



Issue and Crisis Management

Guidelines

Objective:

At the heart of an effective issue/crisis management plan is preparation and coordination to deliver information swiftly, professionally and consistently. Preventing issues from escalating into crises demands a proactive approach designed to shape public opinion, defuse flashpoints, and counter any actual or potentially negative, misleading or misinformed word-of-mouth and/or media coverage.

1. Follow these communication guidelines for enhancing public perception.

- ◆ Take the initiative in providing information.
- ◆ Make sure your information is honest, accurate and comprehensive.
- ◆ Speak with one consistent voice.
- ◆ Anticipate questions and concerns and address them proactively.
- ◆ Be positive and forthcoming.
- ◆ Keep your audiences up to date as new information becomes available.

2. Form an issue/crisis management task force in advance.

- ◆ Assemble a team with technical, advocacy and communications expertise. Draw from internal resources as well as professionals and leaders in the community. Designate a single spokesperson to make announcements, respond to questions and conduct interviews. Doing so is critical to ensuring the accuracy and consistency of public information.

3. Create a contact list.

- ◆ Having names, phone numbers, fax numbers and email addresses at your fingertips is vital, especially when a quick response is necessary. Create a contact list and update it regularly. It should include task force members as well as fact-finding and communications contacts, including:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ◆ School Superintendent | ◆ State Department of Education |
| ◆ School Board Members | ◆ State Department of Health |
| ◆ Civic Leaders | ◆ State Drinking Water Program |
| ◆ Local Public Health Officials | ◆ EPA Regional Office |
| ◆ Head of Building | ◆ Utility/Water Supplier |
| Maintenance/Custodial | ◆ Media (Newspaper, TV, Radio, Web |
| Services | and Newswire Outlets) |

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4. Define what constitutes an issue or crisis.

- 💧 **Issue:** A situation or specific event that has the potential to undermine credibility and positive public perception.

- 💧 **Crisis:** An event or series of events that directly damage your facility's reputation by demonstrating or implying a failure to ensure public safety.

5. Identify your target audiences for ongoing issue/crisis communication.

💧 **Internal:**

- 💧 Teachers
- 💧 Administrative Staff
- 💧 Custodial Staff

💧 **External:**

- 💧 Students and Parents
- 💧 Media
- 💧 Local Health Community
- 💧 Local Drinking Water Community
- 💧 Local Environmental Community
- 💧 Local Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

6. Launch an ongoing campaign of education and awareness, capitalizing on a variety of communication vehicles.

- 💧 Press Releases (media)
- 💧 Follow-up Letters and Flyers (parents)
- 💧 Paycheck Stuffers (school or child care employees)
- 💧 Newsletter (parents and staff)
- 💧 Newsletter Articles (for advocacy groups, parent-teacher organizations, chambers of commerce, service clubs and other stakeholders)
- 💧 Postcard-style Information Updates (parents)
- 💧 Workshop/Open House (parents and community at large)
- 💧 Presentations (before a variety of local civic and community groups)

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7. Prepare a fact sheet so that your task force spokesperson has accurate, up-to-date information about the status of your plumbing system and water source. Information should include answers to the following questions:

- 💧 When was the building constructed?
- 💧 Since then, have any new buildings or additions been constructed?
- 💧 If built after 1986, were lead-free plumbing and solder used in accordance with the requirements of the 1986 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments?
- 💧 What are the potable water pipes made of in your facility? Does your facility contain components that may leach lead?
- 💧 Has your school or child care center checked the brands and models of water coolers to see if they are on EPA's list of banned coolers with lead-lined tanks?
- 💧 Has water quality testing been conducted at your facility? Were samples tested for lead, and if so, what concentrations of lead were found?
- 💧 Is water tested regularly for lead at your facility?
- 💧 Who supplies your facility's drinking water?
- 💧 According to information provided by your public water supplier:
 - 💧 Is the water system in compliance with federal and state standards for lead?
 - 💧 What is the latest 90th percentile lead level for the public water system?
 - 💧 Does the utility collect samples from your facility?
 - 💧 Is a corrosion control chemical being used? Does the system have results to show the effectiveness of the control measures? If so, what are they?
 - 💧 Does the water distribution system have any lead piping? If so, does the public water system plan to remove these sources of lead?
 - 💧 Will your water system provide assistance to support your efforts to minimize exposure to lead in your facility's drinking water?

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- ◆ If potential problem areas have been identified and a sampling plan is being developed, provide answers to the following questions:
 - ◆ Who is heading up your sampling effort?
 - ◆ Who will collect and analyze samples and maintain records?
 - ◆ Where will the samples be collected?

- ◆ If sampling has just been completed, have answers to these questions:
 - ◆ What were the results?
 - ◆ Did lead levels exceed the EPA level of concern of 20 ppb? If so, at which drinking water outlets?
 - ◆ What is being done on an immediate, short-term and permanent basis to address any identified problems?
 - ◆ How are sampling results being made available to the public, including parents, teachers and other staff members, the media, and relevant parent, teacher, student and employee organizations?
 - ◆ If concerned, how and where can individuals be tested for blood lead levels?