



# Crisis Communications Guidelines

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# Overview

## **Background:**

This “Crisis Communication Guide” is made available to Explore Fairbanks partner businesses to assist them in preparing for the dissemination of knowledge and swift communications in times of crisis.

## **Definition:**

For the purpose of these guidelines, a crisis is defined as any unplanned event that potentially presents a risk to people, property, environment, reputation, and industry in and around Fairbanks. These events may be unforeseen and sudden, or an ongoing incident that starts small and grows larger as information unfolds and time lapses. Crisis examples include:

- Catastrophes: earthquakes, major fires, floods, widespread illness, terrorism, etc.
- Ongoing issues due to natural disasters such as road closures
- Transportation disasters: rail, airplane, motor coach, etc.
- Weather: diversion of planes due to bad weather, etc.
- Illegal acts or allegations by members, board members, employees, etc.
- Death/injury of staff members

## **Crisis Communication Guidelines Objectives:**

- To protect life, environment, property and reputation
- To provide policies and procedures for assessing, responding to, and communicating during emergencies and crisis of any degree
- To provide continuous and effective leadership during a crisis
- To serve as information resource for key audiences
- To provide accurate and timely communications to key audiences
- To support local, regional and state efforts in the event of an emergency

# Crisis Team

## **Crisis Coordinator:**

The Crisis Coordinator evaluates the situation, assembles the Core Safety Team, and if needed, the Crisis Communication Team, and activates the Crisis Communications Guidelines. The Crisis Coordinator is often also the Spokesperson.

## **Spokesperson:**

A crisis is a news event and will be covered by the media. All internal and external communications throughout the crisis should be developed by a Crisis Communications Team and released by the official spokesperson(s). The Spokesperson is generally the face of the industry. A spokesperson must be designated and should be the person who speaks on the business' behalf in most crisis situations. Centralizing all media contacts through a single spokesperson minimizes the potential for conflicting statements. That said, it is important to have several people trained and available to act as a spokesperson.

In many cases, the crisis may be managed by a local, state or federal agency, which would provide a central media spokesperson. The Spokesperson will be the primary liaison with that agency. A good spokesperson:

- Demonstrates concern and empathy for those who are affected
- Is articulate and projects a calm, clear, controlled voice
- Talk in "sound bites" – concise statements of 30 seconds
- Is credible and can speak for the industry
- Understands company policies
- Is accessible throughout the crisis
- Explains technical matters in everyday terms
- Can diplomatically respond to aggressive media or special interest groups
- Has a community perspective
- Understands the media's format, deadlines and editorial requirements

## **Spokesperson Preparation:**

Dealing with the media can be challenging during a crisis. Initial training and subsequent rehearsals will help the spokesperson(s) prepare. It's better to be over-prepared than surprised by the depth of the media's questioning. If there are other issues facing you at the same time as the crisis, be prepared to answer those as well.

The health and safety of those affected are always the top priority. Expressing concern about the health and safety of those affected is appropriate for first statement. As the crisis progresses and new information and facts are available, the Crisis Communication Team shall prepare statements for the spokesperson prior to any media interview, briefing or news

conference. These prepared statements can also be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information. The statement can also be faxed or e-mailed upon request.

In all cases, the spokesperson should:

- Speak clearly, concisely with confidence and control
- Establish eye contact (or appear to do so) from time-to-time
- Provide copies of any prepared statements
- Assure reporters/officials of updates as information unveils
- Provide time and location of event, if an accident
- Admit if unsure of answer to a question, and advise that she/he will try to get one
- Promptly clarify information and inaccuracies
- Know audience
- Understand needs of reporters
- Offer to provide information not currently known as a later time

In all cases, a spokesperson:

- **Does not** speculate or elaborate; provide only known factual information
- **Does not** deviate from prepared statements
- **Does not** use jargon
- **Does not** offer personal or legal opinions
- **Does not** answer questions more appropriately addressed to others (i.e., customers, investigators, government officials, etc.)
- **Does not** give names of dead or injured (this is best left to emergency personnel)
- **Does not** give nature of injuries until authorized by investigator in charge and Crisis Coordinator
- **Does not** respond to “expert witness” statements
- **Does not** provide organization communications or records
- **Does not** repeat inflammatory or negative remarks
- **Does not** blame anyone for the incident, but may need to accept responsibility
- **Does not** offer a compromise to the problem
- **Does not** answer hypothetical questions
- **Does not** give long, rambling answers to straightforward questions
- **Does not** lose temper
- **Does not** say “no comment”
- **Does not** lie, evade, mislead, cover up or block access to other sources of information
- **Does not** try to answer a question if answer is unknown

### **Crisis Communications Team Imperatives:**

- Provide accurate information in a timely basis to key audiences
- Communicate concern that health and safety of those affected are a top priority
- Provide the facts only; no speculation
- Release information through a single spokesperson
- Assist with the flow of information to key audiences
- Preserve key audience confidence
- Support local, state, and federal emergency crisis plans as applicable
- Crisis Communications Team will coordinate release of any information, and/or will be a part of an overall communications team in support of local, state and federal emergency crisis plans
- Legal counsel will be consulted prior to release of any information where potential claims may be raised

### **Crisis Communications Team Priorities:**

- Identifying and prioritizing key audiences
- Developing an initial position statement for news media
- Tailoring statement for appropriate key audiences as appropriate
- Identify communication channels available for message dissemination
- Updating website with pertinent information, releases and links as identified by Crisis Communications Team
- Developing messages – determining what can and cannot be released, anticipating tough questions and organizing press conferences as needed
- Identifying, contacting, and briefing third-party experts
- Beginning long-term communications and recovery plan, if needed

### **Key Audiences:**

The Crisis Communication Team will take the lead in maintaining contact with, collecting information from, and sending updated and accurate information to appropriate key audiences in a timely manner as dictated by crisis priorities. Key audiences include:

- Employees and volunteers
- Board of Directors
- Business partners
- Customers, clients, and/or visitors
- Regulators and enforcement agencies
- Government officials or legislators
- City/Borough and business leaders
- News media
- Visitor industry

# Crisis Communications Guidelines Activation

A speedy response is paramount in a crisis. If an employee, volunteer, or board member believes a problem or crisis is pending or underway, she/he should report it immediately to the Crisis Coordinator for evaluation. The Crisis Coordinator will evaluate the problem by answering the following questions:

- Does the situation substantially involve or negatively impact the business, organization, or industry?
- Is there potential for substantial hardship, inconvenience or endangerment to customers or clients?
- Will the situation be long in duration?
- Are there serious, life-threatening injuries to customers or employees?
- Is there significant property or environmental damage?
- Are there local, regional, national or international ramifications for the Interior Alaska area?

## **If the answer is no to all of the questions above:**

- Take the necessary steps to address any immediate needs
- Notify the Board of Directors or person(s) in a position of authority and outline measures taken if needed

## **If the answer is yes to any one of the questions above, it is time to initiate the Crisis Communications Guidelines:**

1. Notify all pertinent agencies (fire, police, etc.) as necessary
2. Evacuate the area if needed to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers, and others in or adjacent to the premises
3. Assemble the Core Safety Team. At the first meeting, Core Safety Team members will do the following:
  - Evaluate the crisis. Gather information to assess the crisis and determine what your support role will be. While assessing the situation, the Core Safety Team shall determine:
    - Who is involved in the incident and/or may be taking charge of the problem/crisis?
    - Are there threats to employees/clients/customers/visitors?
    - How are those who were affected being helped?
    - Is there potential for widespread or ongoing media attention?
    - Are there local, regional, national or international ramifications for Interior Alaska?
    - How does it affect your industry this week, next week, long term?

- Prepare a statement and background information - stick to the facts, do not speculate
  - Designate locations for an Emergency Operations Center and a Crisis Communications/Media Center and determine if remote emergency operations centers need to be activated
  - Assign specific tasks
4. If needed, designate a Spokesperson and assemble the Crisis Communications Team and others to assist with flow of information via your website, an employee and volunteer information phone line, media interviews, and meetings/contacts with borough, city and state officials or other entities
  5. Develop a plan to assist those who have been affected (will depend upon nature of crisis)
  6. Begin your business recovery plan, if available, depending upon nature of crisis

**Emergency Operations & Crisis Communications/Media Center Location:**

In the event of a crisis, the Core Safety Team will gather at the designated location, or other location to-be-determined in the event the designated location is unavailable due to damage, or it is deemed unsafe. The Crisis Communications/Media Center is the venue designated for press conferences, briefings and dissemination of media information.

**Local/State/Federal Emergency Plan Support:**

The Core Safety Team will support local, state and federal emergency operations plans. A member or designee from the Core Safety Team must be available to provide input and take part in local, state or federal crisis and/or emergency planning sessions as needed to provide an industry perspective. She/he will maintain routine contact with these key organizations in order to be part of the response team in instances that affect your organization or industry.

These organizations may include:

- Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) Emergency Services
- Alaska Department of Transportation regional office
- Alaska State Troopers, City and UAF police and fire departments
- Explore Fairbanks
- City and FNSB officials
- Fairbanks International Airport
- Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce

In a catastrophic event, your employees and volunteers may help provide communications/information support at local hotels, Carlson Center, airport, railway, evacuation shelters, and other key locations. These duties may include, but are not limited to:

- Staffing key locations and giving information updates as provided by the Crisis Communications Team to the public, visitors, employees, and others
- Running information to and from key locations in the event that traditional communication channels are not working

- Staffing a city/borough-wide emergency operations public information center

### **Crisis Communications Kit:**

Keep a kit containing the following elements at your designated Emergency Operations Center:

- Two copies of the Crisis Communication Guidelines in binders with instructions, contact lists, insurance information, forms and checklists
- Media badges, name tags and lanyards
- Employee manual
- Company letterhead, envelopes, and postage stamps
- Legal pads
- Pens and markers
- City and state maps
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Paper clips
- Flashlights
- Batteries
- Phone log pad

### **Evaluation and Measurement**

The Core Safety Team should meet after the crisis ends to review and evaluate every action taken. The Crisis Communication Guidelines should be amended as needed to reflect lessons learned. The Crisis Communications Team will monitor and measure the following throughout the crisis:

- Outputs and effectiveness of the process to determine if key messages were communicated accurately and to whom
- Website visits – number of visitors, unique visitors and pages/content reviewed
- Print and broadcast coverage – types of stories, content, length, accuracy, whether positive or negative
- Impact of the messages to determine if they are having the desired affect
- Outcomes, i.e. industry reputation, changes in client/customer numbers, productivity, sales, etc.

# Communications during a Crisis

## **Employee Communications**

Employees and volunteers are an important audience during a crisis. The Crisis Communications Team determines what information will be released to employees and will assist in disseminating through employee communications channels such as e-mail, website, employee meetings, phone calls, etc.

Communications should:

- Identify what has happened/known facts,
- Identify other organizations involved to resolve the situation,
- Reassure that volunteers and employees' health and safety are priorities,
- Describe how the situation relates to employees, and recommend what action employees should undertake.

## **Non-Employee Communications**

If non-employees such as clients, customers, or visitors are directly impacted, timely information is imperative. Your website should be utilized to assist in disseminating updated, accurate information in a timely manner. Non-employees calling with questions should be provided current, accurate information to reassure them that the situation is under control. Your staff should demonstrate the same high level of customer service and care that is shown during normal working conditions, give accurate advice on any change of service, and indicate where they can go for additional help.

## **Website Communication**

The website should be updated or include a special page to communicate and manage pertinent information. It allows for the dissemination of current, accurate information as identified by the Crisis Communications Team as well as a venue to dispel misinformation and rumors. The page should include:

- Latest statements, advisories and bulletins
- Q&A
- Statement or message about the situation from the Spokesperson
- Corrections or clarifications
- Pertinent links (i.e., AK DOT, FNSB, airlines, etc.)

## **Partner Communications**

Depending upon the crisis, the level of direct communication may vary and will be determined by the Crisis Communications Team. Keeping your business partners informed with pertinent information throughout the crisis will assist in making sure that accurate information is disseminated to other key audiences. Although they will receive information

through the media, direct communications through e-mail bulletins and the website will ensure that the information is accurate and timely.

### **Media Communications**

**First media contact:** as soon after crisis as is appropriate and possible

- Read prepared statement
- Show concern for all audiences involved (employees, volunteers, visitors, other organizations, etc.)
- Provide dates/times/locations for upcoming media updates or news conferences

**Second media contact:** within 24 hours of crisis (or sooner, depending upon situation); this level of contact will continue until critical phase of crisis has passed.

- Provide verbal and written updated information about crisis and causes
- Instruct media on gathering visual images
- Relate how information will be disseminated; give media timeline as to when information will be available and how to access
- Offer interviews

**Third media contact:** completion of crisis

- Provide wrap-up release
- Discuss how your organization successfully handled crisis

### **Follow-up**

- Track media clips
- Have internal debriefing meeting to review how crisis was handled (positive and negative aspects); craft improvement plan

### **Media Interview Ground Rules:**

1. Listen carefully to the question and answer it. Try to “bridge” to a point in the organizations favor if the question is along the line to permit it.
2. Answer the question without waffling. Give a direct, non-evasive answer.
3. Ask for clarification or have the question repeated. Some questions are tough, not because the answers are difficult, but because they are unclear. Don’t be intimidated – ask the questioner either to repeat or restate the question more clearly.
4. When a question has many parts – or may be several questions – answer the *one* that is most relevant, then let the interviewer re-ask the others.
5. If the answer to the question is unknown, say so. Opting out by saying “I don’t know, but I’ll find out,” is perfectly valid. Be sure to follow-through on the promise.
6. For questions unable to answer, say so. There may be one or more reasons why a question cannot be answered (i.e., commercial or legal sensitivity). Respond directly

without batting an eyelid “I’m sorry, but I am not in a position to give you that information” and explain why.

7. Tell the truth, even if it hurts; stick to the facts. Concealment or lying will not be forgotten or overlooked. If there is truth to tell, tell it. If the question cannot be answered truthfully, that is, the answer is known but cannot be given, respond as if it were a question that is unable to be answered.
8. Never say “no comment.” Find a way to answer the question even if it is to say “I cannot comment on that at this time because . . .”
9. Avoid “in my personal opinion.” Stick to the facts and don’t speculate – it can become the “official” answer.
10. Don’t be intimidated by the questioner.
11. Don’t argue with a questioner; never lose your cool.
12. Let the interviewer worry about “dead air.” When the question has been answered, stop. Remember to speak in “sound bites” about 5 seconds. Remember talking points and stick to them. Don’t be tempted to say more than is needed.
13. Say the most important things first, then expand. The first point stated is remembered when answering a question. Any supportive reasoning should follow the first point.
14. Don’t repeat offensive phrases or words contained in the question, even to deny them. Do not let words be put into your mouth.
15. Stay within your field of knowledge. Don’t try to answer if the question is out of your area of knowledge.
16. If you don’t want a statement quoted, don’t make it. Nothing is ever off the record.
17. Feel in control by selecting the time and location of the interview when possible, and tape or video record it if necessary.
18. Offer to check technical points of story.
19. Provide information to reporter within stipulated timeframe.
20. Do not forward e-mails containing information to help facilitate media questions, information may be confidential.
21. Do not assign blame.
22. Do not minimize the problem or situation.

### **Media Guidelines:**

#### **1. Responding to media inquiries:**

- Refer all media to official spokesperson(s)
- Official spokesperson should provide all information regarding crisis
- Be courteous and accommodating while protecting the interests of your organization, business, or industry

- Ask if they are on a deadline
- Log and return all calls
- Release only information approved by the Crisis Communications Team
- Update information on a regular basis and as often as new, verifiable information is available
- Coordinate with governmental, regulatory, and other industry organizations as appropriate when making announcements

## **2. Preparing Talking Points:**

Talking points should include information found in the prepared statement and press materials.

- General facts of situation
- How situation has impacted or will impact operations
- General message of concern
- Timeline for information dissemination
- How other entities are involved
- What the organization is doing to overcome/combat situation

## **3. Preparing for Media Interviews:**

- Prepare talking points in advance of any interview; select points that need to be communicated and feel comfortable in discussing them several ways
- Ensure all materials are readily available and can easily be available
- Practice answering tough questions with key staff who can help with answers and who can critique the spokesperson
- Determine timeframe/time limits
- Be familiar with room/space to be used

## **4. Doing Radio Interviews:**

- Arrange a callback time that's convenient and allows advance preparation whenever possible
- Tape answers to questions
- Have talking points before you with exact wording written down for difficult subjects
- Ensure you're undisturbed; block other telephone calls during interview time
- Speak slowly and distinctly
- Have pad and pencil handy to note any questions
- Assume everything, including preliminary discussions, may become part of the interviews edited version
- Be prepared for an interview lasting 5 minutes to be edited down to 2-3 minutes
- Always assume the interview may be "live" or "live to tape"
- Have an associate on hand to help with data

## 5. **Doing Television Interviews:**

- **In studio**
  - Treat taping the same as live, without editing
  - Assume you're always on camera when in the studio before and after the interview
  - Always look to the interviewer, not the camera
  - Remain seated at the conclusion of the interview until asked to leave
  - Avoid "defensive" body language (folded arms or crossed legs)
  - Avoid fiddling with hands or nervous jittering of legs, or swiveling in a chair or tapping a pencil
  - Have neat appearance, avoid loud colors
- **On-site**
  - Basic rule is to shift scene of the interview to a quiet location away from the crisis and possible interveners
  - Look to reporter, don't look at the camera
  - Have a relaxed face
  - Be polite

## 6. **Doing Print Interviews:**

- **Over the Phone**
  - Call back for the actual interview at the agreed time after preparation is complete
  - Tape answers, if necessary
  - Repeat important information, such as figures
  - Have complete, correct spelling of key names and other briefing notes, talking points and key messages ready
  - Offer to call back if you need to obtain new facts for reporter or invite the reporter to call back if more information is needed

### **Sample Questions**

Anticipate questions and answers that media and officials will have before they are asked. Below are examples that may come up, depending upon the situation.

#### What happened? When?

Keep answers short and factual. Provide limited detail. Do not speculate.

#### What caused the incident?

"We're investigating the situation carefully and will provide details as soon as they are available."

Were there fatalities? Who? How many?

Confirm if there were fatalities. Keep reply short and express sincere sadness at the tragedy. Do not divulge names of victims, that's information best released by official emergency agencies. Do not admit guilt or wrongdoing on company's part. Do not assign blame.

Were there any injuries? What kind?

Keep answers general in nature; describe injuries as minor, moderate or severe. Do not provide names of victims until families and stakeholders have been notified by an emergency agency. Do not downplay any injuries as story may be changed later and the media will question credibility.

Was there an evacuation? Why or why not?

Keep response factual and low key. Emphasize the top priority is to protect health and safety of employees, volunteers or other affected publics. Note that established procedures were followed.

Were there neighbors or the community in danger at the time of incident?

Keep response factual and low key. Emphasize health and welfare of employees, community, visitors.

Are employees, public, visitors currently at risk? Will there be an evacuation?

Keep response factual and low key. Emphasize health and welfare of employees, community and visitors.

What government agencies involved?

Note that you are following required reporting procedures to appropriate authorities and list involved agencies.

What is the amount of damage?

Do not provide dollar figure. Briefly outline area affected without a great deal of detail. Indicate there will be an assessment of damage.

Has anything similar ever happened before?

If possible, put the answer in proper context.

What else is being done to address situation?

Be reassuring. Explain that you're doing everything possible, have highly trained and skilled employees, and are fully cooperating with appropriate authorities and emergency services.

Has the facility been shut down? How long will it remain closed? When will normal operations resume?

Provide limited detail. Do not provide date whereby normal operations will resume – that sets up expectation and follow-up story.

When will the crisis be resolved? When will an answer be available?

Refuse to speculate. Do not give any sort of time frame as to when crisis will be resolved. Promise to keep interested parties informed "as soon as we can." Follow through on that promise.

What safety/security measures and precautions were in place to prevent this from happening? Why did it happen then? Are these industry standards?

Provide details on safety/security measures in place and that these meet or exceed government regulations and industry practices. Cite history of safety in all aspects of operations. Assure that you're working with appropriate authorities and emergency services to ensure health and safety of all involved.

# Scenarios

## **Overview:**

The development of scenarios – what may happen – assists in:

- Analyzing hypothetical crisis situations
- Identifying options for dealing with potential crisis situations
- Making recommendations to your staff and Board
- Forecasting unintended consequences
- Identifying key contacts and needed corporate resources
- Refining your crisis response

## **Scenario Example: Routes blocked due to weather or fires**

A member of your Core Safety Team should establish a working relationship with Interior Alaska emergency services to be advised of road closures due to fire, flooding, weather or other natural/unnatural cause.

## **Process:**

1. An Alaskan agency notifies the industry of road closures or a member of the Core Safety Team checks with the Alaska Department of Transportation to assess and stay abreast of a situation heard about through other avenues.
2. The Core Safety Team shall:
  - Contact key partners to notify them of the situation and/or to get an update on any transportation issues.
  - Post information about the situation on the website.
  - Check for lodging availability, if needed, for those trapped in Fairbanks due to the road closure such as hotels or Red Cross evacuation shelter.
3. The Core Safety Team Spokesperson issues a statement or press release to the media as appropriate.

# Emergency Contact Numbers

<b>Emergency</b> (fire, ambulance, police)	<b>911</b>
<b>Community Service Patrol</b>	<b>978-6100 or 347-6847</b>
Fairbanks Police Non-Emergency	450-6500
Fairbanks Police 24-hr Dispatch	450-6507
Fairbanks State Troopers	451-5100
Federal Protective Service - Anchorage	907-271-5995
FBI (24-hour dispatch out of Anchorage)	1-907-276-4441
<b>Fire and Ambulance</b>	
Fire/Ambulance Non-Emergency	450-6600
Public Information Office for Fire Status	356-5600 or 356-5511 (spokesperson)
Eielson Fire Dispatch Center (24 hours)	377-4156 or 377-5130
Ft Greely Fire Dispatch (24 hours)	873-3473
Ft. Wainwright Fire Dispatch	353-9170
Nenana Fire/Ambulance Non-Emergency	832-5632
North Pole Fire/Ambulance Non-Emergency	488-2232
University Fire Department Non-Emergency	474-7721
Forest Fires	451-2626 or 451-2636
<b>Health Services</b>	
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital	452-8181
Bassett Army Community Hospital	353-5172
<b>Other Services</b>	
American Red Cross 24 hr. disaster line	456-5937 or toll free 888-345-4376
24-hour Crisis Line	452-4357 or 1-800-478-7273 or Text Line - dial 839-863 and then text 4-HELP
Family Assistance Foundation	1-404-881-2895
Rape Emergency	1-800-478-7273
IACNVL/Women In Crisis - Rape Hotline	452-7273 or 452-2293
Travel Info / Road Conditions	511 or 866-282-7577
Road Conditions	456-7623
National Weather Service	458-3708
Animal Control	459-1451
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Crime Stoppers	456-2583
Drug Enforcement Administration	455-1818
Drug Information Hotline	458-8500

<b>Government</b>	
Fairbanks Mayor's Office	459-6793
Fairbanks City Attorney	459-6750
FNSB Mayor's Office	459-1300
North Pole Mayor's Office	488-8584
FNSB Emergency Operations Director	459-1221
FNSB Manager	459-1219
Alaska Air Guard	456-8301
<b>Transportation</b>	
FNSB Public Transportation Director	459-1002
State Dept. of Transportation	451-2240
Travel Info / Road Conditions	511 or 866-282-7577
<b>Airport</b>	
Airport Manager	474-2500
Airport Communications & Dispatch Center	474-2530 or Dispatch 474-2530
Airport Operations Chief	474-2550
Engineering Office	474-2587
Airport Police & Fire	474-2500
Air Traffic Control Tower	474-0050
ATCT Watch Supervisor	474-0452
Transportation Security Administration	452-9410
National Weather Service	458-3708
<b>Utilities</b>	
24-hour utility companies dispatch	479-3118
GVEA 24 hr. dispatch	452-4832 or 479-3118