



**EDUCATIONAL
THEATRE
ASSOCIATION**

Crisis Communications Plan for Missouri State Thespians



**MISSOURI STATE
THESPIANSSM**

**AN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE
ASSOCIATION AFFILIATE**

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I. Prepare for the crisis before it occurs

What constitutes a crisis?

Incidents that have the potential to draw media attention require adept communication management. That is the purpose of a crisis communications plan: to help manage events of a crisis nature efficiently while staying in control.

Some possible crisis situations include:

- Fires
- Natural Disasters: including Tornadoes, Earthquakes, Blizzards, ect.
- Events which result in major injuries (whether or not taking place on-site at the event).
- Events which result in death (whether or not taking place on-site at the event). This includes accidents, murders, suicides
- Terrorist attacks
- Mass illness (i.e. Legionnaire's Disease, H7N9, H1N1)
- Incidents involving weapons
- Incidents involving alcohol/drugs
- Robberies
- Situations in which personnel (staff, teachers, Board), members, associates, or guests are accused of inappropriate/criminal activity.

Health Forms

- A. Health forms are required for all delegates (students, teachers, chaperones) and exhibitors, teaching artists, etc.; copies of the forms are to be on file for all delegates. The health form must be completed for each delegate. If a delegate (or their guardian) refuses to provide medical information, he/she must complete the section indicating a refusal to consent to treatment and include a directive as to how to handle a medical emergency involving them. All health forms must list at least 1 name for next of kin/who to contact in an emergency. **All delegates should carry a copy of their health form in their name wallet, without exception!**
- B. A list of phone numbers for all event staff and state chapter Board on-site at an event must be created prior to the event and distributed to all staff.
- C. Prior to the events, communication will be established with the host facility to confirm protocol for managing any crises that take place. In addition to inquiring into the plans for dealing with crises (notification of delegates that a problem exists, evacuation, etc.), inquiry should be made into the crisis communications plan for each facility.

II. What to do at the onset of a crisis

The most important thing to remember in a crisis is basic: don't panic. It is also vital to remember to make sure that you provide for your own safety.

A. On-site event staff should take the following action at the outset of a crisis:

1. Quickly ascertain the situation and its severity.
2. Initiate contact with the appropriate authorities. In order, this is:
 - Emergency services to bring help, if necessary.
 - The State Crisis Management Team.
 - The EdTA National Office staff.
 - Delegates attending a State Event

B. Who are the members of the State Crisis Management Team?

1. Jennifer Forrest-James
2. Debbie Corbin
3. Lara Corvera
4. Brad Rackers

The National Office staff shall be notified at the earliest possible opportunity. In the event that a crisis takes place at an event after-hours, the National should be notified immediately after the crisis occurs.

C. Who makes decisions for the Association in a crisis situation?

If a crisis arises at a state event, the State Chapter Director makes all decisions. If s/he is unable, the primary back-up will be the event director. In the absence of either, the third in command will make all decisions.

D. Notification of next of kin of any event delegates/staff who are directly involved in crisis

As soon as the nature of the crisis has been established and those who have been directly affected by it have been identified and their conditions are known, their next of kin should be contacted as quickly as possible. No confirmation of names or conditions should be shared outside of the State Crisis Management Team until next of kin have been notified and a decision is made about how and when to share the information with the public.

Next of kin will be notified in the following manner:

1. If the parent of the delegate is at the event, the State Crisis Management Team will find and notify the parent
2. If a delegate is ill/injured and in the hospital: medical personnel will notify the next of kin
3. In the event that a delegate is killed: the coroner or medical/safety personnel will notify the next of kin

E. Lock Down Procedures

In the event a conference event requires a lock down action the following steps are established to ensure the safety of our delegation.

- 1) All adults must subscribe to Remind (a text system that allows us to push out texts in real time) to get a text telling what level of Lock Down we will have
- 2) Level 1 - Threat in the area. Stay put in room or get into a conference building asap
- 3) Level 2 - Immediate threat on campus. Move to a safe area and check in with conference adult. If in a safe area close door and stay put. Text sponsor to check in so they know where they are and if they are safe. If it's not safe (in room where you are) follow the instructions of an adult in charge (move to safe spot, barcade door, whatever is necessary to survive).
- 4) At conclusion of event all sponsors need to account for all their delegates (personal contact) within 30 minutes and contact our emergency line to tell us the status of your troupe. They are also responsible to notify their administration (MST will as well but should come first from troupes/schools). Have delegates let guardians know they are safe.
- 5) Do not talk to media. Crisis team will handle if necessary.

III. Managing the crisis: Investigation

In the event of a crisis in which an investigation is required, the first thing to be ascertained is whether the investigation requires police/emergency services or whether it is an internal matter for EdTA. EdTA staff/Board members/members must NOT conduct their own investigation, but rather work with police officials, as instructed. MST will communicate with EdTA any documentation that is transpiring in the investigation, as much as possible. MST/EdTA will also follow the host facility guidelines.

No other event staff/state chapter board members will be permitted to have contact with police investigators, unless instructed otherwise by the Crisis Management Team and/or the police investigators themselves.

Communication with authorities is limited to the Crisis Communication Team and those people they designate. Should a situation require investigation by authorities, do not conduct your own investigation.

IV. Managing the crisis: Communications

All communications regarding a crisis will be managed by State Crisis Management Team.

*****ONLY the designated spokesperson for the state chapter will interact with the media in a press conference or interview situation, unless the State Crisis Management Team determines otherwise. No other staff member, Board member, or chapter member may interact with the media.* More than one person speaking for EdTA means the chance for misinformation to be communicated. All information shared with the media will be carefully vetted by the State Crisis Management Team.

Note: In a crisis which generates attention and brings media to the crisis site, it will be announced to all delegates, especially those who may have been directly involved in the crisis, that they are not obligated to speak to the media (in fact, it is preferable if they do not). However, we can't absolutely prevent someone who wishes to speak from doing so. Delegates should be encouraged to refer media to appropriate personnel.

A. After all of the facts have been gathered, if a statement is required:

- One person (Chapter Director or event director) shall be the spokesperson.
- Talk to no one outside the State Crisis Management Team, unless instructed by the team to do so.

B. The objectives:

- a. **Don't convey wrong or misleading information.** This is especially important in the hours immediately after the onset of crisis, when information may still be incomplete, stress is high, and concerned members (and their families) may be frantically looking for information.
2. **When dealing with our own members, who may feel as though they are entitled to "inside" information, reiterate that information on the situation will be released as soon as possible.** The State Crisis Management Team will determine how and when to communicate information to members who are not directly affected by the crisis.
3. **Don't perpetuate panic.** Remaining calm and composed in a crisis situation is of utmost importance, not only to ensure that the crisis is properly managed, but also to reassure the public that the situation is manageable.
4. **Do manage perception.** The most important thing that needs to be conveyed during a crisis is that the situation is under control and being managed by the appropriate authorities.

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5. **Do not discuss the situation outside of the “walls” of the State Chapter.** No member of the Chapter, event, or others “in the know” about a crisis shall discuss the crisis with family or friends, unless instructed that they may do so. **Communications are coordinated exclusively through the State Crisis Management Team.**

C. Communication of crisis situations involving personnel employed by other organizations

It is possible to have a crisis involving individuals outside of the State Chapter that can still impact the organization. The most likely scenario would be an State Board Member or EdTA member being involved in inappropriate and/or criminal activity.

Any wrongdoing occurring on the job is considered a personnel matter for the individual’s employer, thus comment on the situation is solely at the discretion of the employer. However, that individual’s wrongdoing on the job may be scrutinized in connection to their association with EdTA or the state. (Example: a troupe director accused of criminal activity while on the job.)

In the event that someone associated with the state, is accused of a crime and/or impropriety, the following protocol shall be followed:

1. The nature of the accusation shall be shared with the State Crisis Management Team.
2. The State Crisis Management Team shall determine whether a statement is needed from the state on the situation, if it only impacts the state.
3. If the individual is accused of wrongdoing by their employer, or the situation in question involves the person’s employer or while performing their job, the state must **not** make any statements as it pertains to the personnel matter.
4. If an individual’s wrongdoing has implications for the state or EdTA (example: a troupe director whose actions lead to harm of the Thespians in their troupe), communications on the situation should be coordinated with the individual’s employer (the school for whom they work and in which the troupe exists). Thespian troupes belong to the school; therefore, wrongdoing by a troupe director shall be immediately addressed by the school employing them.
5. Notification will be made to parents/guardians based upon advice from legal counsel and the nature of the situation and in conjunction with the school.

***Because of the wide-range of criminal activity that could be possible, these situations shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with the nature of the crisis communications determined at the time that the situation is evaluated.

VI. General: Preparing to address the public and the media (from <http://www3.niu.edu/newsplace/crisis>)

Media Interviews

- DO NOT SPEAK “Off the record.”
- Prepare "talking paper" on primary points you want to make.
- Anticipate questions--prepare responses.
- Cover controversial areas ahead of time.
- Determine how much time is available.
- Audiences often remember impressions, not facts.

VII. Post Crisis

It is important that the Crisis Management Team holds a post-crisis meeting to discuss what worked, what didn’t, and ways to improve the process for the future.