

Crisis Response Planning

By their very definition, crises are disruptive. But that doesn't mean you can't plan for them. By making sure you have an effective crisis response plan in place, you are putting your organization in the best possible position to take immediate action, contain/manage a crisis and help the community heal.

The crisis plan must be structured to provide personnel (at all levels) with the necessary procedures and training to identify a crisis and operate accordingly. Among the questions that will need to be answered before a crisis hits are:

- Who calls 911?
- Which staff responds to a code/alarm?
- What are others doing at all times?
- Who is allowed to speak to the media?
- How is everyone who is not on-site notified?
- Who makes the decisions for the site when top leadership is not available?

An effective Crisis Response Plan will help to make sure that you have the answers to these questions if and when the unpredictable happens.

Building your Crisis Response Team (CRT)

The first step to developing your Crisis Response Plan is to clearly determine who does what. The CRT comprises of individual roles with specific responsibilities.

When building your CRT:

- Keep your outline of roles and responsibilities as current as possible.
- Designate a chain of command, including back-ups in case more team members are unavailable or disabled.
- Create a checklist of roles and responsibilities and keep it readily available in both digital and hard copy formats.

Note: When developing the plan, use titles as opposed to specific names when identifying the roles of the CRT (i.e. don't say "Sally will contact the Chairman of the Board"). This helps to ensure that staffing changes do not impact the accuracy of the Crisis Response Plan.

Roles and Responsibilities of the CRT

Examples:

President/Executive Director (P/ED)

- Head of Crisis Response Team (CRT)
- Only P/ED will notify Chairman of the Board of Directors and Attorney
- Provide updates to the Chairman of the Board and Attorney throughout the crisis
- Set a time for follow-up CRT meetings for updates to P/ED

Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

- With the approval of P/ED, notify the insurance company of the situation—keeping them informed on the status of the crisis
- Notify Executive Staff on the status of the situation and brief them on phone procedures
- Assign specific tasks to Executive Staff to assist the CRT

Camp Director/Designee (CD)

- Determine if CRT needs to be assembled, and activate the Crisis Response Plan
- In collaboration with P/ED, oversee the CRT on site for the duration of the crisis
- It is the responsibility of the CD/designee to determine—through the use of the activation guidelines—the need to assemble the CRT
- Gather as much information as possible to brief the CRT
- Begin a timeline of events comprised of a running list from each team member
- Ensure all campers/participants/staff are in a secure location and away from further danger
- Be fully informed and gather as much information and detail as possible
- Ensure someone is designated to manage the rest of the campers/participants/staff

Create and post a hard copy list of important contacts with staff titles to supplement the above checklist. Include outside resources that may be essential to your CRT, including local law enforcement, hospital crisis planner, fire department, counseling and social work professionals and local media contacts.

Examples:

President/Executive Director

Sally Simple

Extension: 2222

Home: (555) 555-5555

Cell: (444) 444-4444

Emergency Contact and Phone: Stewart Simple, (333) 333-3333

Community Police

Officer Officer Melanie Blank

Home: (555) 555-5555

Cell: (444) 444-4444

Local Fire Department

Direct: (555) 555-5555

Emergency: (444) 444-4444

Hospital Crisis Planner

Ken Ready

Direct: (555) 555-5555 Front Desk: (444) 444-4444

Emergency Counseling Services

Stephen Doe, Doe and Associates

Direct: (555) 555-5555 Front Desk: (444) 444-4444

Potential Threats

Identifying On-site and Off-site Threats

Once you have established your CRT, the next step is to create and post an exhaustive list of potential threats to your organization. Threats that have the potential to affect your organization could occur on your property, or they may be nearby. They can be man-made, or can stem from some form of natural disaster. Make sure your potential threat list is specific to both your organization and your region.

Becoming familiar with what could instigate a crisis is a valuable way to plan ahead and make sure you are prepared for all eventualities.

Example:

Environmental Threats	Earthquake; hurricane; fire; flood; tornado, dam-collapse; building-collapse; chemical spill
Security Threats	Hostile participants/camper/staff; hostage situation; verbalized threats; child/adult abduction/missing person; robbery; assault; active shooter; bomb threat; arrest of staff/member; gun found in backpack or luggage; breach of computer security
Health Threats	Contagious illness; accidents involving catastrophic injury or death; ropes course, challenge course or climbing accidents
Off-Site Health Threats	Trips; train, plane, bus, van, auto and boat accidents; Accidents involving catastrophic injury or death
Off-Site Environmental Threats	Wildlife; chemical plants; trains and semis carrying hazardous materials; wildfires; severe weather approaching fast; mud slides
Off-Site Security Threats	Terrorism; active shooter; escaped convict at-large; suspicious activity; civil unrest

Identifying Potential Partners & Resources

Your list of potential threats will help you to identify what resources you will need to respond to any particular crisis. The first step is to know what entities/individuals are positioned to help. It is also important to understand which entities/individuals are stake holders and are likely to be directly or indirectly affected by the situation.

Create and post an exhaustive list specific to the area and the organization. Inside resources may include emergency contact information for your Volunteer Coordinator and your camp's Director/Designee. Contact information for a Hospital Crisis Planner will be a necessary off-site resource to have handy.

A comprehensive list may include emergency contact info for:

- President/Executive Director (P/ED)
- Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
- Camp Director/Designee (CD)
- Sheriff's Office (local)
- American Red Cross (local)
- Department of Public Safety (local)
- Department of Fire and Emergency Services (local)
- Animal Control
- National Organization Hot Line (YUSA, ACA, BGCA, JCCA)
- Crisis/mental Health Resources
- Area Media Contacts
- Horse and Animal Owners (if using leased animals)
- Local Schools
- Key Vendors

Blueprints of Facility/Site

A basic visual layout of your facilities can drastically decrease your organization's response time during a crisis. Your blueprint should be simple, for clarity, yet detailed for efficiency. Not only should your blueprint outline the structure of your facility, but it should also identify the location of critical items like:

- Utility lines
- Gas shut-off valves
- Water shut-off valves
- Electrical cut-offs
- Emergency exits
- Storm shelters
- Helicopter coordinates for emergency landing

Written overview of facility/site

A written overview of your site will help you in determining your organization's capacity to provide assistance. It will provide the information you need to make important decisions like how to divide supplies among a number of participants, or over a period of time. The overview should consider the number of facility beds, the number of buildings and type of construction (e.g. prefab or custom built, brick or timber, etc.). It should also cover the average number of participants and staff on site, as well as the type of participants served, including any disabilities or special medical needs.

Command Post as a Resource: On and Off Site

The command post is a location/space that can be rapidly converted for crisis response. It includes the ability to connect many lines of communication, external media (TV coverage) and access to crisis management plans. In the event that evacuation is necessary, a back-up site (off property) should be identified in advance. As much as possible, stock the command post with important supplies. Be certain to display the location of the off-site or on-site command posts and ensure that emergency supplies are clearly marked for easy identification.

A basic stock of supplies should include:

- Back-up power supply generation/gas supplies
- Medical supplies
- Modest reserve of food and water (at least three days)
- Flashlights, batteries and cell phone chargers
- Back up walkie talkies

Emergency Response Codes

Emergency response codes and signals are preset signals designed for use as soon as a crisis breaks. They quickly communicate to your team which particular response module(s) should be activated. Determining which emergency response codes/signals will be most efficient will significantly reduce response times and promote effectiveness.

Example emergency response codes:

1. Missing Persons—code blue
2. Active Shooter—code red
3. Hostile Intruder—code yellow
4. Site-wide Evacuation—code green
5. Crisis Response—code black

Developing a Flexible Plan

The Crisis Response Plan should include multiple response modules to assist with unexpected scenarios, or a combination of scenarios/threats that have been identified. Your CRT will work best when tasks and action items are categorized both by crisis type (response module) and by department (e.g. housekeeping, maintenance, front desk, etc.).

Note: Your Crisis Response Plan should identify what needs to take place within the first 24-48 hours.

Your Crisis Response plan should answer the following questions:

- Who calls 911?
- Which staff responds to a code/alarm?
- What are others doing at all times?
- Who is designated to speak to the media?
- What is the plan to notify off-site personnel?
- Who makes the decisions for the site when top leadership is not available?
- When to assemble the Crisis Communications Team?
- When and how to activate the command post?
- Which statements will be given to the staff, participants and families, and when (including how to obtain consent for the release of information)?
- It should also provide opportunity to review procedures, initiate individual check-lists and prioritize emergency actions

It's important to make sure crisis communication plan aligns with the organization's operational plan.

Because half of crisis management work happens after the acute crisis is over, and can last for weeks, months and even years, your Crisis Response Plan should also consider:

- Signaling an end to the acute crisis
- Determining if the program/area/site will remain open
- Debriefing process
- Determining who is directly and indirectly being affected physically and emotionally
- Monitoring reactions of the CRT for "compassion fatigue"
- Contacting crisis mental health resources
- Filing hospital and police reports
- Providing contacts and resources for optional counseling
- Developing a plan for recovery and clean up (many people will wish to assist)

When the situation is stabilized, the CRT will meet for debriefing, review the events, assess where the organization is and where it needs to be to recover. For the duration of the crisis, the CRT should be monitoring and reviewing conditions. Post-crisis review by the CRT allows learning to occur and plans to be revised as necessary.

Maintaining and Practicing Your Crisis Response Plan

Whether or not your organization has experienced a crisis should not affect your commitment to maintaining, practicing and testing your Crisis Response Plan. All staff—part-time, full-time and seasonal—must know their role in an emergency. This includes: housekeeping, maintenance, front desk, food service, medical, finance, marketing, development, volunteers and participants.

- Remember to document regularly simulated exercises. Implement unscheduled/surprise simulations so as to record crisis response speed and efficiency.
- Maintain and test communication channels, inventory resources and effectiveness of crisis communication (these are steps that are commonly missed).
- Update plans at least annually and after post-accident drills if warranted.

An Important Reminder

It is important to remember that all are affected when a crisis situation happens, and experiences and viewpoints will vary. If running a program which has an end date (e.g. a summer camp or a retreat) check in with those most closely affected six months after the crisis has ended. Remember that anniversary dates and birthday dates can trigger emotions. It is the responsibility of the CRT supervisor to ensure proper critical incident stress debriefing, and that appropriate help is provided. Conduct regular check-ins to assess emotional needs, and to provide all stakeholders with the support they need to heal and move forward with their lives.