



CRISIS PLAN

Planning for and managing your next crisis

Prepared By:

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INTRODUCTION

A woman's fraternity/sorority is subject to many different risks, which expose the organization to property and life safety "disasters." A disaster can be defined as

"an unexpected event causing widespread or localized destruction to lines and/or property."

Classic Examples:

Member is killed in a traffic accident following her attendance at a co-sponsored function with a men's fraternity

A tornado levels the chapter house with several members sustaining severe bodily injury

Members were alleged to have physically hazed their new members in an initiation event

As a fraternity/sorority leader and member you are aware of the many complex exposures that your organization faces day in and day out! These exposures do produce losses. Disaster losses differ; however, from normally occurring losses. In a disaster the sustained losses can be overwhelming and the relief efforts are overtaxed to the breaking point.

A crisis is the period of time following a disaster during which immediate help is needed in order to save and/or preserve life and property, as well as to minimize the negative impact upon your organization and its reputation.

No two crises are alike, they come in all shapes and degrees of severity, but some basic principles apply universally.

There are two distinct features of your crisis planning and crisis management plans:

- Pre-crisis actions that need to be addressed prior to the event in order to mitigate or exercise some control over the event.
- Post-crisis actions that need to be accomplished following the event in an attempt to mitigate and control the results of the event.

Effective crisis planning begins with leadership at the top.

PRE-CRISIS ACTIONS

The best way to deal with a crisis is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The main features of pre-crisis planning review are:

- Determine who is going to be in control once a crisis erupts, preferably at least three individuals within the chapter and/or house corporation.
- Identify individuals who will be media contacts and train them accordingly.
- Establish a phone/text tree of the chapter and house corporation contacts in order to communicate with members and volunteers as quickly as possible. Key University personnel should also be added to your phone/text tree.
- Have a complete and current list of the tenants in each room, as well as a floor plan of the layout of the chapter property available for emergency personnel's use.
- Create an evacuation plan and post it prominently.
- Consider setting up a secure email distribution list of parents of chapter members to contact with information.
- Have cell phones or two-way radios with back-up batteries on hand if necessary.
- Create a single plan to cover all crises, so that your crisis plan is easily tested and implemented.
- Your crisis plan should be written, tested annually and implemented.
- Create an annual timeline for your plan to reviewed and discussed.
- Check with your University to see if they have a list already produced of emergency numbers for your use and post those in prominent areas and with the applicable Chapter/House Corporation officers.
- The crisis plan must be communicated to and understood by **all** officers of the Chapter Advisory Board and/or the House Corporation Board, not just the Chapter Risk Management Officer, the Chapter Advisor, the House Corporation President, etc.
- Brainstorm and discuss the potential impact of a crisis. Use case studies and determine what further information needs to be added to your crisis plan.

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POST-CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Your pre-crisis planning is your best defense in the event of an actual crisis. In addition, keep the following recommendations in mind:

- + Follow the steps created in your pre-crisis planning. Contact the necessary individuals as laid out in your crisis plan. There are specific insurance policy requirements that need to be considered, so be sure to contact MJ Insurance per your crisis plan.
- + Use words as though each were very expensive – everything you say and do may be used against you in court...or in the court of public opinion.
- + Image and reputation are often cemented by initial reaction, so that time must be used wisely.
- + Controlling the message and the flow of this information is critical.
- + All forms of communication are subject to discovery in civil litigation and criminal prosecution.
- + Don't predict an outcome.
- + Remember that a chapter is composed of individual members, so avoid generalizations such as, "the chapter" or "the members." Do not impugn liability by gross generalizations.
- + Do not admit to liability or fault and do not engage in "what if" scenarios.
- + Pay attention to other crises and learn from them accordingly.
- + Focus on protecting the image and reputation of your member(s) and your organization, while balancing this internal focus on the external need to be open, accountable and accessible.
- + Most importantly, follow the media guidelines established by your organization in dealing with the media after a crisis.

There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full.

Henry Kissinger

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IMPORTANT CONTACTS FORM

Instruct each chapter to complete this form and provide it to all necessary local volunteers and officers, as well as posting it at the chapter property or on a secure chapter website.

Campus Security Emergency Number:	
Campus/Local Fire Department Number:	
Campus Police Number:	
Greek Advisor Name and Contact Information:	
Dean of Students Name and Contact Information:	
Other University Contact (if applicable):	
National Headquarters Office:	
Chapter Advisor Contact Information:	
House Corporation President Contact Information:	
Media Contact/s (as identified in Crisis Pre-Planning)	
Risk Management Advisor Contact Information (if applicable):	
Contact MJ Sorority Division:	<p>Heather Cox :: 317-805-7598 heather.cox@mjsorority.com</p> <p>After business hours, call Cindy Stellhorn at (317)374-5039.</p>

Preparation and planning will help you develop a culture of good risk management.

APPENDIX

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A CLAIM

In the event of a Property claim:

- + Do whatever is necessary to prevent further damage from occurring.
- + Call or e-mail **Heather Cox** at MJ Insurance with the following information as soon as possible, even if you believe the claim will be less than the deductible:
 - o What happened
 - o Date damage occurred
 - o Any estimates for repair or replacement of the damaged items
 - o MJ Insurance will advise you if an adjuster will need to be sent to your property prior to repairs being made.

In the event of Injury to Members or to the Public:

- + Make no statements accepting blame.
- + Treat any potential or actual claim or lawsuit as a high priority item and immediately notify your organization Headquarters and MJ.
- + Call or e-mail **Heather Cox** at MJ Insurance with names, date of loss, and details of incident.

In the event of Injuries to Employees:

- + Call or e-mail **Heather Cox** at MJ Insurance with name of employee, date of loss, and what happened.
- + The employer must fill out an "**Employer's First Report of Injury Form**." This form *must* be filed within *five* days of the injury in most states. This form is available **via our website** or in the Appendix of this document. Mail, e-mail, or fax the report to **Heather Cox** at MJ Insurance.

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In the event of an Embezzlement or Forgery claim:

- + Notify **Heather Cox** at MJ Insurance as soon as possible.
- + Remove all financial responsibilities from the individual immediately.
- + Begin the process of developing the details to the loss.

Claims Contact Information

Phone: (888) 442-7470
Direct: (317) 805-7598 (Heather)
Fax: (317) 805-7580
E-mail: heather.cox@mjsorority.com

Emergency After-Hours Contact:
Cindy Stellhorn
(317) 374-5039
cindy.stellhorn@mjsorority.com

HELPFUL WEB RESOURCES

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org>

Crisis Management Toolkit

Department of Defense Education Activity

<http://dodea.edu/instruction/crisis>

Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center

<http://www.ercm.org>

Ready Campaign

<http://www.ready.gov>

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.dhs.gov>

Campus Firewatch

<http://www.campus-firewatch.com>

igot2kno.org

A Fire Safety and Prevention Resource

<http://www.igot2kno.org>

MJ Sorority

<http://www.mjsorority.com>

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Are you Ready for the Crisis: Communication Assessment Tool

When a crisis occurs, are the following in place? Assume it has been classified a crisis.

1. Communication Protocols:

- A. Who needs to know?
- B. When?
- C. How is it communicated?
- D. What is communicated? Is it different for each audience?
 - a. Members?
 - b. University?
 - c. Media?

2. Who needs to know?

- A. Do the persons that either have the title or responsibility know what to do?
- B. Are they knowledgeable about your area?
- C. Are they ready at any moment to handle a crisis?
- D. What happens if they're not physically located near the center of the information, i.e. out of town on business or a volunteer that lives in another city?

3. When?

- A. Is there a timeline written out of when, how and to whom information is generated?
- B. A timeline for face to face meetings?

4. How?

- A. Is there a plan for how information is shared?
- B. To whom?

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- C. In what format? Email, text message, press release, cell phone, land line, meetings?
 - D. Different groups?
5. What is communicated?
- A. Is it different for each audience?
 - B. What does the media receive versus the organization versus the family versus the chapter versus the friends (non-chapter members)?

***Angela Guillory, LSU; Dave Westol, Limberlost Consulting; Cindy Stellhorn, MJ Insurance.
Association of Fraternity Advisors Annual Conference, 2008.***

SAMPLE CASE STUDY

It's Wednesday, November 8. It's been raining for a week and it's 30 degrees.

3 am – 911 is called from Mu Nu fraternity house. “We have an unconscious guest, help!”

3:05 am – University Police Department arrives – discovers 15 students on the floor. President points to the student who seems unconscious – Shannon Thompson, Tampa, FL.

3:21 am – University police assessing – another 911 call comes in – “This is Greg Miller, we’re in the back yard of the Mu Nu fraternity house and one of our new members has been electrocuted. He had been digging a hole and hit a line.” His name is David Miles – Slidell, LA. All power is lost on fraternity and sorority row. Campus Police had not made it to the backyard yet.

3:22 am – EMS arrives and transports Shannon Thompson to the hospital.

4:02 am – Shannon Thompson – 0.588 BAC – Tampa, FL. – pronounced dead in transit to the hospital.

4:00 am – EMS arrives to transport David Miles, he is pronounced dead in transit to the hospital.

4:05 am - Campus Police – Ropes off crime scene; ensures safety of scene and contacts Facility Services. It will take two hours to cut off electricity – Campus Police get generator to provide light. Campus Police will assess the rest of the members including the 30 new members. 911 will be contacted for additional assistance. Mental Health staff is contacted.

4:10 am – University officials begin arriving at the scene. Sober members are taken to Johnston Hall for questioning by university officials and Campus Police. Campus Police begin taking photographs of the area.

5:30 am – Public Affairs – Christine, a member of the Crisis Communication Team calls her team to discuss the need for emergency text message regarding electricity. They decide to send a media person to the scene to assess. Do we need a broadcast email?

6:45 am – Major feeder electrical line to house (trunk line) is secured.

9:00 am – Public Affairs to set up call center, number is published in text message, broadcast email, and on website.

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Other Factors at Work

12 students have sent text messages to their friends regarding incidents.

2-3 hours to get a generator to the Mu Nu house.

Utility company will have to be called. Electricity out.

Who communicates with:

Campus Transit?

Contacting chapter presidents/ house moms/House corporations/National Headquarters?

Neighbors?

Faculty, staff and students coming in for work/school that morning that use that route to arrive on campus?

House employees?

Alternative housing options?

Mu Nu members going to class?

Greek members living in Greek housing going to class?

Fraternity/sorority alumni/alumnae?

Housing for 24-48 hours for Mu Nu?

Is it reasonable that the electricity company is going to react quickly?

How do we treat students who are texting?

Day 3 – electricity is back on. House is open.

Things We Didn't Think About

Each fraternity/sorority needs to develop packaged “phrases” on Alcohol and Hazing policies for Public Affairs purposes.

House moms don't all have texting capability or computers, so Greek Life has to set up phone tree with them – need everyone's cell numbers.

Greek Life will develop communication protocol with presidents, advisors, house corps (text, email, phone calls – with backups for people out of town).

Greek Life will ask everyone to have their chapter emergency plan as part of the assessment process.

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Establish a holding area for students if house isn't available – will need transportation.

Crisis Team personnel needs remote access

Greek Life website update? Sorority/fraternity website update? How quickly can that happen?

What is the role of IFC, PHC, NPHC?

As part of the chapter's emergency protocol, we need to ensure that they review with chapter members the baseline info: only president or advisor talks to press, secure rooms of deceased if in the house.

Develop an information protocol within the Dean of Students office. Whom is contacting whom?

At what point do we bring the whole chapter together and what alternative meeting place would be a possibility?

Also provide general statistics and chapter history to Public Affairs department of the University

How do we share investigative information with the International Organization?

University and international organization needs to be on the same page with the release of information and releasing statements.

Need to provide information of registered events going on that week involving the Greek community.

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2008/12/2008120201c.htm>

MANAGING PR CRISES

No two controversies are the same, but some basic public-relations principles can help you handle the fallout

By RUSSELL POWELL

While experience may be the best teacher, it's not something most public-relations officers covet when it comes to dealing with crises. Yet crises are inevitable if you have been in the business long enough.

During my career, I've had to deal with campus robberies and dead crows, students trampling on an American flag, and, tragically, a student publicly committing suicide. I've had to calm a college president who wanted to verbally attack a popular cultural figure at a public forum (it would have been harmful to the university and potentially fatal to the president's career). I cut my teeth in academic public relations on a student proclaiming to the world that he was earning his degree in Frisbee.

As that list suggests, no two crises are the same. They come in all shapes and degrees of severity. But there are some basic principles that should govern your thinking when it comes to managing campus crises.

The best way to deal with a crisis is to prevent it. An obvious example is the case of the college president above. He, and the university by association, would have looked foolish had he scolded the public figure. With some persuasion, he canceled his plans.

That incident was sudden and discrete. But a wide range of institutional decisions can increase the risk of a crisis, or can inadvertently set the wheels in motion for a public-relations disaster. Will a new dorm incense neighbors? What are the implications of a proposed change to a program to promote diversity? Can the college accommodate an influx of new students to its technology-driven film program?

It is essential that the college's chief public-relations officer be party to those deliberations and given the opportunity to contribute his or her perspective. It's equally important for a PR officer to anticipate potential disasters and bring them to the attention of the president so that the college can weigh the risks consciously before making a decision.

Even before the shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007, campus safety was a perennial issue on every campus in America. Yet many colleges remain slow to react to that

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threat, and have failed to tackle security issues with appropriate vigor. We are doing reasonably well at Elms College. We conducted a campuswide security assessment last spring and adopted some of the recommendations, including the creation of a new position of director of campus safety. Still, several weeks ago, two students and a friend were robbed late on a Saturday as they returned to the campus.

Fortunately, they were not hurt. The incident was isolated, and did not even occur on college grounds. Nevertheless, it worried students (and their parents), who suddenly feared for their safety.

It is essential in such situations to be empathetic, to communicate effectively, and to avoid reacting defensively. Put yourself in the place of a student or parent hearing about a campus crime. It's scary. For parents, their worst fear is that their child will be in harm's way, and their initial reaction is often more emotional than reasoned. For a college official to respond defensively, or fail to communicate the facts in a timely manner, will only increase everyone's anxiety.

When and how much information should be communicated to various constituencies is always open to interpretation, especially in the initial hours of a crisis, when the facts are still coming to light. You don't want to inadvertently add fuel to the fire by over-pitching it, or sending out information prematurely that turns out to be incorrect. Still, it's best to always err on the side of keeping the key players informed.

In the case of the robbery, our president held campus meetings with students and faculty members a few days after the incident, describing what had happened and the college's response (which included new security measures), and listening to people's concerns. On the Monday morning after the robbery, we sent out a collegewide e-mail message from the president laying out the facts, and sent additional e-mails that week as new information emerged.

For some people, that was not enough. But most seemed satisfied that the college had responded appropriately.

When dealing with crises, it's always a good idea to tell the truth. Obviously it's the PR officer's duty to avoid legal culpability and frame things on the best possible terms for the institution. However, many a crisis (see Watergate) has mushroomed from a small beginning to a major problem because the people in charge were not forthcoming and/or tried to cover things up.

If you have bad news, the sooner you 'fess up and take the hits, the sooner you can move past it. The public is more likely to be reassured and forgive your mistakes when you are forthcoming. Conversely, everyone dislikes a liar. Compare New York Yankee pitcher Andy Pettitte, who acknowledged taking performance-enhancing drugs and

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resumed his career, with teammate Roger Clemens, who to this day denies he used such drugs, and has seen his reputation permanently tarnished.

So take the moral high ground. Accept responsibility. Telling the truth allows you — and everyone else — to feel better about you, your college, and your profession.

But perhaps the best advice to guide your crisis response is to put people first. Behind closed doors, senior staff members must candidly evaluate the risk to the college and develop an appropriate response. But when you go public, always put human concerns before institutional ones.

In the case of the robbery, for example, or that incident early in my career when a young man took his life by drinking a poison-laced drink on closed-circuit television, all statements to the college community and news media began with genuine concern for the victims and their families. During such moments, you are the face of the university.

As institutions of higher learning, we always look for teachable moments, even in a crisis. When students in an art class at one college I worked for created an installation that included an American flag lying on the floor, some military veterans in the community heard about it and accused the students — in the media, of course — of trampling on the flag.

Intense discussions ensued among the college's senior administrators, some of whom wanted to capitulate to public sentiment and close the exhibit. That would have been disastrous, abridging academic freedom, trivializing the students' work, and serving as a tacit admission of wrongdoing. Calmer heads prevailed, and we chose to sponsor a public forum, moderated by our president, in which the veterans had a chance to talk with the students.

It went extremely well. Many of the students previously had no appreciation of why the flag, as a symbol, was held so dearly by the veterans, and the veterans had a chance to see that the students were thoughtful, and not intentionally disrespectful. The result was not only an end to the crisis, but a positive story in the local media.

Once a crisis breaks, your goal as a PR officer is to minimize damage to the institution. That is more easily done if you already have a good working relationship with local journalists. A good relationship may result in you getting a phone call from a reporter before a story breaks, rather than after. In the best cases, the story may be dropped altogether. But if it goes forward, it is better to have the college's position represented than not.

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Perhaps my most challenging crisis involved a student at Hampshire College who used a Frisbee as the object of a case study involving everything from physics to marketing. For those unfamiliar with Hampshire, it has an innovative program in which, among other things, narrative evaluations are used in lieu of grades. The college operates something like a graduate school at the undergraduate level: Students assemble faculty committees to review their work, which may consist of course work, research, and other learning tools around a particular topic. The program works best for students who are disciplined and motivated, and Hampshire has produced some extraordinarily talented and successful graduates.

But the titles of some student projects can sound trite, and are ripe for satire. So it was with this student, who thought it was a good idea to trivialize his own work, telling a wire-service reporter that he was earning his degree in Frisbee. The story went *everywhere*, and made Hampshire the butt of jokes for some time (just last summer, 25 years later, I overheard a colleague repeating the story!).

I was new to the college and the field of public relations then, but I learned a valuable lesson: Don't ever assume that the public knows your institution; be proactive about educating people. Hampshire's pedagogical approach was poorly understood by reporters and local residents, many of whom had never set foot on the campus. When the national media swooped in, it was all too easy for the locals to confirm the negative stereotypes. Ever since, I have always made it paramount to get to know my local journalists and community leaders, and keep them informed about the institution I represent.

About those dead crows: Huge flocks had become a nuisance and a public health hazard in a city in which I was working. City officials tried everything to get rid of the birds, including setting off fireworks, which merely made the crows relocate from downtown to our campus. In midwinter, and without our knowledge, the Environmental Protection Agency decided to poison the crows, and black carcasses began littering our snow-covered campus. The college initially was accused of killing the birds, and we literally had to clean up the damage.

Sometimes, you just can't win.

Russell Powell is a public-relations officer at Elms College in Chicopee, Mass. He previously worked as director of public relations at Hampshire College and at Greenfield Community College, and as a consultant. He will be writing occasionally for On Message, our new column on career issues in academic public relations. If you would like to write for the column, send your ideas to careers@chronicle.com.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CURRENTLY UNDER DEVELOPMENT

- + When hiring a security person for a social event in which alcohol is being served, we are developing a short checklist that covers the major concerns of this type of arrangement.
- + Basic guidelines to follow to use good risk management when hiring a contractor.
- + Enforceability or lack thereof of liability waivers being used for more hazardous activities.
- + Preparing for pandemic flu outbreak.
- + Statement by property owner of scientific facts regarding the presence of mold and any ramifications to life safety of the resident members.
- + Please contact us with further suggestions!