Creating and implementing an EMERGENCY CRISIS PLAN

CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A GOOD EMERGENCY CRISIS PLAN may save you from huge financial losses when an accident or an incident occurs at your facility and litigation is filed against you.

A serious accident or incident at your facility may haunt you for years, and may actually force you to close, due not only to bad press but also from the financial losses suffered in litigation. An emergency-crisis plan reduces these liability exposures, provides for a fast and organized response to the injured, and ensures accurate disbursement of information to the media. When created and implemented correctly it also reduces the potential charge of negligence against you, as well.

An accident is an unforeseen event that normally involves an injury to a person(s) and many times damage to equipment or structures. An incident is also an unforeseen event; it may also cause injury or damage and can quickly turn into a negative media event. Examples of incidents are riots, fights, inclement weather, bomb or chemical threats, fires, animal-related attacks, etc.

While you may have a very good loss-prevention plan, accidents and incidents happen regularly, not only to employees, but also to guests.

It is imperative that your loss-prevention plan also has an emergency-crisis plan. Your insurance carrier, legal team and possibly outside expert consultants should be involved in creating this critical component. While there are common policies to include in the plan, you need to create a plan specific to your facility, as each facility is different.

CREATE A PLAN

The safety director or a designee should start by researching all emergency-service responders who service the facility's area. Arrange to meet individually or collectively with them at your facility to discuss their needs and procedures when responding to an emergency. Distribute site maps on utilities and pathway entrances and exits and inform them of your staffing capabilities i.e., security, first aid and maintenance, hours of operation and other facility capabilities.

Conduct a facility walk-through so they are familiar with the layout of your facility and pre-plan their pathways to all of the areas where guests and employees have normal access. In these walk-throughs, determine and identify quadrants on your site map, entrance gates

The safety director or a designee should start by researching all emergency-service responders who service the facility's area.

Flashing light image ©istockphoto.com/nataq and pathways for future reference when reporting an event.

Determine response policies and procedures with each service provider, including:

- A direct telephone number
- Proper identification and location of the emergency site to the responder via the telephone: use area identifications on your and their site maps to notify them of the area where they must respond as well as what entrance they should use
- The best ways to communicate the nature of the emergency
- Any other information that will help in the response

In addition to the local fire department, law enforcement, homeland security and ambulance services, include other specialty service providers for:

- Water rescue if appropriate
- Wild animal control
- Language translating services
- Drug use or sales
- Inclement-weather disasters
- Bomb threats or other acts of terrorism
- Shootings and other forms of violence
- Stress consulting services
- Relief organizations like the Red Cross
- Gang or other radical-group prevention organizations

Once you have completed the meetings, turn to your staff, legal team, insurance carrier and outside consultants and begin formulating an internal response to emergencies. It is your responsibility to identify within your facility staff the departments and individual who will be directly involved in the response actions.

There are two separate personnel groups and activities involved in responding to an emergency. First, there are those on your staff who actually are involved in the first-response chain-of-command. These might include general managers, safety directors, security personnel, first aid, maintenance and press personnel.

The second group involves the public relations department and additional management personnel that do not go to the scene.

INTERNAL RESPONSE PROCEDURES

A first procedure to implement is a predetermined chain-of-command notification. If a guest first reports an emergency to an employee, he or she should contact the proper supervisory staff person to start chain-of-command notifications. Unfortunately, calling 9-1-1 is not always the best and fastest way to respond to all emergencies as the call is also available immediately to outside agencies, including the media. Once you establish direct response procedures and a relationship with an emergency service provider agency, it may prefer direct contact to ensure fast and proper response.

EMERGENCY SITE PROCEDURES

At the site of the emergency, first responders should give attention first to anyone who is injured. **Remember: Only qualified first-aid or medical personnel should touch or administer aid to seriously**

injured people. Interview the injured person(s) to determine the nature of their injuries. Be sure to collect the following information and enter it in your incident report:

- His/her age
- Home address and contact information
- Member(s) of his/her party that are in attendance at the facility
- His/her version of the incident
- Persons to be notified on his/her behalf

Identify if there were any facility utilities, equipment, hazardous materials or machinery involved and notify the maintenance department to shut down the equipment or respond to any unsafe condition as a result of the event and request their immediate attention and response.

Give emergency responders an oral version of the condition of the injured when they arrive on site and the names and contact information of family members that should be notified regarding the injured.

Move spectators away from the scene while establishing a secure perimeter around the site and opening a pathway for service providers, and shutting down any utilities or equipment involved.

If possible, assign a staff member to take photographs of the event scene that will assist future investigations of the event as well as becoming part of the event historical file.

Identify all guests and employees who witnessed the event, and gather them in a secure area. If possible, use a room or area away from the event scene where they can be interviewed privately. With your trained interviewers, interview guest witnesses. Use a pre-established form to record the interview.

- Create a report number and log tag line to describe the event
- Date and Time of interview, location of interview, interviewer's name
- Contact information of the witness: include where they work, their email address, their cell phone number as well as their residence information
- Age
- If they are members of the injured person's party
- Their version of the incident
- Draw a rough sketch of the area and establish where they were standing/located, noting approximate distances
- The interviewer should also sign the report

After the interview, ask the person to review the form to make sure everything is correct; ask the person to initial each page of the form.

Pass out the form to all employees that witnessed or responded to the event and let them fill them out, noting their actions regarding the event. After completion, then review their report with them individually at the earliest possible time. Note the interviewers name and signature and when and where the report review takes place.

Important: The information gathered during the interviews is highly confidential and should only be shared with your general manager, safety director and defense team if litigation occurs. Employees should be instructed not to discuss this information with anyone, including other employees, media representatives, family or friends.

INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA

The second personnel groups involved with the event are those responsible for public relations and press. An important part of the emergency-crisis plan is controlling and disbursing information surrounding the accident or incident, not only at the time of the event but throughout media coverage, which may continue for days or longer.

Many times when a significant accident or incident occurs, the media will come to the facility to report on it. You should strive to professionally control the information given and distribute as much positive information as possible.

Before an incident ever happens, the media press department should create generalized template press releases for every common or conceivable type of accident/incident that may occur. These pre-prepared press releases save valuable time in responding to media requests about the incident event. Select the one most appropriate to the event and fill in the details of the event in this press release template. Make multiple copies to distribute to the media.

In addition, several feature stories or detailed press releases should be created in advance, to provide to the media and be included in formal press kits assembled for media distribution at any time, including the event press conference. Included in this press kit are stories such as facility history, statistics, photos, activities hosted, number of visitors annually, safety records, and copies of prior positive press coverage. Update this information regularly.

HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE

Make a meeting/conference room available for all press conferences. If no room is available, set up an exterior site away from the accident or incident location for the initial press conference. All media are directed and/or escorted (preferred) to this press conference location upon entering the facility. If possible, have beverages, snacks and press kits waiting, along with a pre-press conference "Host." Distribute the press kits to all media who attend the press conference. Be sure to copy press credentials for each person before beginning the press conference, and retain their business cards.

Start by having your press person make a statement, and then take questions. The goal is to ensure that accurate information is delivered and that the facility is presented in the best light possible. The press should be escorted to the scene only after all witnesses have been secluded for interviews and the injured have already been transported to a local hospital or off of the site.

After the event scene is cleared and all injured are removed from the site and only after the site is cleared and cleaned, escort the media to the event site. At all times during this walk, treat the walk as if it was an information tour by pointing out the facilities positive activities, features and photo opportunities,

POST-EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

The safety director should contact all emergency responders and obtain a copy of their reports and the transport report of the injured persons if ambulances were used. The safety director should create a confidential file of all of the documents and write their own executive summary of the documents and the event to add to the file.

Establish this procedure with the responders in your first site meetings with them. Moreover the safety director should follow up on the disposition of the injured as much as possible until they regain full health again. The safety director should continue regularly to coordinate with internal departments to ascertain their actions after the event, including maintenance repairs, press responses and all other pertinent information that may be significant to the defense of the facility in litigation.

Make sure the press director contacts the media regularly with updates/resolutions of the event. Make the media your friends for future relationships and more positive news and feature stories about your facility. ■

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