

7 EASY STEPS TO A CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN



In a crisis, people's health and safety depends on the speed and the accuracy of your response. You need to have a crisis communications plan ironed out well before an emergency happens. This plan should outline what you need to communicate, how, when and to whom. Here are 7 basic steps to get you started:



STEP 1 – START AT THE TOP

Get your plan authorized by management and legal in advance so there aren't obstacles to slow you down when it matters. It's also important that you get management to integrate crisis training into orientations and budgets, and to approve time for testing and drills.



STEP 2 – KEEP IT SIMPLE

Be sure your plan is clear and easy to execute. The process should be as streamlined as possible, with each person clear on the chain of authority and that chain should be as short as possible. Remember that emotions run high in a crisis, so providing simple tools like checklists can be a big help.



STEP 3 – ROLEPLAY AND TEST

Roleplay scenarios for every conceivable emergency on a regular basis to keep everyone on their toes and ready. Be sure to test the overall system – not just parts of it. Identifying and correcting weak spots is an important step in perfecting your emergency alert process.



STEP 4 – BE FAST, BUT BE SMART

How fast you communicate during a crisis can save lives or prevent injuries, but if you don't give enough information or you give the wrong information, it can make things a lot worse. The first minutes are crucial, so protocols and timelines should be established in advance. Be specific – instead of just listing what needs to happen, set specific goals like "Call emergency workers within two minutes."



STEP 5 – COVER ALL YOUR BASES

Make sure you think through everywhere people might be during a crisis and detail how you'll reach them. Don't make people go outside your plan for contact lists or other resources – put it all in there. In addition to people on site, include families, the community and the media. Prepare your press releases and statements for each situation in advance so that only the specifics need to be added when the time comes.



STEP 6 – CONSIDER COMMUNICATION METHODS

There are so many ways to alert people during an emergency that it can actually slow you down if you try to use them all – sirens, alarms, digital signage, websites, SMS and more. Run drills to find out which ways are best for each situation – and never rely on just one way to reach people. And don't forget to build in contingencies in case your computer network or phones or power fail. Also, never underestimate word-of-mouth to get people informed and mobilized. Make sure to train your staff.



STEP 7 – THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE

Be sure to include recovery tactics in your plan. Getting up and running as soon as possible after an emergency is crucial – as is communicating with the community at large. Showing progress toward normality after a crisis is essential to calming people down and restoring their trust.



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