

Crisis Communications Cheat Sheet

Crisis Communications and avoiding contagion - when catastrophe strikes, how do you avoid feeding into the contagion factor? What can you do to ensure you don't become part of the contagion stories others will talk about?

Media coverage

- Reported in waves; breaking news (e.g. shots fired or explosion heard), then witness testimony, then shooter identification, and then the official response.
- The sooner you get accurate information to the media, the faster you get past the who-is-the-shooter discussion.

Crisis Communications Planning

- Have a crisis communications plan, including pre-written bullet points to identify company name, number of employees, type of business, how many people work or are at the location where the shooting took place.
- Identify one person who will work with the first responders and one who will be the only authorized person to speak to the media.
- Open communication lines in the office. People often talk to the media when they are frustrated. Make sure employees and parents know your emergency plans and what to expect.
- Provide employees information on who to call in an emergency or if they hear from the press. Employers can ask employees not to talk to the press. Frustrated people who turn to the media enable the media to continue coverage.
- Before an emergency, make it clear that there will be time to post on social media about incidents but during and right after is not the time. Remind people that media contact and social media postings from company space are not allowed. Remind them that posting messages may unwittingly drag them into criminal or civil actions. Emphasize your concern for victims and their families' privacy. No one wants to hear about the death of a loved one – or worse see it happen - because someone posted a live stream on social media.

Crisis Communications During Event

- Encourage first responders to provide swift accurate information to the press to dissuade speculation and end the breaking-news cycle faster.
- Let all basic information about the shooter flow through the first responders' press conference if possible.
- Discourage victims and family survivors from appearing on camera; grieving families magnify the horror and are replayed more often.
- Let law enforcement do most of the speaking.
- Do not release information about a shooter or provide a photo to the press. Don't let the press see personal effects, office space, or personnel file information.
- Don't characterize the shooter or discuss the shooter's work habits or history, family, or relationships, not only with the press but with friends who might then share it with the press.
- When asked by the press, avoid discussing the shooter even when asked specific questions about the shooter's affiliations, work habits, or other "rumors" they have picked up.
- Focus on the victims and the community.
- Call the shooter the shooter, don't call him or her a lone wolf or use other glamorizing terms.
- Never compare your shooting to another, or say it is the "worst," "most" or use other qualifying descriptions
- Don't let adrenaline prompt you to tell others details or talk to the media, even "off the record" or "on background".
- Don't support the displaying or photographs of weapons, the bulletproof vest, bomb-making or other materials.

Minimizing your internet footprint will help make your incident fade in the public's eyes, and more importantly, in the eyes of would-be shooters looking to mimic the intimate details.