

# 2022 FEMSA Conference

## You've messed up, Now What?



# What You Might Face

- **PFAS/PFOS/PFOA CONTAMINATION FROM FIREFIGHTER FOAM**
- **TURNOUT GEAR/PUMP/EQUIPMENT FAILURE**
- **DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT**
- **CHEMICAL SPILL**
- **FIREFIGHTER OR MEDIC INJURED**
- **EMPLOYEE LAYOFFS**
- **CITIZEN LITIGATION**
- **CUSTOMER/CITY COMPLAINT**
- **EXPLOSION**



# Crisis vs. Issue

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## Crisis

- Unexpected and unpredictable
- Victims
- Require response in moment
- Explosive, unplanned visibility

## Issue

- Known or planned
- You can see it coming
- Normal executive activity
- More control of outcome

# What's in a Crisis Communications Plan

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1. Clear guidelines.
2. Clear delineation of who is speaking.
3. Lists of critical stakeholders and databases with their contact information.
4. Pre-Approved messages for stakeholders and social media.
5. Plan for your website.
6. Instructions and passwords for your official social media sites.

# Developing a Crisis Communications Plan

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## 1. Vulnerability Audit

- ☐ What keeps you up at night?
- ☐ How likely is that to occur?
- ☐ What is hit on reputation?
- ☐ Identify top crisis scenarios.

## 2. Then write the plan.

- ☐ Messages
- ☐ Press release
- ☐ First tweet/facebook post
- ☐ Contact info for crisis team and press
- ☐ Who is going to speak and have they been media trained?

# Case Study

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## PFAS in the City of Blissville

City of Blissville found PFAS in ground water near its production wells. We helped the city conceive and execute a communications program for its water department, which serves more than 400,000 people. Source of PFAS was nearby Fire Training Center who was not being particularly cooperative.

# Crisis Communications Strategy

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**Who** is going to say it?

**What** is City going to say?

**When** is the City going to say it? **Proactive or Reactive?**

✓ **Proactive, Vindicator**

✓ **Reactive, VILLIAN**

**Whom** will the City say it to? Identified all key stakeholders.

**How** is City going to say it? What tools were we going to use?

## Define Your Objectives

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1. Reinforce City's history of protecting the water that serves the community, its role as a champion for the environment and an advocate for public health.
2. Demonstrate City's responsiveness, even though it did not create the problem.
3. Put the issue into context for the residents.
4. Education. Education. Education.
5. Ensure the City was the trusted source of information.



## Suite of Documents

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>A</b> | <b>City of Blissville Cease and Desist Email/Letter to Fire Training Ctr</b> |
| <b>B</b> | <b>Informational Email to Communities that use Blissville water</b>          |
| <b>C</b> | <b>Call-to-Action Email to Community Leaders</b>                             |
| <b>D</b> | <b>Press Release</b>   |
| <b>E</b> | <b>City of Blissville Water Customer Email</b>                               |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Talking Points for Public Officials</b>                                   |
| <b>G</b> | <b>City of Blissville Employee Email</b>                                     |
| <b>H</b> | <b>Talking Points for City Employees</b>                                     |
| <b>I</b> | <b>Master Q&amp;A</b>  |
| <b>J</b> | <b>Fact Sheet on PFAS</b>  |
| <b>K</b> | <b>Blissville Email to State Representatives</b>                             |
| <b>L</b> | <b>Talking points for sit down with reporter</b>                             |

| WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1 |   |  |  |                             |
|----------------------|---|--|--|-----------------------------|
| TIME                 | AUDIENCE  | METHOD   | DOCUMENT<br>(SEE KEY BELOW)  | WHO DISTRIBUTES?            |
| afternoon            | Fire Training Center CEO  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A</li> </ul>  | City Manager                |
| 4:00 P.M.            | Blissville Daily News   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-person meeting</li> <li>Embargoed until next day at 2:00 PM</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D</li> <li>A</li> <li>J</li> </ul>  | City Manager/Water Director |
| THURSDAY, JANUARY 2  |   |  |  |                             |
| TIME                 | AUDIENCE  | METHOD   | DOCUMENT<br>(SEE KEY BELOW)  | WHO DISTRIBUTES?            |
| 8:00 A.M.            | All City of Blissville employees  | Email  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>H</li> <li>G (attach to email)</li> </ul>   | City Manager                |
| 8:30 A.M.            | Local government officials of surrounding cities and counties, who buy their water from Blissville  | Email  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B (attach to email)</li> <li>C (attach to email)</li> <li>K</li> </ul>                                    | City Manager                |
| 9:00 A.M.            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal and state government representatives</li> <li>Blissville officials, relevant boards and commissions</li> <li>The Source Water Protection Group and related groups, as appropriate</li> <li>City, county and state health departments, other appropriate regulatory agencies</li> </ul> | Email<br><br>Follow-up phone calls, as appropriate   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L</li> <li>A (attach to email)</li> <li>D (attach to email)</li> <li>I (use to prep for calls)</li> </ul> | City Manager/Mayor          |
| 11:00 A.M.           | Consumers /Residents  | Email  | E  | Director Water              |
| 2:00 PM              | Media   | Email  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D</li> <li>F (attach to email)</li> <li>J (attach to email)</li> </ul>                                    | Public Affairs              |
| 2:15 PM              | City Web & Social Media Sites   | Post   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D</li> <li>J</li> </ul>   | Public Affairs              |

# Guiding Principles

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- Be proactive
- Put the story in context
- Be transparent and responsive
- Reinforce appropriate framing through tone
- Humanize your communication
- Craft all communications with the understanding that they will be forwarded to the media
- Use outside resources/3<sup>rd</sup> party verification

# You Got Caught, Now What?

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## If You #&%\$ UP.....

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### FESS UP

- Tell the truth, tell it all, tell it first
- Show remorse
- Apologize with candor
- **Do NOT use weasel words:** “Well, I’m sorry people were offended.” “Well, I’m sorry people feel that way.”
- Be transparent
- Take and Answer Questions

### FIX UP

- Words + Action
- Commitment to change
- Pledge to find out what went wrong
- Promise to fix it
- Vow to better reflect of organization’s values
- Be sincere

# Control Tools

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- 1. Messages**
- 2. Questions**
- 3. Answers**
- 4. Bridging Statements**
- 5. Examples/Supporting Facts**

# Don't Let This Happen to You

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## Crisis Management Today Newsletter

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Twice a month, best practices for crisis managers.

→ To subscribe, send your email address to  
[york@crisiscommunications.com](mailto:york@crisiscommunications.com)

