



CRISIS MANAGEMENT

EVENT ORGANIZER RESOURCES

An important aspect of event management is crisis management. Many of the principles are similar to risk assessment with a large emphasis on pre-event planning. One should not only plan for preventing a crisis, but also what to do in the midst of and after a crisis. It is important to consider that a crisis at an event may be something as “ordinary” as weather conditions, or as out of the ordinary as a crowd security issue.

Merriam Webster defines crisis as “an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; especially: one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome”. To be added, is an unexpected disruption of normal course of events.

To start, create a crisis management committee or team to help with the planning, activation and review of the crisis management plan. This is the group that will pre-determine what actions to perform if a certain incident takes place and may be the individuals implementing those actions. If this group is performing event day tasks, they should be people who feel comfortable performing duties in an emergency situation that is both stressful and time critical. Some people do not handle a crisis well. If someone feels uncomfortable, don't make them a part of the crisis management committee.

Since there are many types of incidents that can occur at an event – with participants, spectators, volunteers, officials, vehicles, medical, etc. – the crisis management team should outline the incidents that can turn into a crisis. Examples such as medical, natural disaster, severe weather, and traffic issues can cause major problems that disrupt the normal proceeding of the event. After you complete the risk assessment, you can determine which risks will need a crisis plan.

With the list of likely events that could have a large impact on the incident, you should consider who will handle these emergencies. Staff responsibilities should be outlined and processes documented. Sample responsibilities may be who is notified, who to communicate with if at all, and/or what duties to perform. Once these are determined, a phone tree with contacts should be given to all staff along with a process document. This gives staff time before the event to learn what their responsibilities are, and cuts down on error and time spent responding. A crisis can occur because there is a lack of information or not enough time or resources to handle an emergency. For instance, if you didn't consider heat and humidity into your medical plan you could have a large number of athletes with medical needs and no medical staff or supplies to respond leaving the event open to liability and criticism. Mapping out responsibilities isn't limited to staff members, but should be known for outside personnel, such as medical, security, police, and any other outside personnel who are responsible for responding.

Each role in the process should have a breakdown of tasks for each type of incident, so each member of the response team understands where they fit in the plan. If a staff member has



CRISIS MANAGEMENT

EVENT ORGANIZER RESOURCES

no role, make it clear that they have no role. This could even be a contingency plan for some individuals who are not directly dealing with the incident. As an example, if a tractor trailer spills hazardous material on the course 20 miles from the start, the course director or other appropriate staff will have to determine whether there is a course change or if it can be cleaned up by the time the riders are supposed to arrive.

The assessment, phone tree, staff responsibilities, and inventories should be mapped out in a pre-meeting with staff and the managers of external personnel. Allow enough time between this meeting and the event to ensure that any changes can be fully dealt with prior to event day. This also gives enough time to have a pre-crisis training with staff when the plan is finalized.

A communication plan is as important as the action plan in crisis management. How effective the communication plan is, makes a difference in whether the crisis will negatively, positively, or neutrally affect the event or company producing the event. The communication plan is both an external and internal communication plan that is catered to each specific group. Various stakeholders and media will need to be communicated with, during, and after a crisis. Staff and external personnel should know who is responsible to talk to each stakeholder group. Staff should especially know if they are not to speak to the media, family, spectators, etc. The message coming out of a crisis should be consistent.

To have a consistent message, one person should be responsible for speaking to the media. Everyone on staff should know who this person is so they can direct any inquiries to the right person. This ensures that one message is being given out. It is important to train and have the spokesman practice dealing with questions from the media. The message should be pre-planned and short. If the spokesperson doesn't know an answer, it is best for them to say they don't know and will try to find out.

Written material will ensure accuracy and be limited to the facts and be short and concise. These materials can be catered to different stakeholders, such as the media, spectators, and family. Consider how the communication will be given – phone, person, social media, email, etc. —and if someone will be speaking at the venue where the best place to do this is.

In a crisis, staff should know who is responsible for giving them information and how they will receive the information. This will cut down on questions being asked to those with duties during the crisis. You want to keep them from having the added responsibility of answering questions.

All personnel should also know what the plan is for stopping a race. Many staff, volunteers, officials, announcers, and potentially medical staff will have a hand in stopping an event. Define who will do what, how they will know when to do it, and how to determine when to



CRISIS MANAGEMENT

EVENT ORGANIZER RESOURCES

resume racing. For example if a downhill racer crashes, who will determine if a course hold is needed, who do they relay that information to, who do they contact if the rider is injured. Including the announcer and communications staff in this communication loop is important so they are giving out correct information to riders and spectators.

If the crisis results in serious injury, a plan should be made as to who will communicate with the injured or their family. Showing an injured person or their family that you have concern for them may reduce their feelings of anger and wish for retribution. Someone who is a people person should handle this position.

After a crisis, a communication plan should be mapped out for external and internal stakeholders. It is important to give an injured person any information needed for the USA Cycling rider accident policy. You can direct them to the USA Cycling insurance webpage and you must turn in an occurrence report to USA Cycling as soon as possible after the event along with the signed waiver.

After the crisis is handled, it is time to review what happened, how it happened, what actions were taken, were they successful, whether they could be tweaked, etc. This is a great time to update and improve your crisis plan. A review with external personnel should be undertaken as well.