

# DELAWARE COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY



## Crisis Communications Policy

July 2016



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# What is a communication crisis?

A crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of your company, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention. These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or manmade disaster that could be attributed to your company. It can also be a situation where in the eyes of the media or general public your company did not react to one of the above situations in the appropriate manner. This definition is not all encompassing but rather is designed to give you an idea for the types of situations where you may need to follow this plan.

One thing to remember that is crucial in a crisis is tell it all, tell it fast and tell the truth. If you do this you have done all you can to minimize the situation.

When a situation arises that may be a crisis the first thing you should do is contact the Library Director and/or the Communications Manager.

# Crisis Communications Team

This team is essential to identify what actions should be taken. the team should be comprised of individuals who are key to the situation. They include:

- Library Director
- Communications Manager
- Deputy Director
- Communications Specialist
- Library Board of Trustees President

Other possible team members:

- Lawyer
- Senior manager from department that may have been involved in “crisis”
- Security officer
- Other staff who may have witnessed “crisis”

The job of this team is to come up with a plan of action and decide who the spokesperson should be.

As soon as possible a prepared statement should be given to this staff, if warranted. This statement should be something such as "Facts are still being gathered but there will be a press conference before 4:00, give me your name and number and I will call you back to let you know when."

The crisis communication team should:

- Determine the appropriate positioning or message to address the emergency.
- "Tell it all, tell it fast and tell the truth". It is always best when a mistake has been made to admit it up front, and begin doing whatever is possible to re-establish credibility and confidence with internal and external audiences.
- Never try to lie, deny or hide involvement.
- Don't ignore the situation.

# Positioning

To decide on a position, it is important for staff to put themselves in the situation of whom ever was involved in the crisis or try to view the crisis from the eye of the public.

Examples of categories to consider for positioning are:

- Human error
- Clerical error
- Unauthorized procedures
- Inadequate supervision
- Inadequate quality control
- Misuse of confidential information
- Errors of judgement
- Inadequate standard operating procedures

As you are considering the position it is important to consider the wide range of consequences (e.g., legal, financial, public relations, effects on administration, effects on operations).

Keep in mind that people tend to remember what they hear first and last.

# Designated Spokesperson

- One individual should be designated as the primary spokesperson to represent the Delaware County District Library (DCDL), make official statements and answer media questions throughout the crisis.
- A back-up to the designated spokesperson should also be identified to fill the position in the event that the primary spokesperson is unavailable.
- Criteria for the spokesperson, backup spokesperson and crisis communication expert is:
- Comfortable in front of a TV camera and with reporters. Preferably, skilled in handling media, skilled in directing responses to another topic, skilled in identifying key points, able to speak without using jargon, respectful of the role of the reporter, knowledgeable about the organization and the crisis at hand Able to establish credibility with the media, able to project confidence to the audience, suitable in regard to diction, appearance and charisma, sincere, straightforward and believable, accessible to the media and to internal communications personnel who will facilitate media interviews, able to remain calm in stressful situations.
- In addition to the designated spokesperson and backup, it can be anticipated that other parties involved in the crisis; police, fire department, health officials, etc., will also have a spokesperson. It is important to obtain the identity of that individual as early as possible so all statements and contacts with the media can be coordinated between the two individuals and their organizations/interests whenever possible.

# Media Policies and Procedures

- Select a place to be used as a media center.
- Locations for interviews and press briefings will be decided by the crisis communications team.
- Stick to rules already established for the media. (i.e. If the media are currently required to be escorted then during a crisis they should be required to be escorted. If they are not required to be escorted now then don't require them to be in a crisis. If there are special circumstances that would require them to be escorted such as a safety hazard, they should be advised of this up front.
- Reporters may ask to speak to staff or at a school, faculty or students who are involved with or have been affected by the crisis. It is best to restrict all interviews to the primary spokesperson, back-up spokesperson or technical expert. Controlling the interview process is key to managing the crisis.
- However, remember that reporters have the right to interview anyone they want to and if they don't get the answers they want from you they will get them somewhere.
- All media should be treated equally. What is given to one (such as access to an area effected by the crisis) should be available to all media.

# Tough Questions

A crisis situation is always difficult when dealing with the media. Therefore, tough questions and rehearsals are necessary to help the spokesperson prepare.

It is important, at the onset of the crisis, that the spokesperson, backup and advisors spend some time rehearsing prepared statements and answers to possible "tough" questions that may be asked by reporters. If possible, similar rehearsals should be conducted prior to each media interview, briefing or news conference. It is also important to anticipate and practice new questions as the story evolves.

- Be tough and be prepared.

The Communications Department staff and other staff who may be involved in answering questions should prepare questions and answers for the practice sessions. These questions and answers should be for internal use only and not for distribution outside the organization.

- Don't volunteer information unless it is a point the company wants to make and the question hasn't been asked.
- And whatever you do, "don't talk off the record." Nothing is really off record when working with the media.



# Prepared Statements

Communicate as soon as possible for the greatest opportunity to control events and/or information getting to the media.

If possible, send out a news release. Please see next page for news release template.

- Give facts from reliable sources and confirmed.
- Don't over reach and don't speculate.
- Show concern and/or good will for the public and for your employees in your first press interaction.
- You must have a prepared statement on hand that can be used to make an initial general response to the media when knowledge about the crisis first becomes known on a wide-spread basis or by reporters.
- As the crisis progresses and new information and facts become available, it is also advisable to develop prepared statements to be made by the spokesperson at the onset of any media interview, briefing or news conference.
- These prepared statements also can be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information but are not represented at news conferences or briefings. The statement can also be sent by FAX or e-mail upon request.

# Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Circulation Surpasses Over One Million For Delaware County District Library

October 21, 2011

Contact: Nicole Fowles – Communications Manager

740-362-3861 (Office) or 330-340-3702 (Cell)

[nfowles@delawarelibrary.org](mailto:nfowles@delawarelibrary.org)

A \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ involving \_\_\_\_\_ occurred today at \_\_\_\_\_. The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

A (what happened) at (location) involving (who) occurred today at (time). The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

For example:

An explosion at 84 E. Winter Street, the main library of the Delaware County District Library occurred today at 3 p.m. The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

For more information about the Orange Branch Library open house and grand opening to the public, visit [www.delawarelibrary.org](http://www.delawarelibrary.org), check out our Facebook page, or contact Nicole Fowles, Communications Manager at [nfowles@delawarelibrary.org](mailto:nfowles@delawarelibrary.org) or (740) 363-7277.

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- A definitive time for an upcoming news conference or release of information, if known, could be included but is not necessary.
- You could also add information if it is available such as how many casualties there are known up to this point or any other pertinent information available. Once again, this information should be definitive and not speculative, verify everything you say.



# Collateral Materials

Information brochures about the company or the area in which the crisis has occurred are helpful in informing the reporters or anyone else seeking information about the company.

In some cases it might be necessary to create materials that explain technical systems or in-house procedures. If we explain how a technical system or in-house procedure works and point out where a breakdown occurred, there is less chance of a reporter interpreting the situation erroneously.

- Always do what you can to make a complicated issue as simple as you can for reporters.
- If the crisis was caused by a piece of equipment consider bringing in a similar piece of equipment to show reporters. At the very least provide a schematic or drawing. If you give them a visual that may keep them from seeking one out themselves.
- Try not to use the actual piece of equipment that failed since that is morbid and allows an opportunity to an over zealous reporter to do some yellow journalism.

# Key Audiences

Below is a list of publics served by the DCDL system.  
Communicate with each group that is part of your audience.

## Media:

General, local, national (Delaware Gazette, ThisWeek News, The Columbus Dispatch, Channel 4, ABC6/Fox 8, and 10, WOSU, Clear Channel radio stations)

## Employees:

Management, hourly/prospective/salaried employees, and families

Our customers

## Community:

Neighborhood groups/HOAs, community organizations, Chambers of Commerce

Suppliers, teaming partners, competitors, professional societies, trade associations

## Special Interests

Safety, handicapped/disabled, minority, consumer, health, senior citizens, and religious



# Media Contact List

This should be updated on an annual basis or as needed if crisis occurs sooner. The contact log should be available to the Director, Deputy Director, Communications Manager, and Communications Specialist so no media contacts are missed while reporting on crisis.

The Delaware Gazette      Michael Williams      michaelwilliams@delgazette.com  
740-413-0900

Columbus Dispatch/Delaware Dean Narciso      dnarciso@dispatch.com  
740-363-0861

ThisWeek Newspapers      Dennis Laycock      dlaycock@thisweeknews.com  
740-888-6100      Thomas Gallick      tgallick@thisweeknews.com  
Margo Bartlett      margo.bartlett@gmail.com

WDLR Radio      Fred Shaffer      news@wdlrradio.com  
740-368-1550

WOSU Public Media      Mike Thompson      mediarelations@wosu.org  
614-292-9678      mike.thompson@wosu.org

iHeartRadio Stations Newsroom      newsroom@610wtvn.com  
614-481-6397

News Channel 4 NBC      Assignment Desk      614-263-5555

News Channel 6/Fox 8      Assignment Desk      614-481-6660

News Channel 10 WBNS      Assignment Desk      614-460-3700



# Handling Media Interviews

- Prepare "talking paper" on primary points you want to make.
- Anticipate questions--prepare responses.
- Practice answering questions.
- Cover controversial areas ahead of time.
- Know who will be interviewing you, if possible.
- Determine how much time is available.
- Audiences often remember impressions, not facts.
- Do use specifics.
- Do use analogies.
- Do use contrasts, comparisons.
- Do be enthusiastic/animated (if situation merits.)
- Do be your casual likable self.
- Do be a listener.
- Do be correct.
- Do be anecdotal.
- *If you don't have the answer or can't answer, do admit it and move on to another topic.*
- Don't fall for that "A or B" dilemma.
- Don't go off the record.
- Don't think you have to answer every question.
- Smile, be friendly.
- Don't speak for someone else --beware of the absent-party trap.

## How To Respond During A Newspaper Interview

- Obtain advanced knowledge of interview topics.
- Make sure you are prepared in detail.
- Begin the interview by making your point in statement by making your major points in statement form.
- Try to maintain control of the interview.
- Don't let reporter wear you down.
- Set a time limit in advance.
- Avoid jargon or professional expressions.
- Reporter may repeat self in different ways to gain information you may no want to give.
- Don't answer inappropriate questions; simply say it is "not an appropriate topic for you to address at this time," or "it's proprietary" for example.
- Be prepared for interruptions with questions...it is legitimate for reporters to do that.
- Do not speak "off the record."
- Remember, the interview lasts as long as a reporter is there.



Delaware  
County District  
Library

## Additional Crisis Communications Questions?

### PLEASE CONTACT:

Nicole Fowles  
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Delaware County District Library  
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Delaware, OH  
[nfowles@delawarelibrary.org](mailto:nfowles@delawarelibrary.org)

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