



**PREVENTION • MITIGATION
PREPAREDNESS • RESPONSE • RECOVERY**



PTSC-ONLINE

**PROJECT TO ADVANCE CRISIS AND EMERGENCY
COMMUNICATIONS**

April 2011

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SUMMARY

This online crisis and emergency management communications tool kit can be accessed and adapted for use by municipal officials, non-profits and NGOs, small businesses, first responders and emergency management planners. The tool kit looks at all aspects of crisis communications and pays particular attention to social media which have significantly increased the public, client and stakeholder expectations for prompt and accurate messaging very soon after the onset of an emergency, disaster or business disruption.

We used all the collaborative channels and platforms offered by PTSC-Online to help foster debate and online cooperation and enhance elements of the tool kit as they were developed and posted. We focus on delivering concrete products that can be easily used; templates, tips, list of available resources online, We encourage discussions and contributions from communicators, BCP and emergency management planners to help raise the bar in the use of efficient, science-based and tested crisis communications techniques.

We put together a compendium of tools, tips, best practices and examples, all involving social media, that can be applied by practitioners. This includes:

- Elements and characteristics of a crisis
- How to craft and distribute emergency information messaging
- the differences between communicating during a crisis or disaster and doing the same in routine situations
- crisis communications planning: a step-by-step approach with each step being addressed in details and supporting documents provided: sample templates, checklists and procedures, equipment list and much more.

CHAPTER 1

Project introduction: advancing crisis and emergency communications practices

There is no doubt that social media has forever changed how organizations react to crises, disasters and business disruptions. The genie is out. We now have the ability to share with each other information about a disaster or share our reactions to an event or incident.

That genie is not going back in the bottle! For many, social media is a revolutionary change in how we communicate the biggest thing since the birth of spoken language. For an overview of the impact of social media on our lives, watch this video from Eric Qualman [[Social Media Revolution 2.](#)] You can also find the link to the video in the resources section of PTSC-Online.

The growing importance of social media in all aspects of our daily communications is reflected in how organizations interact with their stakeholders and audiences during crises, emergencies and disasters. In many cases, long-held practices are put in question: the infamous "let's wait and issue a news release! " comes to mind.

It's important, as we develop this project to advance crisis and emergency communications, to fully understand the impact of social media on how audiences get their information and what tools they use to do that. A few recent studies come to mind:

1. A PEW research centre study on how people get their news that concludes: "A [survey of 3,006 adults](#) found that while consumption of traditional news has decreased modestly (less than a third said they'd read a newspaper the day before, compared nearly half a decade earlier, while consumption of radio news fell from 43% to 31%, and TV remained steady), the number of people who claimed to have gotten news from an online source in the last 24 hours rose from 24% to 31% over the last decade - 44% if you include mobile devices, e-mail, social networks and podcasts."
2. In a new study about the news consumption and sharing habits of its international readership, CNN found that 43% of online news sharing occurs via social media networks and tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and MySpace, followed by e-mail (30%), SMS (15%) and instant messenger (12%).

3. On mobile devices, social media is fast becoming the principal channel by which people communicate, supplanting email and SMS messaging: "...Mobile users spend 1.4 times as many hours using social networking sites than reading and responding to e-mail, according to a recent [study by research company TNS](#). On average, users spend 3.1 hours per week on social networks, versus 2.2 hours on e-mail.

Note: you can find the above surveys or studies or a link to them in the resources section of PTSC-Online.

Expectations among audiences, clients and stakeholders are that they will be informed within minutes of your plan and actions to respond to an emergency or incident. Are you prepared to do that? In fact, are you in a position to listen to those channels? Can you monitor social media which provides your audiences with an immediate tool to be heard, share their opinion on your response and even call for help?

A recent study by the [American Red Cross](#) is very illuminating. Among a vast array of very informative data, it reveals that nearly 70 per cent of people expect organizations involved in emergencies to monitor their website and social media platforms AND respond to postings on the ongoing incident. Are you ready to do that?

We face a paradigm. Our audience is now very fragmented and the communications channels that we use to relay our messaging are now more numerous than ever. The challenge is to articulate a plan that will optimize reach and ensure messages can be acted upon.

Equally important for those who provide emergency information or deal with a crisis, is the ability to ensure that their messaging is resonating with their audiences. That's where monitoring programs, effective public inquiry lines and web-response plans come into play. [This blog post](#) from Kim Stephens, a reputed crisis communicator and online contributor, is very interesting. Also very interesting, is the reaction of the Los Angeles Fire Department which is a leader in the integration of social media in it emergency information practices. They [posted this tweet](#) their Twitter account.

So to summarize, our goal with this project is not to be directive and position our thinking as "the best way to do this" ... Rather, we highlight current trends and challenges in providing emergency information and crisis communications by identifying key techniques and successful experiences in meeting these new expectations. What has worked for others, if explained and broken down into actionable parts, has the chance to work for you. That's where we'll concentrate our efforts.

All the while, we focus on social media. How platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, have irrevocably changed crisis communications and more importantly shaped public expectations. Whether social media are "social platforms" such as Facebook, MySpace and others, or "informational platforms" such as YouTube or Twitter, both should play a key part in your efforts to reach audiences and listen ... in other words: to engage in conversations.

Nowadays, during crises and emergencies, people have the ability (and certainly feel the need to) to share what they're experiencing or thinking about an incident ... or share what they know, what details they possess about what's going on. In both cases, the information provided in this manner has great value to emergency managers and communicators. First, it will help us know how our audiences perceive our reactions and response to an incident or crisis. Second, the information shared on Twitter, for example, can be mined, analyzed and geo-tagged and provide valuable situational awareness for responders and managers.

What's more, as the American Red Cross survey reveals, social media platforms are now commonly used by people requesting assistance during emergencies. Furthermore, the expectation is that authorities will heed these calls for help promptly. So monitoring these channels is now an operational (if not lifesaving) necessity.

Our material is crafted to be adaptable, flexible and easily transferable to diverse audiences, whether they are:

1. experienced communicators who handle the day-to-day public relations or corporate communications work for municipal or provincial government, private sector enterprises or ,
2. non-profit organizations, or administrators or emergency management or business continuity planners who do without communications staff.

The ultimate objective is to demonstrate without the shadow of a doubt, the absolute necessity for a crisis communications plan to accompany, and be an integral part of, any emergency, BCP or COOP planning activity.

Although we have not come up with an ideal model of what should be done, we present a large set of options and best practices that includes actionable and practical components (checklists, procedures, etc.,) to be of value to most of the PTSC-Online community. We are not technology experts but we refer and comment on existing systems that allow for more effective crisis communications delivery including online collaboration, feedback and comments management, contact management and much more.

CHAPTER 2

Emerging Social Media Trends in Emergency Communications

We would like to highlight current trends that will impact on the dissemination of emergency information and crisis communications practices. Each trend comes with its own challenges but offers opportunities for organizations to reach a new frontier in how they reach their stakeholders and audiences during a crisis, disaster or business disruption.

So, what current trends have we identified? At least four come to mind:

1. the expectations for immediate communications responses by the public when a disaster, crisis or business disruptions occurs,
2. the growing use of social media as emergency information and crisis communications channels,
3. Monitoring social media is now an integral part of crisis communications operations,
4. the growing reliance on mobile communications technology.

First, let's address the public's expectations for immediate information from organizations hit by a crisis or disaster. Whether dealing with a reputational issue, a business disruption or large-scale emergencies, there is now a widespread desire for immediacy and almost instantaneous sharing of information.

Waiting a couple of hours, to get all the facts, and then issue a news release, just won't cut it anymore. You have to be prepared to give out accurate information within minutes not hours. It's a failure point if your organization can't meet that expectation and the [leadership of Virginia Tech University](#), site of a terrible tragedy are experiencing that.

It boils down to something you will see often in our posts: occupy the public space ... tell your story... don't react quickly enough and someone else will tell a story that might not be the one you want to be told. What's more people now turn to social media because they know and expect to see [immediate and accurate emergency information posted there](#).

People also turn to social media because they want to share what they know and they can't see anything to [validate what they're experiencing](#) on other channels such as official websites or on traditional media (radio or TV). Here's how the [State of Maine](#) is coming to the realization that using social media as emergency information tools is a must:

We hope that we have clearly highlighted the current trend to meet expectations for immediate communications response. Our next topic will be on using social media as emergency information channels during a business disruption or an emergency.

Monitoring social media during emergencies: now an imperative

Many emergency management organizations, [municipalities](#) and businesses already use [social media](#) as a channel to inform residents and clients. What varies is the level of integration of social media platforms normally used during routine times, into a comprehensive crisis communications plan when an incident occurs.

Why should social media be monitored during a crisis or emergency? In our view, there are three major reasons. The first is to ensure that the emergency information you're issuing is resonating with your audiences and that it is helping to ensure that they are adopting the behaviour you want them to adopt: evacuate, shelter in place, prepare or any other message.

Second, you need to ensure that you have the ability to gauge the validity of the information shared on the web, by media and through social media. Rumour control through [social media engagement](#) has become a key piece of a Joint Information Centre operations for large-scale incidents. [Monitoring that chatter](#) and acting when necessary is essential in ensuring that YOUR message is being heard and that inaccuracies don't get out of hand.

The third reason is to ensure that the perception of your response will be favourable. We need to be aware of how our audiences perceive our actions and plans to deal with an emerging situation. Perception is often reality in our business. Because public perception can have a big impact on operational issues, knowing what's being said and by whom, is clearly critical in identifying the key opinion "shapers" that comment on your organization. This will only work during a crisis if you have already established a routine social media monitoring program.

During my time at the Integrated Security Unit which was charged with ensuring safe and secure G8 and G20 summits in Ontario in June 2010, social media monitoring was a big part of our plans in the public affairs and communications team. All throughout the operational phase, we had a robust social media presence and monitoring operations in place. We coordinated and ensured the sharing of information between social media accounts already used by ISU member agencies (Ontario Provincial Police and Toronto Police Service for example) as well as created our own ISU accounts on Twitter and Facebook.

We learned a lot from the experience with social media by the team that planned the security operations for the Vancouver Olympics. We even brought a key member of their team to our unified command centre in June 2010.

Setting up a media monitoring program may appear somewhat scary for many who may think it will take a lot of resources or personnel to implement it. The reality is that one person can ensure your organization has a good social media intelligence operation during routine times and you can expand that operation by adding a couple of other people during a crisis so you can monitor in real-time.

Here's a link to a very comprehensive listing of [monitoring resources](#) and a [presentation](#) on some of these search and monitoring tools.

Social media monitoring is not just the purview of emergency management organizations and businesses. All serious traditional media outlets now have reporters and editors monitoring social media platforms for breaking news. Some [good examples here](#). And for a funny illustration of how social media is being used in newsrooms, watch this [spoof video](#).

In fact, many social media platforms now considers themselves, whether officially or not, news distributors if not gatherers. Helped with the fact that millions of their users armed with mobile devices that can record videos, pictures and sound, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become as important for sharing information as any of the major TV networks. Twitter has a [breaking news feed](#).

That helps explain the decline of traditional media news both in print and in broadcast form. More and more, people are turning to social media as a key source of up-to-date information about an emerging situation or incident. They both seek information there and provide it. A key turning point in that trend were the [Boulder, Colorado brush fires](#) (September 2010) and the recent [New Zealand earthquake](#) (February 2011).

Because both the public and traditional media outlets now turn to social media during a disaster, We go so far as to say that the news release as the main emergency information tool is now almost irrelevant. If you can tweet, post Facebook updates, blog, offer video feeds, audio and video clip and present a truly multimedia offering on your website, why would you need a release?

The social media platforms will drive people to your website as well as serve as key emergency and crisis communications tools by themselves. The news release is dead ... especially if you have to wait two or three hours for approvals before you can send it out ... the world in online and mobile ... if your crisis communications planning does not take this into account ...you will fail. Therefore, two questions come to mind.

- 1 Are your web people available to you on a 24/7 basis and do they have the capability and authority to post critical emergency information for your residents or customers?
- 2 Does your organization have the policies in place to make the above happen?

If the answer to both questions is no, then you will fail in this brave new world.

Here's a very illuminating [blog post](#) on social media and emergency management. I'm also attaching the United States Air Force official policy on social media. It's a document widely recognized as a model of its kind. In particular, there is an matrix in there about how and when to engage on social media platforms.

Building a social media and web monitoring program

There can be no doubt as to the value of social media for emergency management and business continuity purposes. They offer: more effective and direct communications tools with your audiences and provide an exceptional reputation management tool.

The key, especially before a crisis even occurs, is to LISTEN + LEARN + ENGAGE. That means having conversations.



To do so, you must first have the ability to listen and that's where social media and web monitoring tools come in. Some are free and offer you all the basics. They differ in style and appearance, they might be more for Twitter or Facebook, some cover pretty much everything. [Here's a link to useful resources.](#)

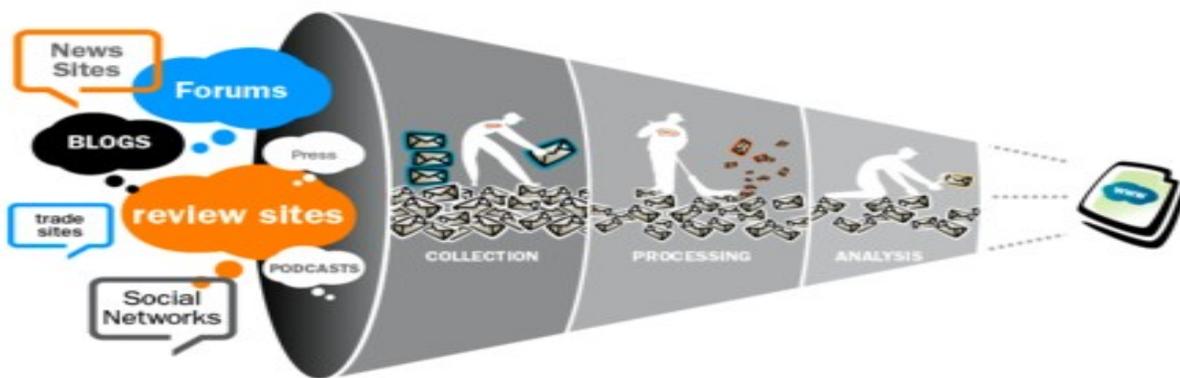
Examples include [Hootsuite](#), [Tweetdeck](#), [Netvibes](#) and many more. A pretty good way to start is with Google's suites of products: an RSS aggregator: Google Reader, [Google Alerts](#) to pull stories and blog posts off the web and into your Reader account and [Google Realtime](#) to search social media platforms.

Other useful social media search engines include: [Kurrently](#) and [Social Mention](#). The key in this process is sending the information you gather to as few places as possible, preferably one spot to make very easy to monitor all the content you want to keep an eye on. [More solutions are available here.](#)

[Here's a resource that should guide you in this process.](#)

If you want to push your monitoring passed the basic (yet sufficient for most organizations) and go into a broader program and better analytics, there are pay services that are also excellent. Some very good ones are listed in this [online presentation](#).

Now, all that is only the first part of the equation. You're listening. You also need to analyze all the information you've gathered to determine who has influence among the people talking about you. Who do they reach? Who you should engage with. This is the learning part.



A couple of years ago, I adapted an social media engagement matrix to help the organization I was assigned to, determine when and how to enter into conversations with. It was based on a similar tool developed by the United States Air Force and is widely considered a model of its kind.

AIR FORCE BLOG ASSESSMENT

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY - EMERGING TECHNOLOGY DIVISON

ASSESSMENT

BLOG POSTING
Has someone discovered a blog post about your organization?
Is it a positive posting?

CONTACT INFORMATION

USAF Public Affairs Agency
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 605
Ballston, VA 22203
Tel: 703-696-1158
E-mail: David.Faggard@pentagon.af.mil
Blog: www.airforcelive.blogspot.com

EVALUATE

CONCURRENCE
A factual and well cited response, which may agree or disagree with the post, yet is not negative.
You can concur with the post, let stand or provide a positive review.
Do you want to respond?

"TROLLS"
Is this a site dedicated to bashing and degrading others?

MONITOR ONLY
Avoid responding to specific posts, monitor the site for relevant information and comments.

"RAGER"
Is the posting a rant, rage, joke, ridicule or satirical in nature?

FIX THE FACTS
Respond with factual information directly on comment board.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

"MISGUIDED"
Are there erroneous facts in the posting?

RESTORATION
Rectify the situation, respond and act upon a reasonable solution.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

"UNHAPPY CUSTOMER"
Is the posting a result of a negative experience from one of our Stakeholders?

LET POST STAND
Let the blog post stand -- no response.

RESPOND

SHARE SUCCESS
Proactively share your story and your mission with the blog.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

FINAL EVALUATION
Base response on present circumstances, site influence and stakeholders prominence.
Will you respond?

BLOG RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

<p>TRANSPARENCY Disclose your Air Force connection.</p>	<p>SOURCING Cite your sources by including hyperlinks, video, images or other references.</p>	<p>TIMELINESS Take time to create good responses, from a few hours to a day.</p>	<p>STONE Respond in a tone that reflects highly on the rich history of the Air Force.</p>	<p>INFLUENCE Focus on the most influential blogs related to the Air Force.</p>
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The above grid proved valuable not only in helping us decide to engage or not on social media platforms but also for dealing with requests from traditional media outlets. One of the good things about the many tools listed above in this entry, is the fact that they can also monitor in real-time, the websites of major news organizations. [Here's why you should do that.](#)

Now, in the normal course of business, in routine situations, you maintain good relationships with your audiences and stakeholders and engage in useful conversations with them. In a crisis, the information you have amassed on your key stakeholder and influencers will help you determine who to engage first and help shape public perception in your favour and help counter false information.

This engagement part is also about tone. You need to adopt a friendly, casual tone on social media platforms. Preaching and 'officialspeak' doesn't work. *The only way you'll know what to say and how to say it is if you've already engaged online before the crisis erupts.*

Finally, let's not forget the mother lode of valuable situational awareness info that can come your way through social media monitoring during a disaster or a crisis. [Read a post on that subject here.](#)

Remember too that putting together a very efficient social media monitoring program doesn't require lots of money or resources. A great many tools are free and very effective and one person within your organization (an intern?, a young IT specialist?) can set up and perform social media monitoring for you in no time. Better yet, do it yourself.

I spend the first hour of my day at work on my Google Reader and Tweetdeck platforms. Gathering stories I can use, learning best practices and building up a good situational awareness and knowledge base. It's the best investment of my time I can think of.

Social media in Business Continuity and Continuity of Operations Programs

As in emergency management, social media is becoming a [growing consideration for business continuity and continuity of operations planning](#). The topic was discussed at a meeting of the National Emergency Management Association in Washington D.C in early 2011. At NEMA's mid-year conference, a whole day of discussions was dedicated to the role of SM in emergency management and BCP/COOP.

The consensus, reached by emergency managers and business continuity planners, is that it is now a ["smart practice"](#) to include SM in BCP and COOP programs. Some applications come quickly to mind:

- for alerting and notification purposes: some smaller businesses and organizations might not have the resources to have full-fledged BCP/COOP alert and notification systems. Twitter might then be an economical and effective way to manage alerts and notifications for key stakeholder groups (such as employees) though the [management of Twitter lists](#).
- As in emergency management, there is a growing trend in the use of social media by different stakeholder groups to provide a wide variety of data. This new way of gathering information can prove to be very useful in performing up-to-date business impact analysis or establishing revised recovery time objectives. (for some quick BCP lexicon help, [see here](#)).
- Communications tool: as with emergency management, social media can provide your organization with prompt and effective communication channels. The benefit of using cloud-based systems includes a channel which is outside of your network and thus unlikely to be affected by the same business disruption that's affecting you.

This cloud based aspect is key and is a factor of improved resilience in itself. Another key point to remember is that BCP/COOP programs are on the same continuum as emergency management. Frankly, why not look at home and individual preparedness as family BCP efforts?

So, it's logical to say that the same obstacles that stand in the way of generalized adoption of social media in emergency management, are faced by BCP practitioners as well. They include:

- Many still consider social media a fad. Particularly if they focus on the platforms currently popular (Facebook and Twitter for example) and not what they mean: ability to exchange info and share perceptions instantly.
- Many Chief Information Officers and other technology experts consider social media too great a vulnerability in terms of cyber-security. A sound risk management and [effective guidelines](#) program should help in that regard.
- Data validation: for many, the info provided by stakeholders through social media remains a bit untrustworthy. But really, is that much different from what is conveyed through other means, the 9-1-1 system or through email for example?
- Resilience: many consider that there are inherent weaknesses in key social media platforms. Recent history (Japan, New Zealand and Australia disasters) and a whole series of [new studies](#) would suggest otherwise however. In fact, more and more BCP practitioners see SM as tools for increasing resilience.

CHAPTER 3

The continuum of social media integration into emergency management program.

The key in integrating social media into your program is a staged approach which goes a long way in overcoming cultural, technical and personal obstacles. On this continuum, we go from no SM involvement, to an integrated approach across the whole EM program, but particularly in the response phase.

- **NO SM:** we still hear some EM types go: ..." I don't have time or the resources, or the money, to get into social media ..." or "... I don't know enough about it" ... or even ..."it's a fad and will go a way, we need official tools to communicate ..." What's our job: to educate, prod, convince and lead by example. Expand our knowledge of best practices and show good ROI.
- **Limited use of SM:** ... the first step is ... acceptance ... social media platforms are now key parts of our communities' fabric. We have to move at the speed of our audience and that means, in some cases, using social media as an old-fashioned one-way communications tool, Think of Twitter (for example), as a key component of your alerting/notification process. How difficult is that to sell to senior execs? Key argument: all traditional media outlets monitor social media so using it will get many audiences informed quickly.
- **Interactive use of SM:** now we move a bit further down on the engagement spectrum. We are into the realm of using more than one SM platform, integrating it into a good web-based information strategy. More importantly, we have convinced our bosses that we need to monitor SM because we can find very quickly what's being said about us. We know who some of the key "influencers" are, those who help shape public perception of our response.
- **Conversational use of SM:** the first real true stage of social media engagement, the Listen, Learn, Engage formula. Now that we know who our key stakeholders who may be helpful to us are, we actually go out and engage with them on social media platforms. We know who to interact with to counter false information and dispel rumours. A key selling point: engaging in SM will help us create a favourable public perception of our response.

- Operational use of SM: this is not only for the PIO or the JIC anymore, although SM play a key role in the provision of prompt, effective and accurate emergency information. Now, we're taking advantage of the "age of social convergence" where mobile devices/tech + SM = empowered citizens and volunteers ... This means we become aware of, and use to some degree, data provided by digital volunteers and crisis mappers. We use social media as a volunteer mobilization tool or we work with agencies/partners who do just that. Key selling point: adding data provided by volunteers/sensors out there in the areas affected by the disaster or from other places, improves our understanding of what's going on.
- Integrated use of SM: The last step in this continuum ... where outside data has been validated, where we have worked with volunteer organizations and help train their people so we have confidence in the info they provide. We integrate those data streams and analyses in the EOC. More than that, it's use is expanded in all aspects of EM, from preparedness and mitigation to recovery. In the response phase, that data provided thru mobile technologies, GIS-enabled software and SM platform is now an integral factor in the production of our common operating picture/Situational awareness. SM is now a fully integrated part of our electronic emergency management systems and a proven volunteer coordination tool. At that point, you don't need to convince anyone anymore

That's where the new frontier of the integration of social media into emergency management lies, in the continuum described above. The crisis mapping community in particular is really putting in question the notions of info control, data validation in EOCs. It's no longer the private realm of emergency managers.

A key factor along the way, will be for emergency management organization to join with their outside partners and embrace this new phenomenon and help train those volunteers. In an era where public funds become scarce, expanding the EM community to volunteers who show commitment, dedication and expertise, will be a blessing for many of us.

Add the inherent resilience of the cloud-based collective that are SM platforms and related technologies, and we now have very powerful allies out there.

CHAPTER 4

The impact of mobile devices on crisis communications planning

One of the most important facts about our changing world is often forgotten because of its omnipresence in our lives. Yes, [the universe is available to us via our mobile devices](#). Whether through iPads, Blackberry, smartphones and many other devices, Canadians are connected to the rest of the planet even when they're on the go. And many other countries are more reliant on mobile devices than Canada.

This trend toward mobile communications platforms is only accelerating. How many of you know people who have abandoned their landlines because everyone in the family has their own mobile?

See this little quote from a piece on the Huffington Post:

"In a first for any age group, more than half of Americans age 25-29 live in households with cell phones but no traditional landline telephones. A report on phone use by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also found that the younger children are, the likelier they are to live in homes that only have wireless phones."



I would say that things are probably not that different in this country and this trend is observed not only for voice communications but also for [accessing the web](#). Here's a [good example](#) of how mobile devices are used to access information during an emergency.

This means that organizations have to shape their websites in a way that the information will be accessible to visitors using mobile devices. Not doing so will be a major source of inconvenience for clients, customers and stakeholders. It will also be a failure point during a crisis or emergency where important, if not lifesaving information, will be harder to find. [Designing your website](#) so it can be more easily accessed via mobile devices is going to be key to any organization's survival or relevance.

In the last few years, many software systems have been developed to use mobile devices as emergency notifications and alert platforms. Through SMS text messaging and, more and more, [social media](#), mobile devices are a key tool to inform citizens about impending emergencies or crisis. For many, the turning point came with the [Virginia Tech mass shooting](#) where the deficiency of email notification and the lateness in issuing such an alert were factors. SMS text messaging is better, however there are [limitations to the use of SMS messaging during an emergency](#).

Here's an [example](#) of the many new applications being built to take advantage of mobile devices as emergency information platforms. Another one comes from a recent announcement by a major telecom company that is working on making the Emergency Broadcast System that would be seen on TV available to mobile phones.

"The Emergency Broadcast System that will alert TV viewers of any emergencies may soon arrive on cellphones, Alcatel-Lucent announced in late 2010. The company is developing a Broadcast Message Center that will let government agencies send mass information regarding local, state or national emergencies. These text messages can warn users of anything from road closures to hurricanes and tornadoes.... "

After initial alerts and emergency notification, mobile devices will continue to play a vital role in providing information to the public, especially if landlines and the electrical grids might be down. Yes, cell systems might also be down but the "technical boffins" around the world are working to resolve that issue and make cell networks more resilient.

Here's a [quick overview](#) of what could be done when reacting to an emerging crisis or incident, including adapting your website. So, the question now is: do you have the ability to fulfil the demand for up-to-date relevant, accurate and prompt information on your website, in a format that people can access on their mobiles? Although we concentrate on content during the course of this project, this topic reflects the need to also pay attention to format and technology.

So far in this document, we've looked at trends and challenges brought by social media in the purveying of emergency information and crisis communications practices. Now, we'll explore how to put together a crisis communications plan. This [blog post](#) sums up once again why being prepared is so critical.

CHAPTER 5

Key characteristics of a crisis

It is important in the context of our project to define what constitutes a crisis. While there are many definitions given in various [academic papers](#) and [other documents](#), we focus less on the definition itself and more on the characteristics of a crisis and their impact on the work of communicators, emergency managers and business continuity planners.

Otto Lerbinger's book published in 1998 and entitled [The crisis manager: facing risk and responsibility](#) provides us with the following definition that strikes a chord. He suggests that a crisis is:

"... an event that brings, or has the potential for bringing, an organization into disrepute and imperils its future profitability, growth, and, possibly, its very survival."

What's at stake, whatever the nature of the disaster or business disruption, is the reputation of any organization, company or brand. We believe it's very important to focus on the "reputational" consequences of any crisis.

A government agency involved in an emergency response normally provides operational emergency information but it should also be heavily involved in a broad public relations campaign to ensure its reputation is not affected.. The agency might have prepared to deal with emerging incidents but how it responds will affect its reputation. You might say that's the ultimate consequence management.

There again, the challenges brought by social media are numerous and the only way to fully gauge the public's perception of your response is to have a sound social media and web monitoring program as part of your plan. For governmental entities of every order and emergency management organizations, reputation management is as critical as it is for for-profit enterprises. This is explained by the public's perception of a response to a disaster or crisis which will unavoidably be reflected in how elected officials deal with emergency managers and senior governmental and municipal executives.

Non-profit organizations, municipalities and businesses face the same issue: anything that threatens their "reputation" can be deemed a crisis; none more so than dealing with a disaster or a significant business disruption that can affect their bottom line. That's all the more true in [our connected and online world](#).

So, for the purposes of this project, a crisis is first defined by any ongoing or emerging threat to the reputation of an organization. Additionally, other characteristics are also present:

1. a crisis will bring significant public and stakeholder scrutiny
2. a crisis will generate increased media attention
3. a crisis is NOT a routine event
4. a crisis may mean a LOSS of control in some fashion and in varying degrees.

The threat to the reputation of any organization, heightened media and public scrutiny appear obvious to many. However, what is often the most challenging aspect of a crisis for [leaders](#), is dealing with non-routine nature of an event and the loss of control it may engender.

Often, the leaders of an organization will try to continue business as usual and deal with the crisis at the same time. It can work but many times it would be more preferable to use all the necessary resources, staff and attention to resolve the incident. It seems that for many executives, this reluctance to use the full array of tools available to them is equated to a loss of control which any serious manager wants to avoid.

But, in the end, resolving a crisis brought by a disaster or severe business disruption, is all about the here and now. You have to deal with the issue because that's what your audiences and stakeholders expect. *The risk to your corporate reputation, is the primary motivation behind any response, particularly for entities that own or operate critical infrastructure.*

Crisis communications practices have to be in step and keep all audiences informed of the impact of the disaster or disruption, given options and a projected recovery time frame.

CHAPTER 6

Key components of the crisis communications planning process

Any crisis management plan or emergency management program should include a comprehensive and well-tested crisis communications plan. This is not a luxury but a necessity of everyday life for any organization as this [post from a former](#) colleague suggests.

In this section we introduce the main components of a crisis communications plan as we see them or the FOUR Ps as we call them. They are:

- Policies (and procedures)
- People
- Preparations
- Practice

We also introduce the growing need to inject a **fifth P** into the equation. A "P" for platform as in social media platforms. As indicated throughout this project, we strongly believe that social media and mobile technologies have forever changed the nature of crisis communications planning, the provision of emergency information and, more importantly, the expectations of our audiences.

We hope to give the members of the PTSC-Online community a better understanding of the need to integrate all these components into a sound crisis communications plan, to avoid failing when it counts the most.

Plans and Procedures ... This is all about the how. What measures, procedures, policies and organizational frame-of-mind, do you need to be able to tell YOUR story. This is really the [nuts and bolts](#) of any crisis communications planning process.

We have established that it's of paramount importance to "occupy the public space" using social media and other tools at the very early onset of a crisis, disaster or business disruption. If you don't have the ability to do it, someone will ... it's a guarantee ... How do YOU want to tell YOUR story? Here's the [opinion of a fire chief from the U.S. Pacific Northwest](#). Who has the authority to ensure an immediate response? Do you have policies about who can act on behalf of your organization?

Do you have a notification or an alerting system in place to let your people know what's going on? This chapter will look at these issues and propose steps to help you be ready.

- Procedures and checklists
- Logistics and equipment
- Hazards and risks identification for organizations and how they apply to audiences
- Monitoring traditional and social media and the move from risk communications (prior to and after) to crisis communications.

People ... This is about the who. Do you have the right people, with the right skills, in the right positions to be heard and effect a prompt and efficient response when a crisis occurs?

Do you have communications or public relations professionals working in your organization? Are they trained spokespersons, especially in times of crisis? There are very few things that are more dangerous to the reputation of any enterprise or agency, than an untrained spokesperson, who says the wrong thing at the wrong moment. It can mortally wound your response.

We now look at what can be done to avoid these pitfalls:

- [Skill set and characteristics of effective communicators during a crisis](#)
- Media relations training
- IMS, business continuity and other training
- Social media as crisis communications tools

Preparations ... This part is about the what. Do you know what you have to say? What channels you'll use and how you can monitor how your audiences are reacting to your messaging. That's where crisis communications techniques such as message mapping come into play. In this section we explore:

- Key messages: their importance and how they relate to expectations from your audiences
- Message mapping ... a crisis communications technique
- Key message delivery
- Social media integration
- Other crisis communications techniques
- Public Information Officer toolkit

Practice ... This is about the above three sections together in a coherent fashion. All the planning in the world will be useless, unless it's practised and tested regularly. It's absolutely essential in our opinion, that communications be involved in all aspects of emergency management and business continuity exercise programs. We provide additional details on:

- Communications and emergency information exercises
- Broader exercises and communication team's involvement

We have added a couple of examples of crisis communications plans in the resources section. One deals with [non-profit organizations \(from Colorado\)](#) and the other is the plan for the [Town of Aurora](#) in Ontario.

CHAPTER 7

Creating the Crisis Communications Plan

Plan Introduction

When needed, the plan has to be clear, readily available, address the issue at hand, and be followed by the crisis response team. It's always good to start with defining for what purpose the plan will be used. You know your organization. What are the incidents that will stop operations in their tracks? You know, the emergency events: snow storms, fuel explosions, train derailments, a product recall, that let you now "this isn't going to be a normal day!".

Next, your plan needs to ensure that the policies and authority are short and simple. Who in the organization can activate the plan? The Chief Executive Officer may not always be the lead. They may not be around when immediate action is required. Alternative decision makers have to be empowered to act. The delegation of authority should list...if 'A' isn't accessible or unable to provide the lead, then 'B' will have the authority to make the necessary decisions. Go to 'C' if neither 'A' nor 'B' is not at hand.

We propose adopting an Incident Command System or Incident Management System approach to integrating the crisis management team and the crisis communications team. Under the ICS/IMS doctrine, all aspects of an organization's activities should be covered while communications reports directly to the Incident Command (or CEO, mayor, or any other individual sitting at the top of the response hierarchy).

Identify each position on the crisis team, their duties including your Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO needs to be thinking communications while others are thinking 'how do we get this situation under control'.

Crisis situations require different scales of response. Your communications plan should indicate how this structure will expand (and contract) as the situation dictates. Tasks will be itemized for media spokesperson, public information centre representatives, media monitoring, social media writer, etc.

Of utmost importance for crisis communications, is knowing who is in charge of this vital operation. Only the lead PIO and alternate should be reporting to the crisis response team (or the Incident Management Team). We have put a "template crisis communications plan" in the [Resources section](#) of PTSC-Online. It is also included in this document as an annex. We offer a step-by-step approach in putting such a document.

Our first step, is putting the plan into perspective with a good introduction that sets out objectives, application and philosophy.

The Crisis Communication Team

Ensuring that you have the essential crisis communication functions identified in your plan, will go a long way in determining how quickly this team gets up an running effectively. We outline these functions.

It's also important to remember that, here again, flexibility and scalability are key. This means that at the onset of a crisis, one member of the team can fulfil more than one function. As the incident grows in scale, so then does the team and each function is assigned to an individual and perhaps more.

Key functions that need to be addressed when putting a crisis communications team together are:

- [Leadership/coordination](#) or (as we prefer) the Public Information Officer (PIO) as in the IMS doctrine. This will be pivotal to any organizational and communication initiatives made during the crisis event.
 - The PIO will determine the needs for staffing and resources.
 - The PIO will liaise with the Incident Commander and/or the crisis management team and or senior executive responsible for dealing with the crisis.
 - Dependant on the magnitude of the crisis at hand, there needs to be an alternate PIO identified and a protocol in place that specifies when the operational 'hand over' takes place. This may be on a shift basis if operations are 24 hours or, it

may be when one IMS team is replacing another as their tour is ending after so many days or weeks.

- Writing function is essential for the creation of key messages and drafting communications products e.g. speeches, news updates, social media messages etc. Hopefully, the initial messages will have already been pre-written as part of the crisis communication planning process.

- Media and web monitoring will be an ongoing function to serve as a feedback or early warning tool to the PIO and the Incident Commander as to the public reaction to the crisis and your agency/company's ability to deal with the crisis.
 - It is no longer just a clipping service which functions through the daily traditional news cycle. Now, social media challenges the communications effort with an endless supply of comment through blog, Twitter, Facebook and forums.
 - In addition, all major media organizations now have sophisticated web-based news services or sites. You no longer need to actually monitor broadcast, if resources are limited for example, if you can find the same information online.
 - It is also essential to ensure that you have the necessary resources and capabilities to respond to public, media and stakeholder inquiries submitted via social media, your website and/or email.

- The [spokesperson](#) is the 'official face' of the agency or community therefore, the person must have appropriate communications skills. He or she becomes link as the face of the response.
 - The role could be filled by the CEO or it could be the Incident Commander with the PIO carrying on the media updates as required.
 - The spokesperson should be prepared for news conferences and/or key media interviews.
 - It is appropriate for senior elected officials to be spokesperson and make themselves available for media briefings at regular intervals.
 - Otherwise, the incident commander and or another designated spokesperson can carry on regular media updates.

- Administrative and logistic support needs which are necessary to keep the communications operations supplied, tracked and accountable and free up the PIO and other members to perform their respective functions. These folks need to be great scroungers in finding or adapting resources particularly if the communication operations has to set up and operate in temporary facilities.
- The Public Call Centre coordinator must be able to ensure the relaying of information to the public, audiences and stakeholders about your response and posture following the onset of a crisis or incident.
 - It can be one person manning phone lines or a more comprehensive operation involving more people. It is a good idea to use whatever normal 1-800 number used to inform your audiences in normal times.
 - Your stakeholders are already familiar with those and they should be able to get the information they require there.
 - It is important to ensure that the public enquiry line staff receive update messaging whenever they are developed.
- Website and social media posting will also be a priority. Using key messages developed by the writer or writing staff, the person or personnel fulfilling this function will be essential parts of your communications response.
 - Using social media means an up-to-date website for your organization. Providing value-added content such as picture, videos, blogs and podcasts, will help you get your organization's message across.
 - Ensure the staff are familiar with these tools and responsive to ever changing information needs of the crisis.
- [Media relations](#) is an ongoing necessity. Media relations officers hopefully have already built strong relationships with journalists as part of the regular duties.
 - During a crisis or emergency, they answer phones calls and other queries from the media, provide media interviews at the incident site, if necessary, and can support your official spokesperson in organizing and even delivering media and technical briefings.

As stated above, other members of the team can be added when/if necessary. For example, you might want to embed IT and telecoms support in your team. Or, if you set up a media centre, you will need media relations officers on site on a permanent basis and the necessary logistical support to make it run efficiently.

CHAPTER 8

Risk analysis and its impact on crisis communications planning

On what should we base our crisis communications efforts for this plan and how do we prioritize messaging based on the risks that our organization may face? Risk management and analysis should be a key factor in the development of any crisis communications plan. It's the basis for any sound business continuity or emergency management program. In fact, in Ontario, every municipality has to conduct a basic hazard identification and risk analysis (HIRA) review.

Here's an excerpt from the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act:

Hazard and risk assessment and infrastructure identification

(3) In developing its emergency management program, every municipality shall identify and assess the various hazards and risks to public safety that could give rise to emergencies and identify the facilities and other elements of the infrastructure that are at risk of being affected by emergencies. 2002, c. 14, s. 4.

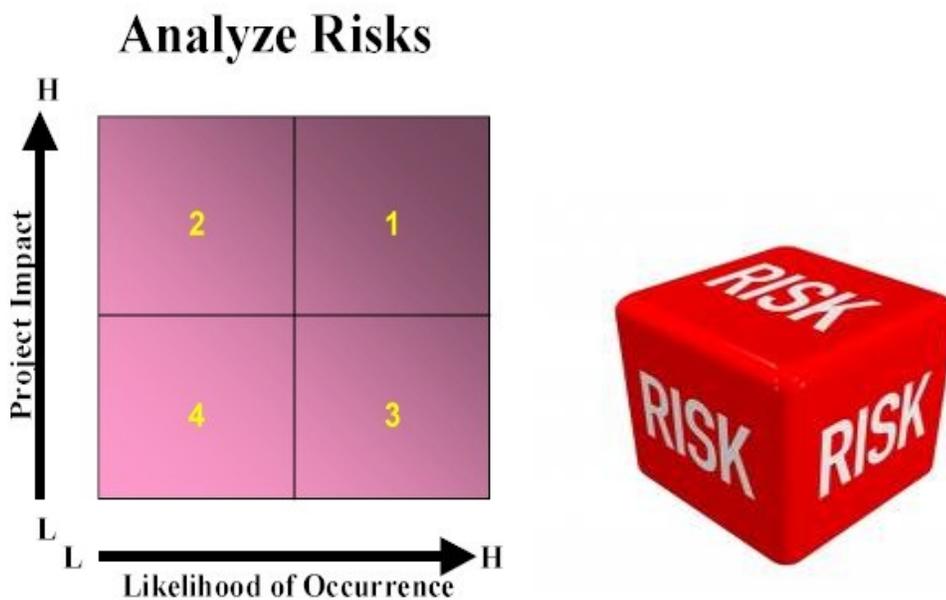
Here's a link to the Act on the government's website: [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#)

The same really applies for any other organization that puts together a business continuity or emergency management program. To prepare, you need to know what could come. The benefits are highlighted in this paragraph taken from [Ontario's Emergency Management Doctrine](#), revised in 2010:

“A risk management approach provides a recognized, flexible and effective means to reduce risk. It has direct application to emergency management and results in a tailored emergency management program to reduce high-priority risks. Organizations using risk management processes are able to identify and exploit opportunities, make good decisions quickly, respond to and adapt to unexpected events and are better equipped to meet their objectives.”

Any risk management program must also include a communications component that guides how you will talk to your audiences about potential emergencies or disruptions that may surface. Therefore, an ongoing risk communications/public education program is most often linked to any serious threats identified in the HIRA process.

A good example of a comprehensive, yet very applicable, HIRA process, was prepared by [Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-term Care](#):



Our neighbours in [Ohio worked on a very thorough HIRA](#).

When preparing key messages, your first option is to review your organization's risk management program and HIRA, if it exists. Consider it a bonus if it exists and is up-to-date because they will identify the top hazards and the degree of risk for your organization or agency. When ranking these risks, a separate consideration should be your audience's perception of these risk.

Likelihood	Consequences				
	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Almost certain	M	H	H	E	E
Likely	M	M	H	H	E
Possible	L	M	M	H	E
Unlikely	L	M	M	M	H
Rare	L	L	M	M	H

In a larger organization, there would likely be a separation of the roles of the business continuity planner and/or the emergency management coordinator and the PIO. However, in a smaller outfit/agency, those functions could be fulfilled by one person only.

As a PIO writing the crisis communications plan, you may want to ensure that the HIRA is viewed through a communicator's eye. Make certain that any risk identified in your analysis is twinned with some sort of measurement of the public's perception of that risk. This factor can greatly affect your ability to remain in control of the situation during the crisis and return on 'normal' operations in the aftermath.

So you might want to take a risk ranking or grid and add another layer to it to illustrate the 'perceived risk' by your key audiences.

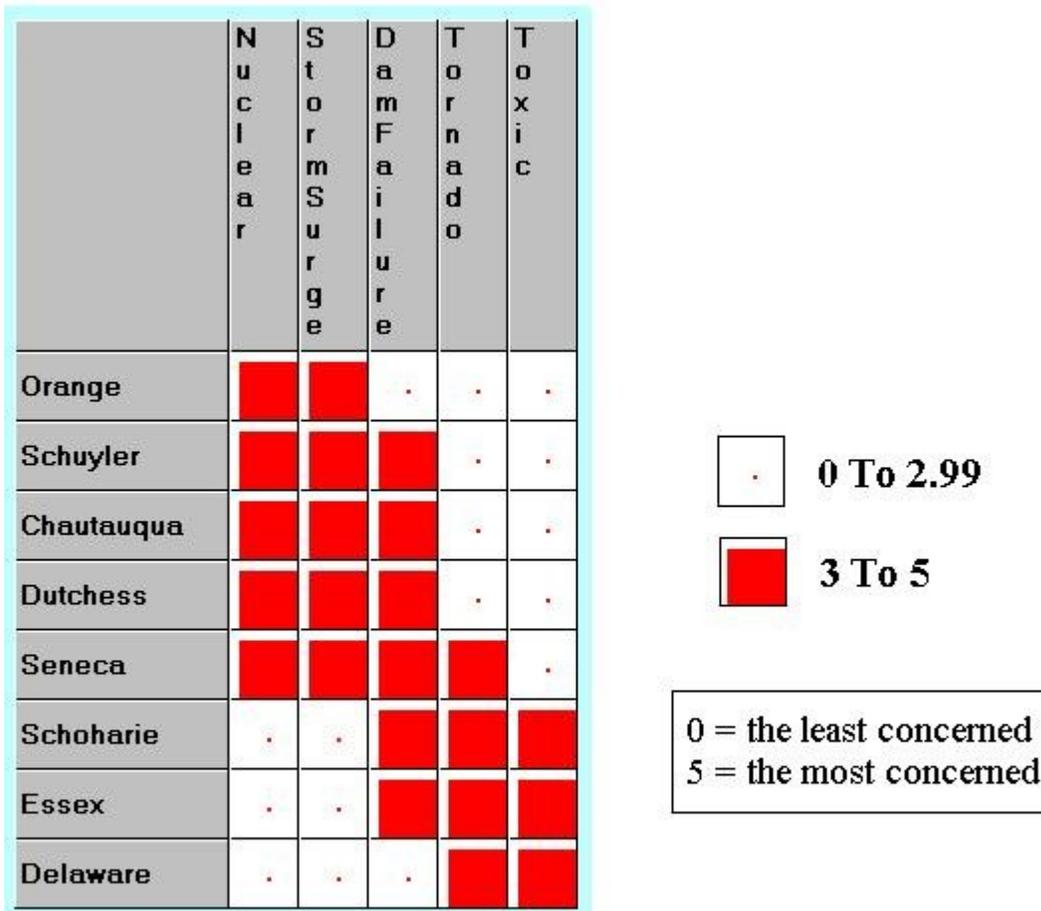


Figure 3 Seriated Matrix of Sample Data

This grading of "risk perception" should determine the level of details to which you plan your communications efforts and messaging. It is extremely important to remember perception of risk may be completely different among your audiences than in your own evaluation.

It would make sense for example to prepare series of key messages or message maps for the five or six most likely risks your organizations faces, add one or two where your vulnerabilities might be more exposed, and for good measure, add another pair related to high level of 'anxiety' among your

audiences. You would then have message maps on approximately 10 different disaster or business disruption scenarios.

Dr Vincent Covello, Director of the Centre for Risk Communications illustrates why it's important to [take public perception of risks into account](#). Therefore, don't assume that the listing of facts about a specific risk is what you will base your key messages on. As the PIO, you need to understand what is going on in the minds of your key audience,

You have to take into consideration when drafting key messages that will be used during a crisis, the difference between how people comprehend and process information under stress as opposed to a routine situation. Effective messages reflect this different approach and enable your audiences to adopt the behaviour you wish them to adopt (evacuation or sheltering in place, for example).

Some of the best examples of crisis communications plans use some grid or matrix to layout and identify the hazard/risk assessment. They then outline the communications initiatives and messages for each key audience or stakeholder.

It has been our experience that a crisis communications plan is where a PIO needs to stake his/her territory and clearly address the needs of those people caught in the crisis. Because you understand their 'state of mind' and their limitations to absorb too much information, you are in the best position to discuss with the crisis management team lead or the Incident Commander, how best to present the emergency information you're your audiences need.

Debating the key messages and strategy with the Incident Commander or senior executives, is very counter-productive and will slow down your communications response. Having prepared a series of risk scenario-based message maps and having them approved ahead of time, ensuring your leadership is familiar with them and how they're used and, finally, having exercised them, is the best way to shine during a crisis!

But also remember this quote from Albert Einstein ... about the imponderables ... the unexpected that can happen at any time to really challenge you despite your best planning and measurements:

"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted."

CHAPTER 9

Delivering Key Messages in a Crisis

What do people really want to know about in an emergency?

- What is really happening?
- How will this affect me?
- What are you doing?
- What do I need to do?
- When will things get back to normal?
- Specific and detailed instructions
- Reassurance
- Voices of authority they can trust

[Remember that people behave differently during an emergency!](#)

Fact #1

Under conditions of high stress, people have diminished ability hear, understand what is being said to them.

Communications implication: You must keep your messages simple. A maximum of three key messages is all your audience can absorb and retain.

Fact #2

For people in high stress situations, as much as 75% of information comes from non-verbal clues...it's what you look like and what you sound like when you say it that's important. In normal circumstances, only 25% of what people absorb is non-verbal.

Communications implication: Make certain you present yourself as someone in authority with poise and confidence. Dress the part! Practice your messages!

Fact #3

95% of the questions people ask during an emergency can be predicted in advance.

Communications implication: You can prepare responses in advance particularly for the early stages of an emergency event; be it a forest fire, flood or any predictable crisis.

There are communications planning techniques such as 'Message Mapping' that can be employed to create these responses. When it comes time to create and deliver emergency messages, it is best to maximize the opportunity that news media offers an emergency information officer. Remember, your audience...they are limited by the stress they are under, so make every word count!

[27/9/3 model: a critical tool](#)

Here are some fundamental facts about how news media operate:

- The average length of a sound bite in print media is 27 words. Your message should be short and clear. There is no room to make your sentences complicated,
- The average duration of a sound bite in broadcast media is nine seconds. Make certain you deliver your key messages in as few words as possible or you will find much of your message on the editing room floor!
- The average number of messages reported in both print and broadcast media is three. Just when you thought you had so much to say, you really only have three key messages to deliver.

These media limitations can work in your favor. It just happens that people in stressful situations can only comprehend about three key messages, so let the 27/9/3 model be your guide. Even the order in which these messages is delivered is important. People are apt to retain the first and third message in an emergency, so pick your order with care!

Caring, Compassion and Competence Model

How you deliver your messages will determine their effectiveness on an already stressed audience - it's not necessarily what you say, rather it's how you say it that counts.

"When people are stressed and upset, they want to know that you care before they care what you know"- Will Rogers

Convey caring and empathy - Before you launch into your key messages, regardless of the interviewers first question, establish that you and your responding agency empathize with those folks who are taking the hit from the emergency event.

"The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources understands the stress that the community is currently facing as this event unfolds."

Demonstrate competence - When delivering you messages, ensure that you express conviction, commitment and competence in the tasks that you are bringing to aid the community. Remember you are being judged by both those most directly impacted by the event and, by those people who care about the victims.

"... our emergency response staff will do everything possible to assist the community. Our response plan is already activated ..."

Offer hope and optimism - People need to see light at the end of the tunnel. Regardless of the initial and/or continuing impacts of the hazard unfolding, your audience needs your optimism.

"We have faced similar events before and know that this will end. We can work with you to start the recovery and restoration ..."

Being effective as an emergency information officer requires; skills training, exercising the skill and, being prepared to respond when called. It does require your commitment, to ensure that you are prepared!

CHAPTER 10

The Message Map

We've talked about why we need to keep our key messages simple and limited (3 maximum), and that first and last messages delivered are likely to be the messages most remembered by people under stress. Now, we can look at a method of delivering those messages. The Message Map organizes those key messages into a simple format and allows for supporting messages to follow once the key messages have been presented.

The MESSAGE MAP can be used to outline a speech at a news conference, a news release, a preparation for a media interview or, any other fact sheet or handout as an emergency event unfolds.

Here's what a message map looks like:

Message Map		
Topic: What is this about? type of incident or emergency.		
Audience: External or internal, media and public, stakeholder?		
Concern: What question s from public/stakeholders are we addressing?		
User: Who will use this message map? Spokesperson, public inquiry line staff? Or will it be included in release/speech?		
Timing: is this messaging at the onset of the crisis? In the recovery phase?		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Supporting message/fact 1	Supporting message/ fact 1	Supporting message/act 1
Supporting message/fact 2	Supporting message/fact 2	Supporting message/fact 2
Supporting message/fact 3	Supporting message/fact 2	Supporting message/fact 2

Remember: Deliver the messages with (CCO) compassion, confidently and give people some optimism as to the outcome of the events unfolding.

For more details on MESSAGE MAPPING, we've provided a link to the [US Environmental Protection Agency web page](#) on this subject and a video explaining how it works by [Dr Vincent Covello](#), who developed this message deliver method.

Alternative Approaches to Message Mapping

There are other alternatives to Dr. Covello's message mapping technique. One of them is the adaptation of that technique by Dr. Robert Chandler, an organizational communications expert. [Chandler looks at three different tiers or stages of an emergency](#) and using appropriate messages for each stage.

- Tier One: long term core messages which are used repeatedly, for example: "Duck and Cover" "Click it or Ticket it"
- Tier Two: messages used during an alert and includes three memorable phrases used with moderate redundancy: "Stay Alert, Stay Awake, Stay Alive"
- Tier Three: messaging used in an acute situation, sentences are short and only used in a limited number of times for specific audiences.

The Chandler model of message mapping asserts the following;

- it is a more sophisticated version of traditional message mapping
- it makes use of three different levels of message mapping
- it develops and holds audience attention over time
- it recognizes that pre-incident information needs are quite different from mid-incident and post-incident needs.

What is particularly interesting is that this approach works backward when creating a message map. You begin with the overall goal in mind, determine the three sub-points that relate to the goal, create

three sentences for each message goal (Tier Three), reduce the sentences to three short phrases (Tier Two) and, reduce phrases to three short words (Tier One)

As Dr. Chandler says, the alternative to not planning your key messages in advance is " high-profile communication gaffes caused by lack of preparation, confusing or inaccurate communication or inability to get a message out quickly to the right people."

Another risk communications approach is the [Risk = Hazard + Outrage](#) developed by Dr. Peter Sandman. [According to Sandman](#), risk communication is grounded by the extremely low correlation between a risk's "hazard" (how much harm it's likely to do) and its "outrage" (how upset it's likely to make people).

You can incorporate the best of these approaches into your own 'message mapping' preparations. We have found that you can obtain good results by keeping your approach simple, and build on the fundamental premises of human behaviour as outlined by Dr. Vincent Covello when developing your key messages.

CHAPTER 11

Your training and exercise program for crisis communications

We outline the basic requirements and lay out the rationale for ensuring the members of your crisis communications team are trained and that their skills are exercised regularly.

Emergency Communications Training

Training opportunities in emergency management and communications, is a growing industry across Canada. Academic institutions, emergency response agencies and communication consulting companies offer a wide variety of course study. You have only to enter "emergency communications training" into a search engine on the internet and you will see our point.

Programs, in the emergency management, security and business continuity fields, are available in many post-secondary institutions, from private organizations (such as ICOR), but some courses are also available online (from Emergency Management Ontario for examples). As emergency responders specializing in the communications aspect, we have found a need for some criteria to allow you to evaluate these study offerings particularly in emergency and crisis communications.

Does the emergency management course offer the following communications content:

- Is the communications role clearly defined within the context of the Incident Command/Incident Management structure?
- Does the course teach basic media relations for use during an emergency?
- Will my 'on camera' interview skills be enhanced?
- Is there a recognition that social media is now one of the leading tools, people turn to in a crisis?
- Does the course outline how, when and where to set up social media tools for emergency communications?
- Does the course show how to monitor and respond to public enquiries through social media

- Is there a methodology for the creation of key messages?
- Are there sufficient opportunities for developing some of the skills that the course identifies e.g. Key messaging, using social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and the major monitoring tools?

The bottom line to the above criteria is that the training should be keeping pace with what people in the world are using to obtain information during a crisis. If you are receiving only course content that meets the needs of the past few decades, are you really being prepared to be an effective emergency responder?

See the effective use of social media during Japan's crisis. Google stepped up to the plate and provided an necessary service for people seeking to find others. Their contribution garnered media attention just as these event unfolded. That alone should signal to emergency managers that 'times have changed.

Validation of your training program will come from exercises (in addition to real crises!). So a program that involves communications into the design and control group for any exercise is a must. In addition, it's also a good idea to run specific training exercises for your communications team. These exercises don't have to involve a lot of preparation or time and they can serve as a motivation and team building initiative.

The key is to remember that exercises test your plans and NOT your people. Applying lessons learned, taking corrective actions, strengthening training and realigning objectives with the reality of today's world, will keep your team current and motivated.

ANNEX ONE:

Step-by-step guide to building your organization's crisis communications plan

Step 1: Plan introduction:

(See how the [Town of Aurora](#) did this section for their plan)

Purpose

- This plan will ensure that [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] assigns the resources and staff necessary to meet the information needs of all audiences (internal and external) during an emergency, crisis or business disruption. It will also ensure that we have the ability to monitor and respond to the enquiries and comments of all stakeholders and otherwise engage our audiences in informative dialogue during such an event.
- This plan will outline the steps to effectively manage communications to mitigate any crisis, or serious negative repercussions for [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] and safeguard its reputation.

Definition:

- A crisis is defined as "... any event that puts, or has the potential for putting, the reputation of [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] in jeopardy and imperils its future ability to respond to [CHOOSE ONE OR MORE: emergencies, the needs of its clients, customers and stakeholders]. Such an event can be caused by a pending or ongoing emergency, business disruption and/or threat to its reputation.
- A crisis can be caused by the following type of incidents or situations [insert highest ranked hazards here as per your HIRA/risk analysis]:
 - [INSERT MOST LIKELY CRISIS SCENARIO]
 - [INSERT LIKELY CRISIS SCENARIO]

Philosophical approach:

- When implementing this crisis communications plan, the [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] will adopt a policy of openness and transparency toward the public, clients and stakeholders.
- Operational requirements may however, necessitate the withholding of some partial or total elements of information, due to privacy, safety, security or other issues.

Notification

- When notification of a crisis has occurred, the [NAME OF POSITION] or designate will immediately contact the head of the crisis communications team or designate, to jointly establish the level of communications support that may be required to assist the response to the ongoing incident
- If the crisis is a reputation issue and does not have immediate operational considerations, the head of the crisis communications team will inform the [NAME OF POSITION] of the nature of the incident and the measures that will be taking according to the crisis communications plan.

Authority

- Only the [INSERT POSITION] or his alternate, or the head of the crisis communications team (or Public Information Officer/PIO) can activate this plan in totality or in parts.
- This excludes procedures that are part of the notification and alerting section of the plan where reporting measures and activities will be undertaken by duty personnel or identified members of the crisis communications team or crisis management team.
- Only authorized personnel identified in this plan [as defined in the policies and procedures section] can engage in media relations activities, post material on the website or social media platforms.

Step 2: Crisis Communications Team

- This section will identify the emergency information and/or crisis communications functions that must be fulfilled when this plan is invoked and implemented.
- Depending on the scale and nature of the emergency or business disruption, members of the crisis communications team may fulfil one or more of these functions.
- These basic functions will be assigned to designated of the crisis communications team during any emergency or crisis:
 - **Public Information Officer (PIO) and/or Crisis Communications Team lead**
 - Name:
 - contact info:
 - Alternate PIO:
 - contact info:
 - duties:
 - liaise with incident commander and/or lead crisis management team lead and/or [INSERT TITLE OF EXECUTIVE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL i.e.: CEO, mayor, regional chair,)
 - Oversee the operations of the crisis communications team.
 - Ensure members of the Crisis Communications Team have a complete situational awareness picture.
 - Coordinate with communications staffs from other agencies and organizations that might be involved in your response to the ongoing crisis.
 - Ensure the crisis communications plan is kept up-to-date.

- **Writer/Researcher**

- Name:
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Research and liaise with crisis management team or operational group to get information necessary to produce information materials for audiences (employees, clients, stakeholders, media).
 - Write and/or supervise the production of public materials (key messages, news releases, speeches) that may be needed for distribution to the public and other audiences or to support executives or the crisis management team.

- **Spokesperson**

- Name (who will be the “public face” of your response? CEO, incident commander, other senior executive, elected official?)
- Contact info:
- Alternate: (who can take his/her place or be used to provide regular/background briefing to the media and public?)
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Maintain situational awareness by liaising with incident commander, crisis management team lead and/or crisis communications team lead
 - Project an image of confidence, competence, compassion and optimism when interacting with audiences and stakeholders.
 - Follow the organization’s media relations policies and best practices guidelines when interacting with reporters.
 - Provide valuable, actionable and relevant information to audiences during media interviews, town hall meetings and through online media (web forums or chats, blog posts, etc.)

- **Media relations**

- Name: (of the person who will handle the media inquiries via phone/email/web or social media, provide background info, and generally respond to the media in between the scheduled briefings where your spokesperson will be front and centre)
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Maintain situational awareness by liaising with PIO
 - Respond to all media inquiries in a prompt manner and providing approved messaging

- Supervise/organize media briefings involving the spokesperson(s)
- Follow the organization's media relations policies and best practices guidelines when interacting with reporters.
- Provide valuable, actionable and relevant information to audiences during media interviews.

- **Web and Social Media**

- Name: (who will provide regular updates to your webmaster or coordinate the updating of your website and post information on your social media accounts?)
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Adapt key messages and other materials developed by the writer and other members of the crisis communications team for posting on the organization's website(s), post updates on social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, others), publish blog posts on behalf of the incident commander or crisis management team lead and/or CEO/elected officials.
 - Identify online and social media forums where your organization's information products could be posted.
 - Engage in dialogue and conversations on online and social media platforms about your organization's response to the ongoing incident.
 - Relay questions from the public to the public inquiries coordinator.
 - Relay questions from the media to the media relations officer.

- **Media and Web Monitoring**

- Name:
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Monitor websites of major news organizations.
 - Bring contentious reports or those containing inaccuracies to the attention of the PIO.
 - Monitor social media and online forums for reactions and comments on the ongoing crisis and detect any reputational threats to your organizations.
 - Bring contentious posts and social media discussions the to attention of the PIO.
 - Monitor or coordinate the monitoring (via outside vendors, if necessary) of broadcasts media reports on the crisis and your organization's response.

- **Public Inquiries Coordinator**

- Name:
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Respond to, or coordinate the response to, public inquiries about the ongoing emergency or business disruption, from clients, residents and other stakeholders that come via phone, email or other means (SMS text messaging, social media, your website)
 - Maintain situational awareness liaising with the PIO.
 - Ensure that replies to public and stakeholder inquiries follow proper procedures and guidelines for engaging with the public (courtesy, prompt service)

- **Administrative and logistical support coordinator**

- Name:
- Contact info:
- Alternate:
- Contact info:
- Duties:
 - Ensure members of the crisis communications teams have the resources and equipment they need to fulfill their duties.
 - Ensure that the location of the crisis communications centre (if not the normal work location of the members of the crisis communications team) is ready to receive the team at the onset of an incident or crisis.
 - Liaise with IT and telecoms to ensure that communications technology and software support is available to the crisis communications team.
 - Ensure that members of the team can be fed, have access to transportation to and from their workplace, have somewhere to rest and recuperate, and other essential life-support needs.
 - Coordinate any administrative staff and clerical support needs of the crisis communications team.

NOTES:

- It is important to remember that one of the key principles of the IMS doctrine is flexibility and that the functions described above can be fulfilled by one or more individuals. Alternatively, any member of the crisis communications team can fulfill one or more of these functions depending on the nature or scope of the emergency or incident.
- You may wish to add key personnel to the crisis communications team: from your legal services or an outside counsel, from your HR department, from your IT department and/or financial or comptroller department.

Step 3: Hazard identification and risk analysis

[INSERT HAZARD RANKING OR HIRA GRID HERE]
EXAMPLE BELOW

	Hazards				
Audiences	Severe weather	Power interruption	IT and Cyber-Security	Industrial Accident (spill/derailment)	Labour disruption
employees					
Clients					
Suppliers					
Residents					
Elected officials					

TEMPLATE GRID HERE

Risk perceived as highest Risk perceived as moderate Risk perceived as low	Most likely hazard here	Second hazard	Third hazard	Fourth hazard	Fifth hazard	Sixth hazard
Audience 1						
Audience 2						
Audience 3						
Audience 4						
Audience 5						
Audience 6						

Audience 7						
------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

Filling in the grid:

- most likely hazards on top row
- key audiences and/or stakeholders in left column
- attribute colour coding: red = highest perception of risk, yellow = moderate, green = low.
- Use grid to determine what key messages should be developed first to address both highest ranked hazards and also the audience/stakeholder group with the highest risk perception.

Risk communications grid:

Hazard One:

Risk perceived as highest Risk perceived as moderate Risk perceived as low	Hazard description here/colour-coded perception below	Key concerns	Our response or actions to address concerns	Channels we will use to communicate	Message Map or key message reference	Note
Audience 1						
Audience 2						
Audience 3						
Audience 4						
Audience 5						
Audience 6						
Audience 7						

Use this grid to determine at a glance your communications tactics for each hazard and audience group. Such grids could be included in an annex/appendix of your crisis communications plan.

An example here (for illustration purposes only)

Risk perceived as highest Risk perceived	IT and cyber-	Key concerns	Our response or actions to	Channels we will use to	Message Map or key	Note

as moderate Risk perceived as low	security		address concerns	communicate	message reference	
clients	moderate	Won't receive services Own systems might be affected	Alternate service delivery Improving or IT security	Website (alternate) Direct contact via phone or email Traditional media Social media	Refer to message map #001	We will need to address the concerns of our clients ASAP at the onset of such an incident
suppliers	High	Won't be paid Own systems at risk	Alternate service delivery Back up data site and accounting	Direct contact Use trade publications if ongoing website	Refer to message map #002	Need to act quickly to ensure smooth recovery following incident
employees	low	Aware of alternate service delivery plans and location Will be able to provide services and contact our stakeholders	We will inform our employees of the need to move to ASDL or other form of service delivery	Direct email Telephone Meetings with staff Social media Internet and intranet (if available)	Refer to message map #003	Our employees will be the face of our organization during such an incident. We need to ensure they can respond to the needs of our stakeholders
shareholders	moderate	Might be worried that their investment will lose some of its value Will be affected by loss of reputation of the organization	Our board of directors and senior executives will inform shareholders of the incident and our efforts to address it	Email to key shareholders and board members Trade publications Website	Refer to message map #004	It will be important to reassure this key stakeholder group to maintain their confidence in our

						organization
media	high	Will want to highlight the impact of the incident Will look for a fault in our IT and cyber-security plans	Crisis comms team and PIO will inform the media about our response	Website updates Social media	Refer to message map #005	PIO to lead and CEO to give media briefing when necessary

Notes:

- it might not be necessary to break all the audiences in so many groups as the concerns might be shared by all stakeholders.
- it might not be necessary to have a whole series of message maps (key messages) if the issues/concerns addressed are the same.

Step 4: Key Messages

- During a crisis brought by (a disaster, a severe business disruption, select one or add another cause), we will communicate with our audiences and stakeholders in an open and honest fashion.
- Our single overarching communications objective will be to (choose one of the following or create your own)
 - Inform our audiences that their safety is our primary concern.
 - Inform our partners and stakeholders that we are doing everything we can to minimize the impact of our business disruption on their activities.
- Key messages have been developed to address the concerns of specific audiences in the case of various emergencies and/or business disruptions.
- We have used the message mapping crisis communications technique to develop these key messages.
- The message maps can be found in appendix (insert number here) of this plan.

[FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES, THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE MAPS INDICATE HOW SUCH KEY MESSAGES COULD BE FORMULATED AND PRESENTED. NOTE: THESE ARE NOT RELATED TO THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER]

Message Map XXXX		
Hazard: cyberattack, hack		
Topics/concerns: business continuity, accounting, payments, information security		
Audience(s): suppliers and clients		
Timeline: [determine the time period this messaging is going to be valid for]		
We're making all efforts to restore our services.	All our customers' and suppliers' information is secure	All our data and critical system are backed up
We expect all our services to be back online in XX hours.	Our security system detected the intrusion and took preventive measures.	Our specialists are working to activate our alternate systems.
In the meantime, you can contact us at:	There was no actual damage to our systems.	Payments to suppliers will be processed as normal.
We will continue to keep you informed at: {website here}	We are collaborating with authorities in the ongoing investigation.	There might be a delay of a day or two.

Here's another example:

Message Map XXXX		
Hazard: chemical fire		
Topics/concerns: address fears and questions related to evacuation order		
Audience(s): residents who live near the facility, evacuees, other residents, media		
Timeline: [determine the time period this messaging is going to be valid for]		
Our first priority is the safety of residents	We have invoked our emergency plan.	All the necessary resources are being applied to suppress and extinguish the fire.
Nearby residents were evacuated as a precaution.	Fire and police have established a unified command to respond to this incident.	We have requested and received mutual aid from other departments.
There are no reports of injuries to residents, workers or first responders.	Our emergency operations centre and control group have been stood up.	Were working with police who have established a safe perimeter.
There are no leaks of dangerous gases or substances.	The EOC is coordinating municipal support to first responders.	EMS crews are on scene and ready to respond to any medical concerns.

A final example:

Message Map XXXX		
Hazard: possible contamination of water system		
Topics/concerns: address fears and questions related to safe drinking water supply		
Audience(s): residents and media		
Timeline: [determine the time period this messaging is going to be valid for]		
We have shutdown our water supply as a precaution	We're working dilligently to restore the water system.	Water will be distributed to residents by other means.
The system was shut down as a precaution.	Our system has built-in safety measures that warn us of possible contamination.	We will have local water distribution points using tenders and bottled water.
We have not confirmed in contamination has occurred or not.	The system worked as it should and warned us of a potential concern.	Reception centres are being open for those who may need to leave their homes.
Tests of water samples are ongoing.	Appropriate precautions were taken to ensure the safety of residents, including a shut down pending test results. ⁵⁸	We are working with social services and public works to ensure that those at risk receive water first.

Step five: Activation of the crisis communications team

The team is activated at the discretion of the PIO or the [INSERT FUNCTION HERE].

The PIO and/or any person designated by the PIO, then proceed to notify staff to activate the team.

Crisis communications team activation levels

There are three team activity levels. They should correspond with the levels adopted by the crisis management team within your organization. The nature, scope and duration of the emergency or business disruption will all have an impact on the crisis communications team activation level.

The PIO determines whether or not the team should be moved from routine activity to either Enhanced Monitoring or Full Activation status depending on direction and information received from the crisis management team.

Routine activity

The team is not assembled or activated at this level but both the PIO should keep track of potential emergencies and/or business disruptions through contacts with other executives and by monitoring social and traditional media.

Enhanced monitoring

The crisis communications team can be partially activated at the discretion of the PIO and/or other senior executives. This is done when an emerging incident could have an impact on the organization and its reputation.

Enhanced Monitoring staffing requirements

The crisis communications team can be partially activated in Enhanced Monitoring status depending on the nature of the emergency and/or business disruption.

Following the Incident Management System and its flexible and scalable approach, the team would vary in size according to the nature or scope of the emergency. At minimum, the PIO would fulfil most of the functions identified in the composition of the crisis communications team.

Typically, under enhanced monitoring, the team would function with two or three staff members ensuring 24/7 coverage and being available to ramp up to full activation if necessary.

Activation

This level of activity and staffing would ensure that the crisis communications team could fulfil its mandate during a severe business disruption or large-scale emergency. Members of the team and their alternates would be informed of the activation and asked to report to any designated site or through virtual means (phone, video conference).

In case of a sustained activation, a two-shifts rotation would be implemented, at the direction of the PIO after a period of 12 or 18 hours following the initial activation and would last for a period of five days. Any activation extending longer than five days would require a three-shift rotation to ensure the optimal effectiveness of the team.

Sustained activation staffing requirements

When it is anticipated that the activation of the crisis communications team might be prolonged, a two- or three-shift rotation will be implemented to ensure that the section can fulfil its mandate. The participating staff would be assigned to shifts to allow the team to function effectively 24/7 over a long period of time. A sustained activation would be initiated at the discretion of the PIO if it is anticipated that the activation could continue over a period of time exceeding 24 hours.

A two-shift rotation would be implemented after a period of 12 to 18 hours following the activation and would last for a period of up to five days. Any activation extending longer than five days would require a three-shift rotation to ensure the team's continued effectiveness.

Team members would be advised of the implementation of a shift schedule with enough lead-time to make arrangements and notify/find alternate members from their home organizations if necessary.

During prolonged activation, the PIO would arranged for alternate PIOs to be designated to cover the other shift periods when he/she will not be on duty.

Crisis Communications Team Activation Thresholds

The following criteria would normally be used to decide on the activation of the team:

- An incident has occurred and resulted in the death or serious injuries to employees.
- An incident may occur that could affect business continuity and/or put the health and safety of our employees, clients, residents at risk. [ADAPT FOR YOUR OWN USE]
- The organization's crisis management cell has been activated and/or senior executives have requested the activation of the crisis communications team.

Activation notification procedure

After being notified of an emergency or business disruption, and if activation thresholds are met, the PIO will initiate the activation of the crisis communications team.

For an activation, the PIO and/or any designated member of the team will:

- 1 notify primary and alternate members of the team
- 2 ensure that communications channels are open and remain available between the crisis management cell and the crisis communications team.

Time of activation	Notification procedures and guidelines
Emergency occurs and EIS is activated during:	When and how members will be contacted
Work days during normal business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)	The PIO will contact primary and alternate team members at their normal work location or via work email, phone and cell phone.
Work days outside business hours	The PIO will contact primary and alternate team members via work email, work and personal phone and cell phone.
Statutory holidays and weekends	The PIO will contact primary and alternate team members via work email, work and personal phone and cell phone.
Any day between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.	The PIO will first contact the primary team members for immediate activation. If a primary member cannot be reached, his/her alternate(s) will be contacted instead.

Notification message

A formal, scripted message is part of the notification procedure to ensure that all persons being notified receive accurate instructions.

Upon receipt of notification of the activation of the EIS, required staff should record the time, source and text of message. Staff should then proceed to the primary EIS or to an alternate location specified in the notification/alert.

NOTIFICATION MESSAGE TEMPLATE

To be used by PIO and/or any designated team member.

- **This is [NAME OF CALLER] from the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] crisis communications team.**
- **This is an Emergency Notification Message.**
- **Are you ready to copy down the notification message?**
- **We have been notified of [STATE NATURE OF EMERGENCY OR BUSINESS DISRUPTION]**

- **As a result, the activation of the crisis communications team has been ordered.**
- **You are required to report to [NAME SITE IF APPLICABLE OR PROVIDE VIRTUAL ACTIVATION INFO SUCH AS TELECONFERENCE NUMBER, VIDEO CONFERENCING INFO, ETC.] as soon as possible.**
- **Please read back the message.**
- **[ONLY RELEVANT IF ACTIVATING AND ASSEMBLING TEAM TOGETHER]
You should bring a kit containing a change of clothes and personal hygiene items to ensure your comfort during a prolonged activation.**

Activation Procedures (relevant when members are reporting to a common location)

Activation Checklist for the PIO or any other designated member of the crisis communications team

- **Contact primary team members and/or alternates, if directed by the PIO to do so (NOTE: you should attach a roster of available/trained members and attach it to your plan)**
 - Ensure room/location is open and accessible to team members.
 - Building security can be reached at: XXX-XXX-XXXX
 - Ensure IT and telecoms support is available
 - IT contact info here
 - Compile and keep all info on email accounts (including back up emails accounts), social media accounts/passwords, telephone directory and other relevant contact information.
- **When team personnel arrive:**
 - Confirm accounts and passwords
 - Confirm access to organization Intranet and website
 - Confirm network access
 - Confirm data line/Internet access line functionality.
 - Set out basic office supplies on desks. (Log/Admin Coordinator)
 - Set out sign-in sheet for team members.
 - Make any reference materials available (plans, procedures, checklists) to team members upon their arrival.
- Assist members with setting up their work areas as necessary.
- Contact crisis management cell and/or senior executives on activation status.
- Arrange for log keeping with record keeper or admin/log assistant.
- Set up Task Tracking board.

- Determine if a toll-free line is going to be stood up to respond to public inquiries and ensure website is monitored to respond to enquiries.
- Ramp up social media monitoring program and ensure that you have the ability to send any relevant information to the crisis management cell and/or other executives.
- Determine if any public information/alerting protocols have been implemented and ensure continuity in emergency information messaging.
- Adapt/update initial message map in consultation with crisis management team.
- Conduct initial briefing for team members.

Initial Briefing (conducted by the PIO)

When team members report for duty, an initial briefing will be conducted. Briefing items should include:

1. Update/situation report (sitrep) on the nature and extent of the emergency
2. Review of any public information or alerting messages sent.
3. Review of crisis communications team functions/roles and assignments.
4. First communications/information tasking
5. Initial key messages (message map)
6. Advising members if public inquiry line is being activated
7. Advising members of any intranet or wiki site where information can be shared/stored.
8. Outlining documents/products approval chain [should stop at PIO with FYI to crisis management cell]
9. Identifying/resolving issues that might impede full effectiveness of team
10. Shift rotation and additional staff requirements (if necessary)
11. Liaison with governments, business associations and/or other stakeholders
12. Anticipating media coverage, trends and rumour control
13. Ensuring logistical, IT and administrative support.

Media Relations Policy

Objective of the media relations policy and standard operating procedures

The purpose of this standard operating procedures (SOP) document is to outline our media relations strategy during a crisis brought by an emergency or business disruption.

Guiding principles

Media relations activities will be conducted according to principles of openness, collaboration, and effectiveness. As well, all communications will be sensitive to public concerns and risk perception.

Operational guideline: [CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS ... or draft your own, combining elements of the two options below]

Option 1:

- Any employee or executive can respond to media enquiries and talk about his or her own specific area of expertise or involvement in the response to the incident, emergency or business disruption.
- If the media enquiry extends beyond the normal scope of the employee or executive's involvement in the response, the journalist shall be referred to the media relations officer.

- If the media enquiries addresses potentially contentious issues or puts into question our organization's response, the journalist should be referred immediately to the media relations officer.
- Any employee or executive that does not feel comfortable responding to a media request or contact, should refer the journalist to the media relations officer in a courteous manner.
- Any employee or executive contacted by a member of the media and cannot respond to the enquiry, should refer the journalist to the media relations officer.
- IN ALL CASES, even when an employee or executive responds to a media contact in a positive fashion, a report (verbal or through email) should be sent to the media relations officers denoting:
 - Name of reporter and media organization
 - Topics discussed and key pieces of information relayed by employee or executive
 - Any follow up that might be needed with the journalist.

Option 2:

- Any employee or executive contacted by the media should NOT provide any answer other than to politely refer the journalist to the media relations officer.
- Any employee or executive should alert the media relations officer of any enquiry that could potentially lead to a negative perception of our organization's response,
- Any employee or executive contacted by a member of the media and cannot respond to the enquiry, should refer the journalist to the media relations officer.
- IN ALL CASES, even when an employee or executive responds to a media contact in a positive fashion, a report (verbal or through email) should be sent to the media relations officers denoting:
 - Name of reporter and media organization
 - Topics discussed and key pieces of information relayed by employee or executive
 - Any follow up that might be needed with the journalist.

The on-duty media relations officer(s) will keep a log of all media contacts that will show the following information:

- Name of reporter and media organization
- Topics discussed and key pieces of information relayed by employee or executive
- Any follow up that might be needed with the journalist.

Referring media calls/inquiries:

Employees and executives should direct media inquiries to the media relations officers to report emerging issues or media requests that may require immediate attention. This applies for media contacts in person, via phone, email or social media platforms.

Media relations officers:

- primary: Name + email + telephone + cell
- alternate: Name + email + telephone + cell

Media inquiry line:

The on-duty media relations officer has the responsibility to respond to media requests in a professional, prompt and courteous manner.

The media relations line's number is: XXX-XXX-XXXX

The media relations email address is: [INSERT HERE]

Step 6: Exercise and training program

It is essential to align any communications exercise and training program to your organization's emergency response and business continuity exercises. A key to ensure useful and meaningful participation is to have a key member of the crisis communications team as part of any exercise design group.

Exercises:

Ensure you organize periodic crisis communications exercises and validation activities, independently of the overall exercise program to ensure your team is ready to fulfil all its functions and responsibilities.

Each exercise, whether an independent crisis communications activity or part of a broader organizational exercise, should have detailed objectives and a plan for any after-action report and a strategy to undertake any necessary corrective action. This will help to measure the crisis communications team's implementation of the plan and identify any potential gaps.

It's also key to remember that exercises are not meant to test people but your functions, procedures and plan implementation. Before any exercise, team members should have the opportunity to review any available plan, procedures or manual you have available.

A regular training and exercise schedule will help you integrate your emergency management and/or business continuity program in your routine activities. This level of engagement will help make the members of the team familiar with the expectations outlined in your crisis communications plan.

Sample Crisis Communications Exercise : IT systems outage

- Situation: simulate your reaction to unfavourable comments being made on media outlets, websites, blogs and social media platforms about an ongoing IT outage within your organization that's impeding normal business.
- Action: implement, relevant components, or totality, of your crisis communications plan to shape stakeholder opinion in your favour or counter negative comments
- Expected outcome: occupy the public space where comments are being made to ensure your story is being heard.

Key steps:

1. Activate you plans (partial or full)
2. Mobilize team (partial or full)
3. Media, web and social media monitoring evaluation (what's being said about you? By whom? Where?)
4. Determine how the information you gather from your monitoring can be actioned and relayed to operations or senior executives.
5. Determine your level of response (use an [analytical or engagement grid](#))
6. Adapt your key messages (message maps)
7. Practice executing your response (develop revised message maps, writing web updates, blog posts from your senior executives and [posts on social media platforms](#))
8. Evaluate your response and identify corrective actions

Training requirement

Your organization's training policy should be aimed at enabling and empowering the personnel assigned to your crisis communications team and their alternates. Training curricula need to be updated regularly to maintain pace with new thinking on basic emergency management and business continuity doctrines.

In addition, a training program should also integrate new techniques and technology as they become more popular and widespread among your stakeholders. Furthermore, it's always a good idea to ensure that your staff are trained to fulfil a primary function within your team, but also have them trained to be able to fill in at least another (if not all) other functions.

Key training requirements and considerations include, but are not limited to:

- basic IMS or ICS training
- understanding of the PIO function(s) within the broader IMS/ICS doctrine
- basic business continuity planning
- basic media relations skills
- basic crisis communications and key message development
- basic understanding of social media and their use in emergencies and for BCP purposes
- basic understanding of the hardware and software that will be available to the crisis communications team.

Plan Maintenance:

- Identify who or what part of your organization is responsible for maintaining this plan and updating the information included.
- This should include:
 - regular confirmation/update of contact information
 - regular verification/confirmation of training status

- regular exercise program archiving and scheduling.
- Ensure that all corrective actions identified in after-action reports are integrated into the plan.
- Plan approval sign-off sheet.

ANNEX TWO:

Checklists for the PIO

The 'day of action' eventually will arrive when an incident calls for the crisis communications plan be made operational. Will the site for crisis communications operations, be ready for the heightened activities that will consume the PIO and supporting staff to meet the demands of the crisis command team, the community most impacted and media?

As a lead public information officer, you need to ensure that those facilities and supporting technologies are clearly identified in the crisis communication plan and, they are in a ready-to-use condition. One of the more concise and contemporary checklists comes from the document [Basic Guidance for Public Information Officers \(PIOs\), National Incident Management Systems \(NIMS\) - FEMA 517/November 2007.](#)

It is important for the PIO to have tools and resources available for use during any incident. Although this is not a complete list, a emergency information Go Kit might include:

- Communications Log Book
- office supplies such as pens, paper, stapler, tape, etc.;
- laptop computer and portable printer with an alternate power source(s), including accessories (e.g. memory stick, CDs, mouse, etc.);
- maps;
- television, radio, and/or broadcast recording equipment;
- cell phones/Personal Data Assistants (PDAs); (perhaps matched/equipped with technology to make it into a wifi/myfi "hotspot" for connectivity)
- fax machine;
- agency letterhead;
- PIO task list and other emergency operations plans;
- camera with additional memory cards;
- contact lists;

- battery powered radio; and
- pre-scripted messages and template releases.

Prior to an incident or planned event, establish agreements with businesses or agencies that can assist with the operations. Examples would be contracts with: translation services; printing companies (in order to publish brochures, fact sheets, or other emergency documents); and telephone companies to install hard-line telephones.

What we like about this list is that it applies whether the crisis communications operations site is already at an established location or that it includes the tools necessary to bring to a location created at the time of the incident.

Since every situation will vary, we are providing additional [PIO checklists](#) in the resources folder for your reference for those [PIOs who are likely to be deployed to remote locations](#) or to the actual incident sites. Our suggestion is to 'mix and match' your essential checklist to meet your own reality.

PIO should review the kit's components and their the components on a regular basis. What we would add to this list is the software necessary to ensure a quick setup for searching, posting and responding to social media needs. These are time critical tools to ensure your messages are out there and your efforts are seen to be on top of the ongoing incident.

In larger integrated crisis communications team operations there is a trend towards 'virtual' communications facilities which are fully integrated into the emergency response systems. These include already established computer servers preloaded with the templates and data bases, i.e. Maps, media listings and distribution services etc. The advantage of these systems are that they can be accessed from any authorized agency through wireless laptops or smartphones. Be prepared by having traditional backup technologies (as in the list above).