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## CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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# Hamilton County Office of Emergency Management CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## PURPOSE:

- Creates procedures and establishes resources for distributing information appropriately in a timely, accurate, responsible and sensitive way to stakeholders, first responder agencies and the public during a crisis/emergency situation.
- Provide a framework for effectively communicating with our partners, stakeholders accurately and consistently, utilizing the resources that are available during a crisis/emergency incident.

## OBJECTIVE:

- Be the first source for information
- Develop a single and clear message for the public
- Deliver the message quickly and with credibility
- Utilize all available communications vehicles to maximize reach
- Immediately address rumors, inaccuracies and misperceptions
- Avoid harmful actions instigated by crisis-related psychological issues
- Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources
- Promote cooperation between response partners

Activation of the Crisis Communications Plan will be determined by the activation of the Hamilton County Operations Center. The size of the communications team will be based on the size and the available resources during the crisis/emergency incident.

## Stakeholders and Partners:

**Stakeholders** - persons, groups or organizations that may be affected by the crisis/emergency incident.

**Partners** - anyone who may aid in communications during a crisis/emergency incident.

## STAKEHOLDERS

Fire  
EMS  
Police  
Media  
etc...



## PARTNERS

- Government agencies
- Community Partners

### ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Hamilton County OEM PIO for news and information will activate the crisis communications plan and serve as the voice of the Hamilton County Office of Emergency Management (HCOEM) Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as needed. This person responds to the EOC where he/she will obtain information from Emergency Operations Center. The PIO/spokesperson should be fully aware of the most updated information regarding the crisis/emergency incident in order to relay that information to other constituents and media. The PIO/spokesperson is also responsible for scheduling press conferences and facilitating media availability.

**NEWS MEDIA:** The PIO/spokesperson will field media calls/requests as necessary based on the volume and situation. Consider using the news media to help spread important information. All media releases should be coordinated with the EOC manager and HCOEM Director.

**WEB & SOCIAL MEDIA:** The social media should be activated immediately, as social media is the fastest way to spread information. Information should also be posted to Emergency Management website, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (X). If a large volume of web traffic is observed or anticipated, a plain text of information about the incident should be displayed on the agency's front web page

## COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

- **Internal Team**
  - **Communications Director/Manager** – serves as Public Information Officer
    - Works with EOC Supporting agencies on crafting messages
    - Messages are approved by Emergency Management Director/Deputy Director, EOC Manager before sent to media outlets or social media
  - **Assistant PIO** – Serves as back-up to the PIO
    - Helps to gather data, monitors social media and informs Public Relations Manager of any trends or concerns. Social media posts must be approved by Communications Director/Manager before posting.
- **External Team**
  - **Joint Information System**
    - This system is a group of PIOs and support staff working together to deliver accurate, timely and consistent information to the public.
    - It is a location where personnel with PIO responsibilities perform critical emergency information functions, crisis communications, and public affairs functions.
    - If the JIS is activated, an interoffice notification system will be sent out to all City/County PIOs regarding JIS activation in the EOC.
  - **JIC Location**
    - *Address:*



**Command and Control:** In the absence of the Communications Director/Manager/PIO, the “appropriate” staff member will assume these responsibilities:

- ❖ Direct work related to the release of information to the media, elected officials, first responder agencies, and public
- ❖ Activate the Crisis Communications Plan based on careful assessment/s of the situation and the expected demands for public information by media, elected officials, first responder agencies, and public
- ❖ Coordinate with local PIO partners as outlined in the plan to ensure that messages are consistent with all agencies involved with the crisis/emergency incident.
- ❖ Provide communication updates regarding the crisis/emergency incident to the Emergency Operations Center as well as the City/County Mayor’s office, as determined in the plan
- ❖ Confirm with Chain of Command regarding information to be released to media
- ❖ Review media release with EOC Manager.
- ❖ Ensure that resources are available (people, equipment and supplies)

**Media:** Communications Director/Manager/PIO personnel will:

- Assess media needs and organize mechanisms to fulfill those needs during the crisis/emergency incident
- Triage the response to media requests and inquires
- Ensure that media inquiries are addressed appropriately
- Support spokespersons
- Maintain media contact email distribution list and phone directory
- Produce and distribute public information when needed
- Ensure that crisis communication public messages are credible before delivered to media
- Act as Point of Contact of the Joint Information Center for media relations
- If the Emergency Operations Center lobby is unavailable and/or the “affected area” of the emergency, other locations to consider:
  - Add additional locations here

## **COMMUNICATING WITH SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

- The Emergency Operations Center will implement communications strategies to reach special populations such as:
  - Hispanic population –
  - Hard of Hearing/Deaf Population – Family & Children’s Services

## **CRISIS INFORMATION DISSEMINATION VEHICLES**

- Phone
- Email
- In-Person
  - Press Conferences
- Website
  -
- Social Media
  - Facebook:
  - Instagram:
  - Twitter:



- Media
  - Radio
  - TV
  - Print
  - Web
- LED Billboards –
- Emergency Alert System (EAS)
- Emergency Notification System
- IPAWS – Integrated Public Alert Warning System

## **CRISIS MESSAGING STRATEGY**

When a crisis of any nature has occurred, it is a goal for the Communications Director/Manager/PIO to provide accurate and timely information to the media, stakeholders, partners and the community. All City/County PIO distribution list will receive a copy of every press release to ensure they have the most current information. Media Releases will be sent from the Communications Director/Manager/PIO at the Emergency Operations Center. Each release will be approved by EOC Manager and/or Emergency Management Director/Deputy Director before sent to the media.

### **INITIAL PHASE**

**Be First** – It is important for public information to be delivered in a timely manner to get ahead of the story.

**Be Right** – It is critical that information is accurate and truthful. Confirm facts. If you don't have all the answers, explain what the process is to gather additional information.

**Be Credible** – Designate a credible spokesperson and expert who can explain/deliver the key messages.

**Express Empathy** – Recognize the impact of the event on victims and their families.

**Promote Action** – Tell people what they should be doing to protect themselves and their families during the crisis/emergency incident.

### **MAINTENANCE PHASE**

**Provide On-Going Updates** – Provide updated information on a regular basis through news releases, press conference and social media posts.

**Address Misinformation** – Monitor all media and correct any information that is incorrect or misunderstood

### **RESOLUTION PHASE**

**Continue Updates** – Continue communications with the public and media regarding recovery efforts.



## EVALUATION PHASE

**Incident** – After the crisis/emergency incident, conduct a debriefing with communications with PIO group/stakeholders.

**Tools** – After the crisis/emergency incident, evaluate if you have the “right” tools you need to facilitate your communication efforts and adjust as needed.

**Plan** – Determine adjustments needed for Crisis Communications Plan with the EOC and City/County PIOs

## MESSAGING BEST PRACTICES

### Do:

1. Be empathetic for those affected by the crisis/emergency incident
2. Be honest. State the facts without ‘dressing’ them up
3. Say “I don’t know” if you don’t know the answer but.... Reply “I will find someone who will answer that question for you”
4. Assume everything you say to a report is “on the record”
5. Be concise and to the point
6. Repeat key messages 3 times throughout the interview
7. Give yourself time to gather your thoughts
8. Refer to your notes if needed during an interview
9. Refer to our Facebook and Twitter accounts for updates

### Don’t:

1. Don’t say “no comment”. Tell them if you don’t know the answer or cannot release the information at that time and why
2. Don’t speculate or offer “what ifs”
3. Don’t blame others
4. Never joke around. Humor is never appropriate in a crisis/emergency incident
5. Don’t agree with a reporter’s statement if you don’t know if it is true
6. Don’t fall into the “pause” trap. Answer the question and stop talking
7. Don’t get angry. Reporters may be pushy. Be patient and consistent with your message.



## WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

### Questions to Expect from the Media

- WHAT HAPPENED?
- WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?
- WHO IS INVOLVED?
- WHY DID IT HAPPEN?
- WHO IS IN CHARGE?
- WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR THOSE WHO ARE HURT?
- HOW MANY ARE FATALITIES OR INJURED?
- IS THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL?
- CAN YOU FIX IT?
- WAS THIS PREVENTABLE?
- WHAT ELSE CAN GO WRONG?
- DO YOU KNOW WHO IS AT FAULT?
- IS THIS CRISIS UNDER CONTROL/CONTAINED?
- WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE DO OR NOT DO RIGHT NOW?
- WHEN CAN WE GET MORE INFORMATION?

### How to write a press release

Contact information and phone number – top of the page

Date the information – top of the page

Headline – should be short, but capture the main news point

Lead Paragraph – should answer as many of the 5 W's as possible

- who
- what
- when
- where
- why/how

Source – if not already provided, answer the question “How Do I Know”

Other Essentials – why is this important, who will be impacted, how was this done

Quotes – include a “” if you have someone else is providing a statement

Anything Else – wrap up with any other missing information (i.e.) who the public should contact, where to find additional information

Other Tips –

- Avoid using Jargon.
- If using an acronym write out the entire term the first time it is used
- Stick to the facts
- Add photos if available



### Instead of

Impact

The public

Incident/event

Stated

Minor/Juvenile

Succumbed to injuries

Avoid the Area

### Say

Effect

Our community

Tragedy

Said

Young person/child

Died

Please use alternative routes

**\*\*\* Be wary of positive/negative association with words. WORDS DO MATTER!**





# Media Holding Statement

\*\*\* Until a formal media release or response statement can be prepared, here is a sample to use as a holding statement to respond to media inquiries MOMENTS AFTER THE CRISIS. \*\*\*

Recommended to release 30 minutes AFTER CRISIS HAS OCCURRED

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For Immediate Release:

Date:

Contact Name

Title

Phone Number/Email

Re:

At approximately (time) there was an incident that has occurred at (location of crisis).  
We are in the process of preparing a statement based on the information we have at this time. (If appropriate) We will also be scheduling a press conference (date, time, location and directions)

That is all the information we have at this time.

Thank you,

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# Media Holding Statement with Empathy

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For Immediate Release:

Date:

Contact

Title

Phone/Email

Re:

We understand the concerns, fears and questions everyone may have about the incident (location of crisis) that took place (day/time). Currently, the Emergency Operations Center continues to support our first responding agencies with resources needed for this emergency/incident. Our goal is to return this emergency event back to a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible.

As more information becomes available, we will provide updates with scheduled media briefings.

Thank you,

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## **MEDIA BRIEFING**

Guidelines for deciding on whether or not to hold a press conference. In general, one should consider a press conference when:

1. There has been a loss of life, serious injuries or significant property damage
2. There has been significant inconvenience to or endangerment to the public
3. Misinformation or insignificant information is increasingly getting worse per rumor control/social media
4. Being transparent about your emergency efforts for the public.

With media reporters changing every day, it is easier to send to the main MEDIA HUBs with your releases. *(Add your list of Contact with Name, Cell number and Email address)*
