



# **CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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## **OVERVIEW**

A crisis and a disaster are both bad for tourism, but they are very different. A disaster is an event that results in great damage, difficulty, or death. A crisis is a situation that has reached an extremely difficult or dangerous point...we need to be prepared for either difficult situation. Failure to properly handle a disaster can result in a crisis!

## **GOAL OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Have in place a response system that will enable the Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association (TA) to communicate tourism and business related information to the media and others in the event of natural disaster, accidents and other incidents that have the potential to negatively affect our destination and ensure we have the tools to get the crisis under control as quickly as possible to minimize the damage.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Establish guidelines and processes for successful communication during crisis situations
- Decide when the TA should get involved and only provide information appropriate to our organization and role
- Determine appropriate action(s) and work closely with other appropriate entities, specifically the PIO in charge of the incident
- Keep the media informed
- Provide “the facts” as they become available
- Prevent negative press, speculation and misinformation
- Ensure that all information provided to the public and the media is consistent and accurate with information being disseminated by the incident Public Information Officer (PIO) and local government PIO’s.
- Support PIO’s by providing access to businesses/organizations needed to help address the emergency.
- Support requests from PIO and local government in an emergency as needed and specifically through outreach to all levels of media

## **DEFINITIONS**

Distinguishing between issues, emergency situations and a crisis is important in nearly every situation. The key to effectively communicating in difficult situations is to be prepared before a crisis occurs. Once an emergency happens, there is little time to think, much less plan.

First, it's important to understand the unique differences in various situations.

### **What is an issue?**

An issue is any matter that is in dispute. Whenever there are two or more conflicting points of view on a subject, that subject becomes an issue. Issues do not have a specific starting or ending point. However, because they tend to develop over time, organizations can usually prepare for them.

Issues can be either active or dormant:

- **Active** issues are of continuous interest to the public. For example, the potential mining of Red Lady is an active issue.
- **Dormant** issues are those that repeatedly resurface after they have gone unnoticed for some period of time. An example of a dormant issue could be rate increases

### **What is an emergency situation?**

An emergency is a sudden, usually unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action and prompt communication. Emergencies typically involve accidents or incidents. Natural disasters, such as major storms or floods may also be considered emergencies. Emergencies usually have a well-defined starting point.

An emergency for tourism can range from a small-scale local incident to a large-scale national incident. Depending on the magnitude of the emergency and the level of media interest, an emergency may also escalate to a full-blown crisis.

### **What is a crisis?**

A crisis is an out-of-the ordinary event that typically occurs suddenly, often unexpectedly, and demands a quick response. A crisis interferes with normal routines and creates uncertainty and stress. A crisis can be an accident resulting in loss of life or severe injury, a natural event such as a major blizzard or flood, or it can be manmade, such as an explosion, scandal or conflict. Ultimately it can threaten the reputation of an organization and/or its top officials. In all instances, a crisis is a situation that creates a need for a clear, concise and immediate communications' response.

A crisis is the point at which public reaction to an issue or an emergency threatens to jeopardize or significantly damage the reputation of an area, town or organization. It represents a major turning point at which the magnitude of the situation escalates dramatically. It may be driven by factors such as:

- the number of casualties
- its similarity to other recent incidents
- the level of media interest

It is sometimes difficult to recognize when an issue or an emergency is escalating to crisis proportions. However, it is essential to actively monitor the situation for changes and gauge public reaction (including media attention) to the situation, and that you be alert for signs that a potential crisis is developing.

Here are examples of potential emergency situations that could turn into crises within our organizations.

- Weather disasters (floods, major blizzards, drought)
- Major power outages (affecting heating, electricity, sewage transfer, water)
- Wildfires
- Wildlife issues (whirling disease [fish], wasting disease [deer]; bear and mountain lion injuries/deaths, etc.)
- Homicides affecting visitors (e.g., criminal on the loose)
- Avalanches (snow, rock slides preventing access to recreation for visitors)
- Water contamination
- Public transportation (air and ground) issues affecting access by visitors and major accidents
- Public Health emergency
- Mass Casualty Incidents (aircraft, bus)

## PROCESS

1. Event/situation takes place.
2. TA staff and board will be on alert to notify each other about issues, emergencies and crisis situations.
3. TA Public Relations Director, Executive Director and Marketing Coordinator are notified immediately
  - Based on availability, PR Director takes lead; next in line Executive Director followed by Board President
4. Once identified, lead contact for Tourism Association liaises with the incident PIO and local government PIO's.
5. Designated TA staff will confer with incident PIO and TA Executive Committee to gather facts; review information and determine severity of the issue, emergency or potential crisis; and consider who and if anyone should be notified (local, state or national media); top community leaders.
6. Confer with incident PIO, local government officials/PIO's, Chamber of Commerce directors and board, CBMR, RTA director and board, and local business owners as determined appropriate by the PIO; determine outreach plan...email; phone call chain; door-to-door; visitor centers, etc.
7. Develop key message and action plan using defined resources, most important of which is an information brief from the incident PIO and/or local government PIO's. Determine course of action and direction.

### SUMMARIZING ANSWERS TO PRIMARY QUESTIONS:

What happened? (Stick to the facts, do not speculate) Answers to this question should be very generic/broad. Specific/detailed info should come only from the incident PIO.

When did the incident happen?

How are we handling the incident? (Important to show concern, empathy) Answers to this should relate only to the TA's activities regarding tourism/business issues.

8. Develop response messages in collaboration with local government and incident PIO's.
9. Alert local businesses and tourism related organizations, as needed, to direct all inquiries about the issue to the TA's PR Director for consistency of message to the public and media.
10. PR Director becomes the sole spokesperson and/or issuer of any "official statement" from a tourism perspective for the media on behalf of G-CBTA.
11. Monitor the media to determine how the story is being reported and take necessary action if needed.
12. Update information/respond regularly. Can use [www.gcbta.com](http://www.gcbta.com) as a tool to get information out quickly.
13. PR Director, when appropriate, will work with the various local spokespersons (mayors, city managers, county personnel, etc.), and the incident public information officer (PIO) to create a response and to interact with the media.

14. Utilize the TA Board of Directors where necessary to expedite specific actions.
15. Utilize media lists to communicate via email and phone to “key” media. Make sure that Internet reporters are included in contact as deemed necessary.
16. Contact the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) to cooperate in the event of statewide crisis also affecting Gunnison County (e.g., forest fires) and/or for support in a locally isolated incident.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS TIPS**

Working with the news media during a crisis will be one of the most challenging and important tasks to successfully managing public perception of the crisis. Many organizations make the mistake of treating the news media as an audience. *They are not.* The media is a conduit to providing information to our various audiences. That is why it is imperative that we shape and control our key messages.

- The most critical aspect of dealing with the media and the public in an emergency is the absolute necessity of accurate, consistent, and common information emanating from all information sources regarding the emergency. All public information officers (PIO’s), regardless of agency affiliation, must be giving out the same message.
- Execute our crisis communication plan as soon as possible. Activating the plan should begin immediately.
- Go public immediately, but only with what we know as confirmed facts and after going through the process outlined above.
- Know what we want to say and repeat it often. Set schedules for press conferences, and abide by them.
- Don’t wait until we have “something to tell the media.”
- If we don’t know, tell the media we don’t know and when we might have an answer.
- Be honest.
- Stick to the facts. Don’t guess or speculate.
- Be concise and direct.
- Be aware of nonverbal communication.
- Watch mannerisms; stay cool.
- Know the level of understanding of the reporter and their audience and speak to that.
- By acting quickly and doing immediately the things we will eventually have to do anyway, we can maximize our chances of staying ahead of events where we have some chance to influence the story.

## **EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**

- Timely – We cannot wait until the next day to communicate
- Concise – Information should be brief and to the point
- Consistent – The same key messages and general information should come from all sources
- Credible – Our message, our spokesperson and our reputation must be believable
- Accurate – Share only the information we are confident is true; never speculate; once inaccurate communication is in the public, it’s nearly impossible to completely correct the facts
- Reflective of our values – key messages/images related to our operation and our organization should be consistent whether it’s an ordinary day or in a time of crisis

## **COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF A CRISIS**

- **Surprise:** you don’t always know when a crisis will occur or what shape it will take; the principles of crisis communication will serve at any time.

- **Panic:** it is inevitable; the degree of panic is inversely proportional to the degree of preparation.
- **Rapid flow of events:** reaction time at the start is crucial; chaos results from poor planning and a lack of leadership.
- **Insufficient information:** this creates uncertainty but we must communicate. Early in a crisis, the media have neither the time to neither wait nor require a great deal of information; we will give them what firm information is available as quickly as possible and keep updating them.
- **Public and government involvement:** a crisis is always of concern to the public and to government; our communications plan assist in providing what they require..
- **Internal conflict and confusion:** can happen during a crisis; our level of preparation and cooperation during the crisis will determine if it stifles our efforts.
- **Intense press scrutiny:** the media thrives on a crisis – it’s hard news. Public opinion is formed by the media; we will perform well when we enhance our image by being prepared.
- **Negative:** crises are nearly always negative; they can cast shadows of doubt about the credibility of our organization in the eyes of the public ... we will be prepared for this.

## **PREPARING FOR AN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS SITUATION**

The best way to prevent a crisis is to prepare for one. Crisis management refers to the planning, preparation and training we will devote to emergency communications **before** a crisis occurs. It also refers to the quality of the ongoing dialogue with various internal and external audiences.

- We will develop a good working relationship with external crisis management personnel:
  - Town of Crested Butte, Town of Mt. Crested Butte, City of Gunnison, Gunnison County, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and National Forest Service
  - We will annually meet with crisis management contacts for the above mentioned crisis management personnel during the month of November
- TA Executive Director and PR Director will keep the TA Board of Directors in the loop about important matters and abreast of the latest status of any issues
- We have and will maintain an up-to-date local, state and national media contact lists including names, phone numbers and email addresses with “last revision date noted”
- We will notify on a yearly basis each local media contact to advise them of who our official spokesperson is and how to reach him/her
- Attend public information officer courses, and train with local government PIO’s.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Samples demonstrating crisis plan at work
- Tourism Association staff contact information; President contact information
- Local/regional, state, national media contact lists
- Crisis management contact information for the Town of Crested Butte, Town of Mt. Crested Butte, City of Gunnison, Gunnison County; Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and National Forest Service

# APPENDIX A

## SAMPLE WILDFIRE CRISIS

### OVERVIEW

The seriousness of a fire is measured in four stages as determined by the U.S. Forest Service. Stages are declared as the fire escalates. Here is a brief overview:

- Level IV – very small and local
  - Involves local resources only
  - Will likely make local but not regional news
- Level III – regional, multiple counties involved
- Level II – beyond county resources
- Level I – beyond state resources

As a fire moves through levels, operations are handed over to new teams. There is a standard operating procedure (Incident Command System) which allows for expansion/contraction and flexibility at each level in terms of control, decision-making, media management and resource allocation.

It is important to get involved when a fire is classified as a Level III.

### WHEN TO GET INVOLVED

- Level IV – very small and local
  - Maintain curiosity
  - May need to work with local press
  - No real need to engage in communications operations
- Level III – regional, multiple counties involved
  - Get involved in communications operations. Note, it is imperative to become involved at this stage. If you are not in early, you may not get in at all later, when it really matters the most.
  - Implement communication plan
- Level II – beyond county resources
  - Remain involved in communications operations
  - Continue working the communication plan
- Level I – beyond state resources
  - Remain involved in communications operations
  - Implement communication plan

### HOW INFORMATION IS DISSEMINATED FROM THE FIELD

It is important to create and maintain a relationship with the area PIOs. This relationship will help facilitate our role and ease in receiving information in a timely manner.

- Public information officer (PIO) drafts release
- The release is approved by commander in charge
- The release is sent to the Operations Center (OC) by either a runner or radio
- PIO disseminates the release

*Note of caution:* Don't always rely on or wait for information to come over the Internet. Oftentimes there is no way to transmit it electronically due to environmental conditions (smoke, weather, etc).

## **OUR ROLE**

- For level I – III fires work with local incident PIO to supply the following information to the news media and assist where needed and as directed by the PIO.

The role of the TA PIO should be limited to updating the media and public on the status of tourism related issues – are businesses open, are restrictions affecting public transportation, are key tourist attractions affected etc.

- Elements to consider when working with the PIO to draft message to media:
  1. How did the fire start
  2. What level of fire is it currently
  3. Area(s) of Gunnison County impacted
  4. Approximate acres affected
  5. What is being done
  6. When fire started and how
  7. Any challenges to fighting fire (weather conditions, terrain, access, etc.)
  8. Have any injuries or deaths occurred
  9. Are any homes or businesses are threatened
  10. Regular updates will be needed
- We also need to be prepared to release statements that Gunnison County is not being impacted by fires in surrounding counties or in the state. Or there may be cases where one area of Gunnison County is affected, but others are still open for tourism.
- Primary communication tools most likely will include:
  - Information brief from incident PIO and local government PIO's
  - Fact Sheet
  - Official Statement
  - News Release
  - Talking Points
  - Updates on [www.gcbta.com](http://www.gcbta.com)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **SAMPLE MAJOR POWER OUTAGE CRISIS**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The potential impact of an erupted gas line on tourism was demonstrated in January 2007, when a natural gas line erupted between Crested Butte South and Crested Butte. The eruption, repair and relighting of pilot lights by the power provider caused some homes and businesses to be without heat and operating gas stoves and fireplaces from Thursday – Sunday.

#### **WHEN TO GET INVOLVED**

- When there is a power outage that lasts more than 4 hours and may continue for an extended period of time, particularly in winter.
- When the outage impacts area hotels', restaurants' and other service providers' ability to provide a quality guest experience.

#### **OUR ROLE**

Be prepared to supply the following information to businesses serving tourists and possibly the news media, if the outage will impact tourists' decisions to visit. In some cases we may not want them to visit unless the problem is solved.

- Elements to consider when working with the PIO to draft message to the media:
  - How and when outage occurred
  - Area(s) of Gunnison County impacted
  - What is being done to fix the problem and when is power expected to be restored
  - Any challenges to repairs (e.g., weather conditions)
  - Have any injuries or deaths occurred
  - What should people be doing to stay warm
  - Where emergency shelters are located
  - Examples of businesses making the best of the situation for guests (e.g., using grills to cook, distributing free hand and feet warmers, businesses with power reaching out, movie theatre has power and is serving warm beverages, etc.)
  - Regular updates will be needed, mention where updates can be found
- We also need to be prepared to release statements that Gunnison County is not being impacted by major power outages in surrounding counties. Or there may be cases where one area of Gunnison County is affected, but others are still open for tourism.
- Primary communication tools most likely will include:
  - Information brief from incident PIO and local government PIO's
  - Fact Sheet to Update Media & Tourism Businesses
  - Official Statement
  - News Release
  - Talking Points
  - Updates on [www.gcbta.com](http://www.gcbta.com) (Note: In case of a long-term electricity outage, Internet communication will not be possible)

## TOURISM ASSOCIATION CONTACT INFORMATION

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