



Business Crisis Communications Plan

When an emergency occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. A business must be able to respond in a timely and accurate manner before, during, and after an emergency or disaster. Many different audiences must be reached with information specific to their interests and needs. The image of the business can be positively or negatively impacted by public perceptions of the handling of the incident.

There are many potential audiences that will want information during and following an incident and each has its own needs for information. The challenge is to identify potential audiences, determine their need for information and then identify who within the business is best able to communicate with that audience.

Know Your Audiences

Understanding the audiences that your business needs to reach out to during an emergency is one of the first steps in the development of a Business Crisis Communications Plan. There are many potential audiences that will want information during and following an incident and each has its own needs for information. The challenge is to identify potential audiences, determine their need for information and then identify who within your business is best able to communicate with that audience.

List of potential audiences:

- Customers
- Employees and their families
- News media
- Community
- Investors
- State and local government
- Suppliers

Audience Checklist

- Contact information for each audience should be compiled and immediately accessible during an incident.
- Business continuity plan should include action to redirect incoming phone calls to a call center or to a voice message indicating that the business is experiencing a temporary problem.
- Develop and document procedures for notification of suppliers.
- Develop protocols for when and how to notify management, investors, and other stakeholders.
- Know the regulations for how and when to notify OSHA and other regulators as failure to notify within a prescribed time could result in fines.
- Human resources should coordinate communications with management, supervisors, employees and families.
- Plan should include coordination with public safety officials to develop protocols and procedures for advising the public of any hazards and the most appropriate protective action that should be taken if warned
- If the incident is serious, then the news media will be on scene or calling to obtain details. Prioritization of requests for information and development of press releases and talking points can assist with the need to communicate quickly and effectively.
- Develop a company policy that only authorized spokespersons are permitted to speak to the news media.
- Determine in advance who will speak to the news media and prepare that spokesperson with talking points so they can speak clearly and effectively.

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