

Crisis Management Guide for Corporate Office Use

A. IN THE EVENT OF A SERIOUS EMPLOYEE INJURY

1. Determine the extent and nature of the injuries.
2. Find out immediately where the person is being taken.
3. THE MOST SENIOR PERSON ON SITE (or whomever the Safety Director designates) will call the family to explain only that there has been an accident and that the employee has been injured. If the injury appears to be serious and you are questioned by the spouse, say: "We can't be sure until we hear from a doctor." Advise the family that transportation can be sent to take them to the medical facility. Discourage them from driving themselves unless they absolutely insist.
4. If necessary, an employee will go to the injured person's house to lend assistance. When the designated employee arrives at the family's house, he/she should call the office for any new developments and then, depending upon the situation, offer to take the spouse to the hospital (if a cab was not used), or find someone to watch the children (if applicable).
5. The Team Leader will assign someone to stay in contact with the hospital for updates on the injured person's condition.

NOTE: If the injury involves a non-employee, the authorities should be consulted as to notification procedures. Contact your insurance company and your legal counsel as soon as possible.

B. IN THE EVENT OF AN EMPLOYEE FATALITY

1. THE MOST SENIOR PERSON ON SITE (or whomever the Safety Director designates), will make a "best effort" to inform the spouse in person of the accident. If a face-to-face notification is not possible, then a minister or police officer may be a possible candidate. The goal is to notify quickly...a phone call is a last resort due to its impersonal nature. (See the following pages for more detail).
2. The designated upper management personnel should remain at the home until other family members arrive or as long as he/she can.
3. If the media attempts to contact a family member, it's the family member's right to speak to the media only if they wish. You cannot prevent them from talking to the media.
4. If the employee's family is in need of money to cover small expenses, assistance may be appropriate. The few dollars it will cost will come back in good will.
5. Contact should be maintained with a relative or close friend of the spouse throughout the time of the funeral to make sure everything is being taken care of.

NOTE: If the fatality involves a non-employee, the authorities should be consulted as to notification procedures. Contact your insurance company and your legal counsel as soon as possible.

C. **FATALITY NOTIFICATION (*NEXT OF KIN*)**

At some time you may be called upon to notify the wife, husband, mother, father, son or daughter of one of our workers of the death of their loved one. This is a traumatic event, for both the relative and you. Here are some guidelines to help you.

1. Do your homework. Obtain the full name, address and social security number of the deceased. Next, get the full name of the next of kin, the relationship (wife, brother, mother, etc.) and determine if the family members are English speaking. Gather all information relative to the cause so we can provide an explanation.
2. Determine where you'll meet. Will the contact be at home, work, or school? If it's outside of the home, arrange with the relative's employer or school for a private place to meet. Verify that you are talking to the correct person, i.e.: "Are you Sandy Johnson's sister?"
3. Don't go alone. Take a fellow employee to support you. This could be the superintendent, a friend of the worker, or minister. Try to assess the stability and health of the relative. If the notification is likely to cause an immediate health problem, you may need to have a health care professional along.
4. Decide what you'll say. There's no easy way to say that someone has died, so don't try it. Speak simply and directly. Using terms like "mortally wounded" only confuses people. While it's not necessary to be blunt or cold, at some point it's necessary to say "dead" or "died." Example: "Mrs. Jones, there was a very bad accident this morning at the project. Charlie was moving a ladder and fell over a guardrail. The paramedics did everything they could, but he died instantly."
5. Don't lie. If you tell a mother that her son died with her name on his lips and she later learns his death was immediate, there's a conflict. It may not be necessary to offer all of the details. Example: If the spouse asks, "Did he suffer much?" an appropriate answer might be, "I don't think so."
6. Be prepared for emotions. There will be shock, denial, grief, numbness, anger at the deceased, at you, at the medical staff, at other people. Let the relative vent their feelings. Use common sense and do what seems appropriate at this time. Some people will appreciate a touch of a hand, others will not.
7. Decide what not to say. By not preparing what to say, you may end up saying things that you'll later regret. Example: In an effort to offer words of comfort, do not say, "He's with God now," or "You're young and will find someone else." Instead, say "I'm so sorry this has happened to you," or "What can I do to help you right now?"
8. Always listen. The formula is 90% listening and 10% talking. If the relative needs to go to the hospital, funeral home, etc. you may offer to drive them or get them a cab. If there are children involved, help arrange for a sitter or a friend to look after them. When appropriate, offer assistance in getting in touch with the life insurance company, social security, etc.
9. When it's over. You've gone through an extremely stressful event. Take care of yourself now. Find someone to talk with about what you just went through. No one ever gets comfortable with this.

D. **DO'S AND DO NOT'S OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

1. **DO** make sure the reporters know who the spokesperson is. The corporate spokesperson should be the only one authorized to disseminate information to the outside world. It is very important that you

"speak with one voice." Keep in mind that no information should be released without being approved by upper management and legal counsel.

2. **DO** talk. Saying little is better than saying nothing. Explaining why you can't talk is better than stonewalling. If you want your side of the story told, you must tell it. If you don't, reporters will get a version elsewhere...perhaps from a disgruntled employee that was laid off last week, or a worker who has just witnessed his best friend getting hurt or killed.
3. **DO** tell the truth. Reporters will find it out anyway so be honest and accurate when giving information. This doesn't mean you have to give every detail, but be truthful. If you don't know the answers... say so! It's not a crime to say "I don't know" or "I'm not absolutely certain about that"...as long as you follow it up with "but I will find out and get right back with you."
4. **DO** respond quickly. If you don't, the wrong story may be told and that is tough to erase.
5. **DO** emphasize the positive and communicate your corporate message. Remember to emphasize the good safety measures taken, the minimal damage because of good teamwork by your employees, and what the company is doing to minimize the effect of the emergency on the community.
6. **DO** stay away from liability issues. Don't talk about who is responsible, don't make any accusations, and don't give out company or individual names. Whatever you say may become part of a legal issue, so be as general as possible.
7. **DO** take control. If there is bad news, release it yourself before a reporter digs it up and tells the world.
8. **DO** create visual analogies. The old saying "a picture is worth 1,000 words" applies here. Examples are powerful as well, e.g. "The affected area covers 40,000 s.f., which is the approximate size of a football field."
9. **DO** condense your information. Remember that the average sound bite is 7.3 seconds. Try to keep your response to no more than three sentences. The first sentence should be your direct response and the next one to two sentences will support/explain.
10. **DO** make sure your information is accurate. It should come from a reliable source and you should understand the details thoroughly.
11. **DON'T** say "no comment." This statement implies guilt. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the reporter you don't know, but will try to find out. If the question may lead to an embarrassing answer, give as much information as you can in as positive light as possible. If you make a mistake, admit it. Avoid excuses. Explain how you're planning to make things right.
12. **DON'T** be trapped into predicting the future... NEVER speculate!
13. **DON'T** say anything "off the record." If you don't want it used, don't say it.
14. **DON'T** wear sunglasses when being interviewed. You'll be perceived as being "shifty" and hiding something.
15. **DON'T** discuss damages or estimated costs.
16. **DON'T** discuss any facts relating to insurance, such as amounts and terms of coverage, name of carrier, possibilities of settlements or reimbursements.

17. **DO** think before answering. Taking some time before you respond is perfectly acceptable. You're in control of your response...not the reporter. Don't allow them to rush you. If you don't understand the question, ask the reporter to rephrase it.

E. GETTING READY FOR THE INTERVIEW

1. **Buy-Time Statement.** If the accident has just happened, you won't have any verifiable information to release to the news media. However, the media will expect someone to say something. Avoid the urge to stonewall the media while you're gathering facts. Instead, deliver what is called a "buy time" statement. This acknowledges the situation but doesn't really divulge any information. It would go something like this:

"My name is John Smith and I'm the Project Manager for XYZ Construction Company. At approximately (time) we experienced a (description). We are cooperating fully with the investigation being conducted by ___ as well as conducting an investigation of our own. We want to find out exactly what happened to ensure that it never happens again. We have requested assistance from (police, fire, etc.) and our company spokesperson (name) is enroute. This is all I can confirm at this time. I'm sure you understand we're very busy trying to deal with the situation and gather as much information as possible. Please remain in this safety area and either (spokesperson) or I will be back in 30 minutes with any additional information that can be verified."

You can count on the reporters pestering you for additional information. Should this occur, say "That's all I can confirm at this time. I'm sure you understand that we need to deal with the emergency at hand and gather some verifiable information for you. Thanks for your patience."

Remember, if you say you'll be back in 30 minutes, be there! Even if it's only to say that you still don't have any facts. You can usually get away with giving two "buy time" statements. After that, you better have something to say.

Here are some other options to choose from:

- a. "Due to the rush of the emergency, information is not yet complete."
- b. "Our management team cannot be reached because they're handling the emergency. As soon as we receive verifiable information, we'll share it with you."
- c. "We have no information as to the extent of the emergency at this time. As soon as we receive verifiable information, we will share it with you."

H. DETAILED STATEMENT

As you receive information that has been verified by a trusted source, you'll need to live up to your promise of delivering that information to the news media. Always get your statements approved by upper management and legal if possible, before release.

Here are some examples:

"My name is _____. I'm (position) _____ with (Company). At approximately (time)____, one of our workers accidentally hit an underground electric cable, disrupting service to _____. At this point, we have contacted the utility company, whose crews are on their way to repair the line. We don't know how extensive the damage is, but I'm sure the utility people will be able to provide you with those details once they review the situation."

"The location of the line break is approximately _____."

"Because our employees adhered to our strict safety policies, no one was injured and there was no further damage to the area."

"At this point, that's all the information I have. Our corporate spokesperson is on the way to provide you with further details, but right now all I ask is that you stay in this area, away from where the line break occurred, so emergency personnel and utility employees will be able to work on the line. We'll keep you posted on any further information."

"Joe Smith, 20, of San Francisco, California was injured Tuesday morning at 8:45 a.m. on the XYZ construction site in San Francisco. Smith, who is a laborer for (Company), suffered multiple injuries as a result of the 30 foot fall. He is reported in critical condition at University Hospital in San Francisco. We are cooperating fully with the investigation to find out how this happened so we can make sure that it never happens again. We will keep you advised of any further developments."

"We are deeply saddened to report that Joe Smith, 20, of San Francisco died as a result of an accident that occurred Tuesday morning on the XYZ construction site in San Francisco. Smith, who was a laborer for (Company), suffered multiple injuries as a result of a 30 foot fall. We all feel helpless at this time. Our focus right now is on the family and friends of Mr. Smith as well as the investigation of the accident."

I. GET READY FOR QUESTIONS

Here are some questions that might arise. Also included are some suggested responses.

1. What caused this accident?

Suggested response: "The cause of the accident is not known at this time. The investigation is continuing and we're working closely with the authorities to find out what happened."

2. How many, and who, were injured/killed?

Suggested response: "At this time we can confirm _____. I'm sure you'll understand that we cannot release any names until the families have been notified."

3. What is the estimated damage in dollars?

Suggested response: "We don't have an estimate at this time. All of our resources are committed to the investigation right now. Estimates will be addressed at a future time."

4. Have you had any accidents in the past? What's your safety record?

Suggested response: "Right now, all of our resources are committed to the investigation. I'll be happy to gather that information and deliver it in our next update. (However, if you have a strong safety record, mention it.)"

5. Can we come on site to take pictures?

Suggested response: "Once the site has been secured, access will be determined by _____. We'll keep you informed of our progress."

J. HANDLING HOSTILE MEDIA

On occasion, you'll run into a "pushy" reporter. The following points will help you keep your calm.

- Be prepared by knowing all of the important facts and details.

- Neutralize negative questions. Here's an example in the event of a fatality and a reporter is relentless in asking, "Your Company's responsible for this death. How does that make you feel?" Your response could be, "This was a tragic accident. We don't know what caused it right now and won't know until the investigation is completed and the findings are released. Right now our energies are focused on the family of ___ and finding out what happened to ensure it never happens again."
- Give yourself time to think by pausing for one or two seconds before responding...or restate the question in your own words.
- Respond to a series of "rapid-fire" questions by picking one which best relates to the point you wish to make.
- Maintain your position of authority by making eye contact and using positive body language.
- Don't let a reporter interrupt. If a question is posed while you are making a statement, wait until the reporter is silent, then complete your thought and continue with any other points that you intend to make.
- Always keep your cool and be unemotional, but confident.

H. **RESPONDING TO TELEPHONE INQUIRIES**

Never take a media phone call cold. Always have an assistant take a message (stating that you're in a meeting). This will buy you a few minutes of time to organize your message. Then, make sure you return the reporter's phone as quickly as possible. If you fail to return the call, you'll be able to see your name in print like this: "XYZ Construction had no comment" OR "XYZ Construction could not be reached for comment."

The guidelines presented in this section remain consistent whether you have a phone or personal interview.