IAAPA’s Quick Guide: Crisis Communications

Tips for Dealing with the Media
- **Stay calm. Take a deep breath.**
- Keep in mind, the media will learn of an incident within minutes.
- Speed, accuracy, and credibility are essential to an effective response.
- Gather all the facts and stick with them.
- Don't be afraid to say “I don't know.” Take notes and follow up later.
- Show compassion, particularly if human life has been impacted.
- Realize you are always “on the record.”
- Correct mistakes in news reporting as soon as you learn of them.
- Don’t forget to monitor social media outlets for factual errors.
- Always tell the truth.

Initial Holding Statement
The holding statement is designed to help control the message the public will hear immediately following an incident. It is the one opportunity you have to shape the message — don’t miss it by not being prepared. Provide the media with a non-emotional, fact-based response. Establishing the initial interaction with the media will also allow your organization time to investigate the incident and gather additional information before the next communication. The media will look for information and the holding statement helps position your organization as their primary source of that information. Here are a few tips for drafting a holding statement:

1. Keep your statement short and simple.
2. Generically confirm that an incident has occurred, but do not offer any details. This should be no more than one sentence in length and should not provide any specific information: “We understand that X has occurred.”
3. Explain your priorities and the action you are taking at that point in time: “We are currently attending to the needs of the guests and families involved.”
4. Explain that the appropriate authorities are involved and you are working with them: “The _____ department has arrived at the park to assist us with this event.”
5. Provide generic background information related to the incident: “X ride opened in _____ (year). X ride does ______ (flips, spins, etc.). X million guests have safely ridden this attraction since it opened in _____ (year).” “The zoo has safely welcomed X guests to date and we have never had something like this occur.”
6. Reassure the public of your top priority: “The safety of our guests is our number one priority.”
7. Assure the media you will continue to keep them updated as more information becomes available, and identify when and where the next briefing will be: “We will provide additional information at our next briefing at _____ (time) at the _____ (location).”

Social Media
Remember your most loyal customers, fans, and members of the media, will naturally look to your social media outlets for information. It is important to either post your official statement directly to your blog, Facebook, and Twitter sites or provide links to the information.

Line Employee Statement
Employees of your organization should be equipped at all times with a statement they can refer to if approached by a member of the media in the event an incident occurs at your facility. Employees should expressly know **NOT** to speak to the media and should direct any inquiries to the public relations department or person on your staff trained to respond to the press. “Thank you for your question. I am not a designated spokesperson for the company. Please go to (or call) _____ and someone there can help you.” This will help you maintain consistent, accurate messaging throughout the event.
Tips for Subsequent Statements
As your organization collects specific information about the incident (number of people injured, where the incident occurred, why it happened, etc.) you should provide additional updates to the media. Remember to highlight your safety record in all statements.

- “Safety is our top priority. Over X million guests have safely ridden this ride.”
- “We are saddened by the loss of life/injuries and are doing everything we can to help those involved.”
- “Our thoughts are with him/her/them and his/her/their family(ies).”
- “What we know so far is... (give out basic facts only).”
- “We are currently working with (name the appropriate local authorities) to review exactly what happened.” (avoid using “investigate”)
- “Our policy is to assist the news media to the fullest extent. However, we are unable to grant the media access to the area at this time.”
- “We will continue to provide additional information as it becomes available.”

When Preparing Statements for the Media – DO:
- Identify one to three company spokesperson(s) who are trained to talk to the press. The on-call spokesperson should always be within 30 minutes of the facility. Only those trained individuals should speak to the press.
- Communicate the actions you are taking to resolve the situation and take care of those involved. Remember to include social media in your plan.
- Confirm that all spokespersons know your organization’s talking points (from statement outlined above) and stick to those messages.
- Have a generic backdrop picked out in advance of any press conference at your facility. Be sure there are no logos, attractions, exhibits, animals, games, or other facility signage in the background.
- Reduce drama by removing emotional and colorful words from your statements.
- Verify that someone is taking good care of the victims and their families.
- Include only the facts you can verify with 100 percent certainty in your statements.
- Coordinate your official statement with local public information officers (PIOs) for any government agencies involved with the incident.
- Monitor media coverage, including social media outlets.
- Correct errors immediately in press coverage.
- Think about the long-term implications of what you are saying.
- Take care of yourself and the other members of the team. Food (light, simple), drinking water, and rest are important, especially if an incident response continues for several days.
- Develop and maintain fact sheets on your company and your attractions/exhibits. They can be used to provide critical background information at the time of an incident. (Keep a spare set in a safe, off-site location in case your primary office is not accessible.)
- Develop strong working relationships with the press throughout the year. It will pay off in a crisis.
- If possible, have your legal counsel review statements before they are issued.
- Contact IAAPA to inform them the incident occurred. Request assistance if needed.

When Preparing Statements for the Media - DON’T:
- Don’t release names of people involved. Leave that to local authorities.
- Don’t speculate. Stick to the facts.
- Don’t paint word pictures (avoid using vivid words such as victim, tragic, scene, gruesome, or awful).
- Don’t provide a timeline of the incident with too many specifics. This will create the beginning of a dramatic story. It is okay to include the approximate time the incident occurred.
- Don’t use industry jargon.

Feel free to contact the IAAPA Communications team for assistance:
24-Hour Hotline (Member and Press): +1 703/299-5127
IAAPA members can call this number at any time for communications advice or assistance. Also, feel free to share this number with members of the media who need industry information.

www.IAAPA.org/pressroom is a great resource for industry information, including ride safety information.

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