*When a crisis occurs, being prepared while maintaining open and honest communication is critical. This document provides specific guidelines for those needing to act as a spokesperson.*

The most important things to remember when communicating in the wake of an unexpected event are:

TELL THE TRUTH · TELL IT FIRST · TELL IT OFTEN · TRAIN YOUR COMMUNICATORS

DOs

* In preparation for potential crises, identify an individual or team who will be responsible for crisis communications. Ensure those individuals receive proper training outside of a crisis situation, so they understand all aspects of crisis communications and how to represent the organization in gathering and disseminating appropriate information properly.
* Exercise judgment and due diligence when selecting a spokesperson. You need a good communicator who is clear and well-spoken. The selected individual needs to be able to confidently deliver the organization’s messaging with authority and credibility. Ideally, this is someone in the organization who has established a level of trust among stakeholders. In many cases, this will be someone in a leadership position.
* Educate personnel so they are aware of who is authorized to speak on behalf of the organization, or to the media during a crisis. They should know where to direct any media inquiries.
* Incorporate crisis communication into Emergency Preparedness plans. Practice drafting and delivering messaging during drills.
* Pre-plan and draft holding messages for possible incidents based on identified risks (e.g., service interruption due to bad weather or power failure) that can be adapted during times of crisis. These prepared statements allow your organization to quickly respond to the public at the beginning of a crisis while providing time to gather more information.
* Be honest and transparent. Keep trust front and foremost in communications.
* Express sympathy and empathize genuinely.
* Give credit and express gratitude when appropriate.
* Keep communications as concise as possible. Stick to the facts.
* Invest time to craft the right message for the audience, using the most appropriate communication channel and media format.
* Be diligent when it comes to content. Research and validate sources of information.
* Proofread communications. Check the facts and ensure you are sharing the most current information.
* Make sure the content or key messages of different communications are aligned.
* Draft responses to anticipated questions. If you do not know the answer to something, say so.
* During interviews, the spokesperson must stick to the approved messaging.
* Repeat your key messages in an interview. Make sure the most important points are made multiple times, if appropriate.

DON’Ts

* Don’t avoid the media. Manage communications promptly and in a controlled environment.
* Don’t lie or soften the message.
* Don’t provide answers that are outside of the accepted key messaging.
* Don’t allude to or speculate about the causes of the incident.
* Don’t accept liability prematurely or without legal counsel.
* Don’t point the finger or assign blame.
* Don’t speak to the actions or conduct of other organizations or individuals outside of your organization.
* Don’t answer hypothetical questions. Stick to the messaging regarding the specific situation.
* Don’t promise resolution, as it may not be possible.
* Don’t try to “spin” an answer. It will unravel and could have greater negative consequences.
* Don’t provide more details than necessary.
* Inform the media of scheduled briefings and any changes to that schedule.
* Don’t respond to questions from reporters outside of formal, scheduled interviews.
* Don’t underestimate the power of public opinion.
* Don’t release the names or circumstances surrounding injuries or casualties.
* Don’t prioritize monetary damage over the well-being and safety of human lives.
* Don’t estimate the financial impact of any damage.
* Don’t have someone other than the spokesperson speak for the organization unless they have been approved and prepared by the crisis communications team.