The Six Stages of a Crisis
Stage Three: Response

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COMMUNICATION DURING A CRISIS

Executive Summary

In a crisis, the response stage begins when an incident occurs and the reaction to the emergency begins. At this time, the emergency response plan is activated, and crisis team members call first responders into action and notify potentially affected contacts about the incident. Response stage crisis communication includes alerting first responders, those in harm's way, and other key constituents.

The Facts in Brief

A crisis is an unexpected event that disrupts normal operations and has the potential to create significant financial, security, safety and reputational harm. Depending on the nature and severity of a crisis, it can present complex threats and risks, as well as endanger the safety and well-being of people. Every stage of the crisis dictates the audience's requirements, including the need for information, and the response of the agency providing the warning.

There are six identified phases within every crisis: (1) Warning; (2) Risk Assessment; (3) Response; (4) Management; (5) Resolution; and (6) Recovery. This is the third of six topic briefings that will explore each stage of a crisis, identify specific areas of concern, and provide manageable solutions.

Response is the third stage of a crisis. In this stage, the emergency response plan is activated, first responders are called into action, and the public is notified about the incident. The response phase requires communication to initiate the actions that are taken during and immediately following a disaster.

During the response stage, emphasis is placed on fast, effective action, containing the incident, gaining control, protecting people and property, and minimizing the effects of the emergency. All communication that requires immediate response occurs at this time. Effective communication can also facilitate coordination efforts between local, county, state, and federal agencies.

In the response stage, the type and extent of notification is determined by the scope, size, and type of emergency. In some circumstances, one of the most important notices that is disseminated is a "declaration of an emergency" or "activate the emergency response plan."

Types of response stage notifications can include:

+ Safety warnings, emergency information, and action instructions
+ Information requests to survey and evaluate a crisis
+ Directions for first responders and reactive steps
+ Instructions to position personnel and equipment for crisis response
+ Alert and activation of an Emergency Operations Center
+ Reminders of established guidelines
+ Evacuation or shelter-in-place instructions

If an emergency occurs without a warning phase, activate the response as rapidly as conditions permit. Instructions must reach and be understood by all audiences. Evacuations will need to be conducted, rescue operations will be required, and/or emergency information and instructions will be issued.

Emergency notification should include communication with the crisis team, first responders, people at risk, key personnel and executives, local law enforcement and other responding agencies, and applicable audiences, including citizens, students, and employees. Focus of the notifications should be geared toward making contacts aware of the incident, providing instructions, and seeking confirmation of a response.

There are several emergency notification factors to consider:

Understand that events can change rapidly, and information may not be accurate	Incoming information about the event need to be taken in context, with particular consideration given to potential for inaccuracy and misinterpretation (receiver orientation) issues, psychological interference (noise), and people and technology breakdowns.
Know the best ways to communicate	Communicate decisively, quickly, calmly, directly, exhibiting a richer vs. leaner mentality, avoiding redundancy, and displaying command, control, and coordination.
Know what to communicate	Focus on power-wording, and delivering concise, precise, literal, behavioral directions and meta-messages.
Understand meta-messages	Meta-messages (literally messages about messages) should include all of the "implied" levels of meanings or interpretations.

After the initial series of messages during the response stage, there is a transition to ongoing management of the emergency rather than immediate response.

Key Recommendations

1. **Activate the EOC:** Position personnel and equipment for effective crisis response. Alert and activate the Emergency Operations Center and reinforce established guidelines.

2. **Disseminate warnings:** Notify first responders that an incident has occurred. Coordinate emergency operations personnel to minimize the impact of the crisis on people and property.

3. **Alert the public:** Inform employees, constituents, or the public about the incident. Issue instructions for evacuation, sheltering in place, or other behavioral responses.

4. **Provide updates on current events:** Keep all stakeholders informed throughout the lifecycle of a crisis. Send updates as changes in the emergency situation occur.

About Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D.

Dr. Robert C. Chandler, (Ph.D., University of Kansas; M.A., Wake Forest University; B.A., Harding College) is Professor of Communication and Director of the Nicholson School of Communication (NSC) at the University of Central Florida (UCF).

Dr. Chandler's research spans the range of crisis communication, leadership, teamwork, decision making, psychometric variables during crises, and emergency communication, including specific areas of crisis and incident notification, warning messages, cognitive processing, and message comprehension. He also investigates organizational communication, communication and conflict, risk communication, multicultural and intercultural communication issues, and business ethics. He is the creator of several widely-used planning models for crisis and emergency communication preparedness, including: (1) Communication Planning for the Six Stages of Crisis, (2) the 3-3-30© principle for incident notification, and (3) Message Mapping: The Chandler Model.

Dr. Chandler is an internationally recognized social scientific researcher with more than 150 academic and professional papers, including widely-circulated "white papers" on emergency and crisis communication. He has authored more than 75 academic and professional publications, and is the author or co-author of eight books including: Emergency Notification (2010); Surviving the Pandemic: A Communication Management Guide for Business (2009); Media Relations (2008); Disaster Recovery and the News Media (2007); Managing the Risks for Corporate Integrity: How to Survive an Ethical Misconduct Disaster (2006); Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Priorities for the Coming Outbreak (2005); and Crisis and Emergency Communication (2006).

About Everbridge

Everbridge provides industry-leading interactive communication and mass notification solutions to organizations in all major industries and government sectors.

Communication failures have historically plagued organizations in their ability to respond to and minimize the human, operational and financial impact of critical events and emergency incidents. Everbridge began with a shared vision: empowering a single person to communicate with any number of people as easily as communicating with one person to save lives, protect assets, minimize loss, and ensure continuity of operations. Everbridge brings technology and expertise together at every level for a complete solution. Everbridge solutions match your unique needs, from safety and survival during a crisis to cutting costs and achieving efficiencies in your everyday operations. Our understanding of mass notification and interactive communication challenges is leveraged in everything we do, from how we build our technology from the ground up to the expertise of the people we hire and best practices we share with the community.

We design the Everbridge system according to several key tenets:

- **Target the individual** – not the device. Everbridge has the most comprehensive notification system available, offering more than 30 contact paths that can be designated by incident type or by escalation steps.

- **Ease-of-use during any situation** – emergency or daily use – so even a non-technical person can communicate effortlessly and without anxiety.

- **Speed and reliability of communications.** Every second counts in an emergency. With global datacenters and an infrastructure unparalleled in security and reliability, the Everbridge mass notification system is designed for rapid and efficient communications worldwide so your message will always go through.

- **Universal accessibility** – with a fully managed system requiring no hardware, no software, no maintenance, and a flexible pay-as-you-grow model, organizations large and small have access to the same powerful communication capabilities.

- **Scalability** – the Everbridge mass notification system provides the ultimate flexibility in communication capabilities to meet changing needs in today's dynamic environment. The Everbridge system is inherently scalable to grow with and adjust to the requirements of any organization quickly and without disruption to internal processes, infrastructure, or resources.

Visit www.everbridge.com to learn more.