



# CHPA MEMBER CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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## OVERVIEW

A crisis situation has the potential to damage your reputation. To minimize the impact of a crisis situation, you need a plan in place that outlines potential crisis situations, primary principles for handling the situation and a general order of activities for reacting to each potential situation.

## NEWS TRAVELS FAST

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, news travels faster than many of us can comprehend. The effects of this technologically-based form of new media include:

- Word of Mouth – This not only includes traditional word of mouth communication but also email, social media and blogs that can be created and reported internationally in just seconds.
- Internet – Anyone, including visitors or media, can use the Internet to receive news alerts or to search for topics. This means that news can be revisited for years and “bad press” can be particularly detrimental.
- News Wire – The Associated Press (AP), Copley News Service, etc., all share stories. If a story is picked up by one service, it can spread within minutes to all major outlets in every country.

Years ago, a local story that ran in a regional newspaper would rarely be picked up by other media; however, with the rising power of these new media outlets, a story can now find its way from the San Francisco Chronicle to the Orlando Sentinel to the AP, and then to hundreds of other media outlets.

With that in mind, the following crisis communication plan has been created specifically for the Corporate Housing Providers Association and its members to be able to react in a timely, consistent and effective manner.

## DEFINING A CRISIS

*A crucial situation; a situation whose outcome decides whether possible negative consequences will follow. A decisive or crucial time, stage, or event.*

The first step in any crisis situation is acknowledging the existence of a situation before it hits the news, and recognizing its potential impact.

*The CHPA member should acknowledge the existence of a situation when any of the following are at risk:*

1. Reputation or image of the member company or CHPA\*
2. Clients
3. Employees

***\*Note: If the situation affects the reputation of CHPA, the member company should immediately notify CHPA CEO Mary Ann Passi at [map@chpaonline.org](mailto:map@chpaonline.org). CHPA members are not authorized to make comments on behalf of CHPA.***



## TYPES OF CRISIS SITUATIONS

- Restrictions/bans that affect the CHPA member company or corporate housing industry
- Negative publicity
- Cyber attacks
- Crime
- Accidents
- Natural disasters
- Man-made disasters
- Public health issues
- Acts of terrorism

## KEY COMMUNICATION TACTICS

**IDENTIFY AND TAILOR YOUR COMMUNICATION** to each of your constituencies (vendors, clients, prospective clients, staff, media, etc.). Each group is affected by a crisis in different ways. Be sure not to neglect any of them.

**DESIGNATE A COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR.** One person should be the “keeper of official information.” This person will be responsible for compiling reports from news sources, local, county, state and national sources, city officials, websites, social media, on-the-ground contacts, etc., and distributing them to everyone answering the phones, sending out emails and newsletters and updating the website. All reports should be vetted carefully for accuracy; when possible, confirm with a second source prior to distributing this information.

**KEEP RECORDS OF ALL COMMUNICATION.** Keep electronic records of all website postings, emails and scripts; keep notes on what was said to each constituency. You will find yourself reviewing records to find out: what did we say and when did we say it? What information did we have on this date? This information might be used with clients, vendors and business insurance representatives, for filing claims, and such.

**CREATE SCRIPTS.** Information provided by your company must be clear, correct and consistent. Everyone relaying information must distribute the same information. Update the scripts/website often—as soon as there is a significant change – and make sure everyone has the current scripts.



**USE YOUR PHONE SYSTEM.** In order to reduce confusion and assist customers quickly, modify call options accordingly.

**WEBSITE.** Your website is a valuable communication tool – people can access it easily and at anytime, and it's easy to update. You can choose the words, tone and level of detail of your messaging. You can include links to more information and you can update it frequently, and post those links on social media.

Remember to position your key message near the top of the page – don't make customers hunt for it. It could make them think you are minimizing their concerns.

Encourage guests to visit your website often for updates. Make the content so rich that it is their main source for information and updates. Then be sure to keep it updated including a synopsis of the situation once the crisis is over.

**EMAIL BLASTS.** If you have email lists, use them! Communicate updates and photos (good and bad) to your constituencies so they are aware of the latest information.

**ATTEND TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA.** Control your own message. Don't let rumors spread; monitor and use your social media outlets to deliver your message and accurate information. Correct misinformation immediately out in the blogosphere.

**DATE/TIME YOUR COMMUNICATIONS.** Make it easy for callers, readers, website visitors and your staff to understand how current the information is.

**MANAGING EMPLOYEES.** Your employees are your most important resource. Keep them well-informed via e-mail, text and most importantly, via one-on-one meetings. Not only do they need to understand management's plans, but they are critical to its success. Brainstorm with your employees: get their ideas for reducing expenses and creating efficiencies, what to communicate with clients/vendors, how to minimize the crisis' impact on key constituencies, etc.

**MANAGING MONEY.** It is hard to tell what's ahead financially and it's important to reserve cash as well as set expectations. Review your general ledger line item by line item. What expenses can be postponed? Cancelled? Reduced? Take a hard look at anything that is not a fixed cost. This is a time to make hard choices. It's best to prepare for the worst and then reinstate these items when the crisis has passed.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- All Executives should undergo basic media and crisis communication training and should participate annually in a “table top” exercise to ensure implementation of this plan, should the need arise.
- Identify a physical spot as a communications hub should a crisis occur and receive media attention. The site needs to be easily accessible, have plenty of electrical outlets for computers, cameras, etc., land-line telephones available for use, Internet access (preferably wireless), and if possible, the ability for radio/TV to utilize technology at a local TV/radio station to uplink.
- Ensure that in a crisis situation accurate information is communicated effectively to the media and the public; however, the lead role of communication should be determined on a case-by-case situation. In fact, in most instances the association member would actually benefit by staying in the “background.”
- It is important to understand, prior to a crisis situation, what information is typically available via hospital administrators and law enforcement officials.

## BASIC STEPS FOR ANY CRISIS

*Immediately upon learning of a crisis situation, the company spokesperson should be notified by the person who discovered the crisis. Then, the following steps should be taken:*

1. Identify and define the crisis.
2. Gather all relevant information and facts (who, what, when, where, why, how and how much).
3. Discuss whether a proactive or reactive approach is necessary.
  - Proactive approach is taking action to address a situation before it hits the news and prior to any reporter requests.
  - Reactive approach means not responding to the news until media has already reported on it.
  - It is important to consider the best and worst-case scenarios of both approaches. Generally, when a crisis is national in scope or affects a large number of people, it will require a proactive approach. However, it is equally important that member companies not create news when it is not warranted. Therefore, sometimes it is more beneficial to be reactive.
4. Determine appropriate Crisis Response Team and spokesperson(s) needed, contact them and assign roles. ***Note: For every crisis there should be two permanent spokespersons and one or two additional “expert” spokesperson(s).***
5. Determine key message(s), mode of delivery and intended audience.
6. Establish communication.
7. Monitor media coverage.
8. Follow up.
9. Wrap up.



## FUNDAMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR ANY CRISIS

### DO...

- Tell the truth and tell it often. This is your opportunity to supply the media with legitimate information and to communicate that officials are in control and taking all possible steps to resolve the situation.
- Let the media know that you are willing to cooperate and will try to provide the most up-to-date information available.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it, and tell them you will look into it and get back with the information as soon as possible.
- Eliminate incorrect information and the rumor mill by providing regular updates with as much available information as possible, even if the update is “nothing has changed since the previous update.” This is essential to quelling rumors and/or speculation. If inaccurate information is discovered, make a courteous effort to bring it to the attention of the media so the correct information can then be conveyed.
- Communicate with one message and one voice.
- Forward all media queries directly to the designated spokesperson(s), as it is imperative that the designated spokesperson(s) communicate all messages and conduct all interviews. This will ensure consistency and validity of message, thereby fostering greater trust and unity. You do not want conflicting statements, especially during a crisis situation.
- Accentuate positive aspects—the company’s safety record, steps taken to ensure guest’s safety/establish alternate lodging options, acts of heroism, concern for others. But do so without glossing over the negative aspects.
- Give key contacts instructions about where and to whom they should direct all calls requesting information during a crisis.
- Obtain regular updates/status reports and keep association key team members up to date as appropriate.
- Communicate the do’s and don’ts and speaking points with your internal team(s). They will receive questions from clients and consistent answers are the key.



## DO NOT...

*During a crisis situation, you must be careful about what is said, and when and how. Review the following:*

- Do not assign blame or appear overly defensive. You do not want it to appear as if you are trying to “pass the buck” or cover up information.
- Never speculate (or guess) about a situation. If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it and promise to look into it.
- Do not feel pressured to answer every question; it’s okay to respond that you cannot answer the question due to privacy, legal, etc., issues.
- Do not release specific, personal information on people involved. If people have been injured or killed, the names of victims should not be released until the families have been notified. Advance coordination with the local hospital and law enforcement administration regarding this policy is advised. Particularly, each source should be instructed, orally and in writing, not to release information to the media with references to accident/crisis circumstances.
- Do not state specific numbers until these can be confirmed following the crisis situation. Instead, state that you are still gathering facts.
- Never make “off the record” statements to the press. In a crisis situation, no statement is ever “off the record.”
- Do not play favorites to the media. Give the same information to all, particularly in a crisis situation.
- Never repeat negative or inflammatory words used by a reporter. It could end up as part of your quote or in a 10-second “sound bite” on television.
- Do not demonstrate a great deal of emotion during interviews, which might convey panic, particularly on television (it is preferable to conduct television interviews off camera).



## SOCIAL MEDIA AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

*Remember: By constantly creating new, optimized messages, companies can preempt the impact of negative information on the web by having as much online content possible. On that note, the rules remain the same as those listed on pages 6-7 of this plan.*

1. **Communicate:** Any of the communications referenced in the above plan should also be distributed through the member companies' social media profiles, communities and networks.
  - Tip: Create an appropriate hashtag about the situation so that updates and conversations can be easily tracked and responded to.
2. **Pay Attention:** Being aware of social media conversations is an essential part of today's crisis management process, allowing companies to set up 'digital listening posts' for potentially negative information. Monitor on a daily basis content referencing your company on the web and in the social media marketplace utilizing the following online monitoring services:
  - Twilert.com – Sends daily emails with keywords picked up on Twitter.com
  - Google Alerts ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) – Set up a "Comprehensive" daily search using relevant keywords.
  - WhosTalkin.com – A social media search engine reporting on conversations in blogs, news, networks, videos, images, forums and tags.
  - Moz – Paid SEO tool ([www.moz.com](http://www.moz.com))
3. **Define situation and review context:** Follow "Basic Steps for Any Crisis" on page 5.
4. **Be prompt:** In the social media marketplace, information can be spread internationally within a matter of seconds. Address issues quickly and transparently, but strategically.
5. **Meet attacks with facts:** If you detect an issue online, the first step is to correct false information. Do not launch a public argument - If coming from a past client, when appropriate, be sure to validate that their opinion matters by acknowledging their concerns while making the correction.
6. **Remember:** Don't make an online attack personal.
7. **Be grassroots:** Ask the community to share comments that are positive to bury any potentially false/negative information. This will also associate better keywords with the posting in terms of search engine optimization.
8. **If allegation is plausible, fix the problem:** Make every effort to correct an issue, and communicate that you've taken actions to remedy it.
9. **Respond to negative information through the same medium as it was posted**, whether it's through Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, etc. This way, positive content will be optimized alongside the negative.
10. **If on YouTube, "flag" content as inappropriate** and ask to have it removed. On Facebook, "hate groups" are not in line with the website's guidelines—ask to have such content removed.



# TEMPLATE: DESIGNATED PERMANENT SPOKESPEOPLE

It is important to maintain an up-to-date contact list of at least three key company officials. However, only one of these should serve as the official spokesperson for any given crisis situation. By having only one key spokesperson responsible during any given crisis situation, the information given out will be consistent, accurate and sensitive to public and private concerns.

*The following individuals are designated to serve as spokesperson on behalf of the association member company during any crisis related event. Be sure that your spokespeople understand which kind of situation they serve as point person on. This could be determined on a case-by-case basis:*

Spokesperson Name: Title: Company: Office Phone Number: Mobile Phone Number: Home Phone Number: E-mail Address:
Spokesperson Name: Title: Company: Office Phone Number: Mobile Phone Number: Home Phone Number: E-mail Address:
Spokesperson Name: Title: Company: Office Phone Number: Mobile Phone Number: Home Phone Number: E-mail Address:



# TEMPLATE: KEY CONTACTS

Keep these key contacts on file so that you have them at your fingertips if/when a crisis should occur. Be sure to include multiple phone numbers as well as an email address so that you can reach them in the event of a crisis.

**Key Company Contacts:**

- Company Spokesperson:
- Company Chief Executive Officer:
- Company Chief Operating Officer:
- Company IT Contact:
- Company Finance/Accounting Contact:
- Company Legal Counsel:
- Additional Key Staff:

**Local/State Emergency Contacts:**

- Fire Department:
- Police Department:
- Convention/Visitors Bureau:
- Local Hospital:
- Key Government Officials:
- Other Key Contacts:



# TEMPLATE: COMMUNICATION LOG- MEDIA LIASON

Keep a record of all correspondence with media so that you can track coverage and follow-up as needed.

Date:

Name of Recorder:

Crisis Situation:

Time of Communication: Name of Media Outlet: Name of Journalist: Title of Journalist: Email Address: Phone Number: Brief synopsis of communication exchange:
Time of Communication: Name of Media Outlet: Name of Journalist: Title of Journalist: Email Address: Phone Number: Brief synopsis of communication exchange:
Time of Communication: Name of Media Outlet: Name of Journalist: Title of Journalist: Email Address: Phone Number: Brief synopsis of communication exchange:



# TEMPLATE: COMMUNICATION LOG- DISTRIBUTION

Keep a record of all correspondence with media so that you can track coverage and follow-up as needed.

Date:

Name of Recorder:

Crisis Situation:

<p>PRESS RELEASES:</p> <p>Topic:</p> <p>Time of Release:</p> <p>Distributed To:</p> <p>Response:</p>
<p>PRESS BRIEFINGS:</p> <p>Topic:</p> <p>Time of briefing:</p> <p>Attended By:</p>
<p>INTERVIEWS:</p> <p>Spokesperson:</p> <p>Outlet and Interviewer:</p> <p>Focus:</p> <p>Expected Coverage Date/Air Time:</p> <p>Comments:</p>



# TEMPLATE: NEWS SOURCES TO MONITOR

Note: log all key local media outlets to monitor during the event of a crisis situation.

WEBSITES:

PRINT:

FACEBOOK PAGES:

TWITTER ACCOUNTS:

RADIO/TV STATIONS: