accidents Near Facilities, Other Accidents at Manufacturing Locations	X	X	If the incident is minor, communication should be handled by the facility. If the incident is significant, facility should probably take the lead in communication, with backup and some comments from headquarters. If the incident is major (with loss of life, serious damage, or off-site effects), headquarters may need to lead the communication effort with supplementary communication from the facility.
Transportation Accidents (Away From Facility)	(X)	X	In most cases, attention will be focused on the carrier. In cases where attention is focused on the maker of the transported material, communication is typically handled by headquarters.
Discovery of Contamination	X	X	If the contamination is found at a facility, facility management should probably lead the communication effort unless the contamination is serious (e.g., has traveled off-site, into surface waters or drinking water) and there is significant community concern. Where the contamination is serious, headquarters may need to lead or be heavily involved in the communication effort.
Fines or Enforcement Actions (Imposed by Government Environmental or Safety Regulators)	X	X	Facility will probably lead the communication effort (if the fine or enforcement action involves the facility). If there is significant stakeholder concern, headquarters should provide statements to supplement the facility's messages. If the fine/enforcement action is perceived to result from gross negligence or willful action, then headquarters would need to lead the communication effort.
Workplace Issues: Sexual Harassment, Discrimination	(X)	X	This is a case in which the facility (if it is a facility issue) may make some statements, but public expectations will dictate that headquarters lead to show the organization's commitment to fixing the situation.
Workplace Issues: Workplace Violence, Sabotage	(X)	X	This is another case in which the facility (if it is a facility issue) may make some statements, but the public will expect headquarters to lead the communication effort to show the organization's commitment to a safe workplace. Note that law enforcement will most likely play a significant role in the communication process, and the organization will need to coordinate with them.
Terrorism, Suspected Terrorism, Threat of Terrorism (Including Cyberterrorism)	(X)	(X)	Law enforcement will lead the communication effort unless the threat is disproved. In the United States, the law enforcement agency involved will probably be the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Facility management (if it is a facility issue) may make some statements, but the public will expect headquarters to provide the main non–law enforcement communication.
Product Contamination		X	Particularly if the product has been used by customers, this is an issue in which the communication effort should be led by headquarters.
Serious Crime Committed by an Employee	(X)	X	If a statement is made, it should probably come from, or be directed by, headquarters.

Exhibit 2. Vulnerability Analysis: What Can Go Wrong? *(continued)*

Type of Incident or Situation	Facility Involvement in Crisis Communication	Headquarters Involvement in Crisis Communication	Comments (Various Considerations, Including Level in Organization at Which the Communication Should Be Handled)
High-Profile Crime Committed on/ Connected to Company Property (Involving Non-Employees) or Organization Products or Goods	(X)	X	If a facility is involved, facility management may be involved in the communication. However, if there is a need for significant communication, it should probably come from headquarters.
Financial Mismanagement		X	Headquarters will need to communicate on this issue.
Significant Layoffs, Facility Closings	X	X	Communication should come from the facility and from headquarters.
Protests by Environmental Advocacy or Other Groups	X	(X)	If protests are aimed at the facility, communication generally should come from the facility, with additional communication from headquarters. However, if the protests relate to sexual harassment or discrimination, then headquarters should lead the communication effort.
High-Profile Opposition to Permits	X		Facility should lead the communication effort. If opposition is very serious with significant media coverage, some involvement from headquarters may be necessary.

time and level of effort, when confronted with communicating about crises of various magnitudes.

Crises can range from minor, such as a small fire that is quickly extinguished (and may or may not receive any mention in the local media), to a major catastrophe that could spell the demise of a company and receive news coverage for years to come. Fortunately, truly catastrophic events are relatively rare.

For the sake of discussion, we have broken crises into three categories: minor, significant, and major. Following are descriptions of these categories and the level of crisis communication response you will need to consider. Please note that you will not necessarily need to undertake all of the actions listed. Instead, these lists reflect actions that people who are responding may need to undertake to respond appropriately to a crisis of a given magnitude.

Description of a Minor Crisis

- May or may not result in media inquiries or inquiries from public officials or customers.
- The situation is contained (e.g., the incident's effects don't go off-site or, if they do, the effects are minor and are perceived as minor by most stakeholders) or the situation is sufficiently mild to be of low news value.
- If the incident or situation attracts news coverage, there is usually only one story (one day of media interest) or one main story and a minor follow-up story.
- Coverage tends to be local only (some minor crisis situations may also be reported in the trade press).

Actions That May Be Required to Respond to a Minor Crisis

- Notify senior management.

- Obtain approvals, as necessary, of news releases or statements that will be made available to the media/public.
- Make statements to reporters.
- If necessary, provide information packages on the company or organization (and if the issue involves a facility, on the facility) to reporters.
- If necessary, issue a written news release. (Minor crises shouldn't require more than two news releases, with one being the norm.)
- If necessary, contact and brief key officials, customers, or others who may have concerns or be contacted by the media for comments.
- If necessary, issue a memo to facility/organization employees to inform them of the situation (and to remind them that only designated spokespersons should give statements to the media or other stakeholders).
- Follow up with stakeholders (e.g., customers, local officials) to ensure that there are no unresolved issues regarding the situation.

> A greater duration of media interest and a greater number of reporters than in the case of a minor crisis will require the preparation of multiple news releases to ensure the dissemination of accurate information on a timely basis.

Description of a Significant Crisis
- Often has off-site effects (real or imagined) on community members, customers, property, or the environment, or involves information that is dramatic, adverse, or newsworthy enough to catch the attention of the media and other stakeholders.
- Likely to result in high-profile stories that run more than two days locally; may also garner some regional or even national media coverage.
- Trade-press coverage is likely.
- Likely to result in lawsuits and/or a significant amount of money being spent to litigate and/or remedy the situation.

Actions That May Be Required to Respond to a Significant Crisis

In addition to the steps included under minor crises, responses to significant crises often necessitate multiple media contacts, leading to the need to:

- Keep a formal log of media inquiries, including names of reporters, contact information, and their deadlines.
- Engage a media monitoring service.
- Develop formal message points; may also need to develop questions and answers to determine how best to explain complex information.
- Hold formal media briefings. A greater duration of media interest and a greater number of reporters than in the case of a minor crisis will require the preparation of multiple news releases to ensure the dissemination of accurate information on a timely basis.
- Prepare or distribute existing background information on the organization, facility, or other topics relevant to the crisis to reporters and (if necessary) to other stakeholders to help them better understand the situation or incident.
- Keep a formal log of community, customer, and public inquiries and comments.
- Hold briefings for or otherwise inform key community stakeholders, customers, and the like, as necessary, to provide updates on the incident or situation.

Description of a Major Crisis
- Media interest in the incident or situation is very strong, and is likely to include national and even international coverage that could continue over an extended length of time (several weeks or months) as the story "unfolds."
- Typically involves deaths or critical-care injuries to company employees or bystanders, severe property or environmental damage, or other serious consequences that could have major negative financial ramifications for the company.

- Likely to result in major legal action and fines.

Note: Addressing a major crisis will require substantial resources, including (in many cases) assistance from outside consultants.

Actions That May Be Required to Respond to a Major Crisis

In addition to steps included under minor and significant crises, responses to major crises are likely to involve:

- Preparation of a communication plan to guide the response. (Note: The effectiveness of the crisis communication effort should be regularly assessed to ensure that stakeholder concerns are being addressed and to fine-tune the communication plan, as needed.)
- Development of comprehensive message points and questions and answers.
- Multiple interviews with broadcast media, as well as print/online media.
- Professional outside assistance for coaching of spokesperson (media training).
- Preparation of numerous news releases and other statements to employees, customers, and other stakeholders.
- Briefings/updates of key community stakeholders (if the situation involves a facility or site) and other stakeholders on a regular basis.
- Formal follow-up inquiries and follow-up communication with key stakeholders to identify outstanding questions, issues, or concerns.

Escalating Factors: Conditions That Can Cause an Incident to Attract Increased Scrutiny

Sometimes relatively minor incidents receive more publicity than the incident itself appears to warrant. The following conditions/factors increase the likelihood that an incident will receive greater (and more critical) media and/or public scrutiny. When ranking an incident for the appropriate level of response, you should consider the following factors. If any are present, you should "upgrade" the level of response as necessary:

- Facility/organization has had other issues previously.
- Facility/organization already has problems with the community or with certain stakeholder groups.
- Facility/organization is located in a community that has been sensitized to health, safety, or environmental issues because of problems at other facilities.
- Facility/organization already receives more scrutiny/criticism than seems warranted because of perceptions about labor or employment issues (e.g., large layoffs) or other issues (e.g., controversy over permitting or siting of a facility in the community).

> Addressing a major crisis will require substantial resources, including (in many cases) assistance from outside consultants.

- Other incidents similar to the one that has occurred at the facility or organization have recently been in the news (e.g., incidents of workplace violence, product tampering, disclosure of actual or potential adverse health effects of chemicals made or used at the facility). In such instances, a relatively minor incident at the facility/organization may receive unusually intense news coverage because it is being reported as part of a "trend."

Using a Team Approach to Crisis Communication

Responding to media or public attention can be very labor-intensive. So it often requires a team approach to make sure you are responding with confirmed information in a timely fashion. We find that an effective crisis communication team consists of persons who fulfill three roles:

- designated spokesperson,
- communication coordinator, and
- administrative coordinator.

The idea behind the team is to split up the work to ensure that all of the necessary tasks are performed. Note that in significant or major crises, several people may be needed to fulfill these roles. However, in a minor crisis, with only one or two media calls, one person may be able to do whatever tasks are required to fulfill the duties of all three roles that need to be performed. The discussion that follows outlines how we usually suggest the tasks be assigned.

Designated Spokesperson Position

For most incidents that occur at a facility, the facility manager serves as the designated spokesperson—although this may not be the best choice. For crisis communication purposes, it is best to pick a designated spokesperson who will not be heavily involved in managing the crisis itself so he or she will be able to devote the time and effort necessary to fulfill the designated spokesperson role. Backup spokespersons should also be identified to cover the spokesperson duties if the designated spokesperson is unavailable.

Exhibit 3 contains a checklist of duties for the designated spokesperson. The designated and backup spokespersons should have received crisis communication and media training. Those chosen for these roles should be individuals who are viewed by the public and media as persons who can speak authoritatively for the site. The organization's employees should be instructed to refer all questions to the designated spokesperson if they are approached by reporters or other stakeholders (e.g., local officials, neighbors, customers).

Exhibit 3. Designated Spokesperson: Checklist of Duties

	Act as the official spokesperson for the facility/organization in briefings and interviews with media and other interested parties.
	Ensure that notification regarding the crisis is made to upper management within the organization per the organization's crisis communication plan. Ensure that upper management is kept apprised of how the crisis communication efforts are going.
	Designate and mobilize crisis-specific members for the crisis communication team.
	Work with the communication coordinator, legal department, and other relevant managers to develop key messages about the crisis and about the facility's or organization's response.
	Work with the communication coordinator and emergency responders and with representatives of other government agencies that may be involved in the crisis (e.g., law enforcement, United States Environmental Protection Agency) to ensure that key messages of the organization do not contradict statements of government officials (to the extent practicable).
	Inform key stakeholders, such as local non-emergency officials, of the crisis so they are not blindsided by the media. If the designated spokesperson does not have the time to make such notifications, then the communication coordinator should make these notifications.
	Work with the communication coordinator, administrative coordinator, legal department, and organizational management (if necessary) to:
	• Assess how well the crisis communication effort is providing timely and accurate information to the media and to nonmedia stakeholders (e.g., review information gathered by the administrative coordinator and communication coordinator regarding, for example, the groups requesting information, number and frequency of media calls, and other relevant issues).
	• With the communication coordinator (and possibly the legal department), review and assess media coverage and/or other comments or questions from nonmedia stakeholders and revise messages and/or add background information or fact sheets, as necessary.
	• Assess whether additional communication activities (such as placing display advertisements, holding neighborhood meetings, and/or contacting customers) should be undertaken.

Communication Coordinator Position

Since acting as the designated spokesperson can be time-consuming, it is often necessary to have someone else involved who can concentrate on gathering information, formulating and fine-tuning key messages, and preparing and coordinating the editing and approval of news releases and other backup information (including questions and answers) with senior management and other key players, such as the organization's environmental department, legal representatives, and emergency responders. This is the role of the communication coordinator. The communication coordinator may also perform notification to nonemergency response local officials and other important stakeholders if the designated spokesperson cannot take the time to do so.

Exhibit 4 sets out a checklist of duties for the communication coordinator. Ideally, persons filling the communication coordinator position should possess good writing skills and an understanding of both the news-writing and news-gathering processes. The communication coordinator should also possess knowledge of technical issues, or at least some knowledge of technical concepts and terminology.

Administrative Coordinator Position

In crises of significant or major magnitude, the administrative coordinator position is demanding and time-consuming. The administrative coordinator is responsible for gathering and conveying information on media inquiries (and other comments or questions) received by the facility or organization to the communication coordinator and designated spokesperson. He or she supervises or executes the distribution of news releases and handles other important logistical arrangements, including obtaining information on (for example) requirements for placing display

Exhibit 4. Communication Coordinator: Checklist of Duties

	Collect information from all parties involved in responding to the crisis, including "outside" emergency responders and other government agencies involved in the crisis.
	Work with the designated spokesperson; act as a liaison for the communication function with emergency responders or other relevant government agencies.
	If the designated spokesperson does not have the time to make such notifications, inform key stakeholders (such as local officials) about the crisis so they are not blindsided if they are contacted by reporters or facility neighbors.
	Prepare basic message points about the crisis, the organization's response, and other relevant issues. Refine this information in consultation with the designated spokesperson, legal department, and other relevant managers.
	Shepherd message points, news releases, approvals/input regarding other possible communication activities through the designated spokesperson, legal department, and others who must approve them. If necessary, shepherd message points, news releases, and information about other activities through review and/or approval by emergency responders, law enforcement, or other relevant government agencies.
	Work with the administrative coordinator to determine what questions, concerns, and comments are being received by the facility/organization from reporters, neighbors, customers, or other stakeholders.
	Work with the administrative coordinator and designated spokesperson to determine what basic information (e.g., background information, basic fact sheets) can be provided by the administrative coordinator to the media and/or other stakeholders (see description of administrative coordinator position for explanation).
	Work with the designated spokesperson, administrative coordinator, legal department, and other relevant managers to:
	• Assess how well the crisis communication effort is providing timely and accurate information to the media and to nonmedia stakeholders (e.g., review factors such as groups requesting information, and number and frequency of media calls compared to the organization's communication efforts).
	• Review and assess media coverage and/or comments and questions from nonmedia stakeholders.
	• Assess whether additional communication activities (such as placing display advertisements, holding neighborhood meetings, and contacting customers) should be undertaken.

Exhibit 5. Administrative Coordinator: Checklist of Duties

	Gather and convey information on media and nonmedia inquiries, comments, and questions to the communication coordinator, the designated spokesperson, and (as necessary) the legal department and other relevant managers.
	Ensure that calls from reporters and other nonmedia stakeholders are logged. As necessary, obtain additional contact information and deadline information from reporters.
	Supervise or handle the distribution of confirmed and/or approved information to reporters and other stakeholders in consultation with the designated spokesperson, communication coordinator, legal department, and other relevant managers.
	As necessary, gather outside information (such as information on display advertising space and outside communication materials).
	Provide logistical support in arranging for media briefings or other meetings with stakeholders.
	Assemble background materials as needed.

ads and arranging for off-site meeting or briefing locations. **Exhibit 5** sets out a checklist of duties for the administrative coordinator.

In some cases, the administrative coordinator may also be asked to provide specific information to persons who contact the facility or organization. Such communication is typically limited to:

- Providing confirmed information, especially information that has already been distributed in news releases, to callers.
- Providing certain "background" information, such as the number of persons employed at the facility, the products it manufactures, and the date when the facility began operations.
- Calling back reporters or persons who have already contacted the facility or organization to clarify what their questions are and ensure appropriate responses.

The administrative coordinator can "safely" perform these tasks, meaning that he or she can perform them without being expected to provide further authoritative and/or sensitive information because this team member can state that he or she is not involved in the immediate handling of the crisis and has limited information. This provides another layer of responsiveness without going beyond the release of confirmed and approved information.

Conclusion

Even with good planning, communicating in the midst or aftermath of a crisis is labor-intensive and time-consuming. Crisis communication plans that spell out important processes, such as who within an organization needs to review and approve news releases and other statements—with "bypass" instructions if some of these people aren't available—can help those charged with the communication function concentrate on getting useful, confirmed information out to the media and other key stakeholders.

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