



**Girl Scouts of Central Maryland**

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## **Girl Scouts of Central Maryland Crisis Communications Plan for Council Volunteers**

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of the Crisis Communications plan is to establish procedures and standards for the volunteers and staff of Girl Scouts of Central Maryland. It is designed to serve as a frame of reference for training, as well as for providing some internal checklists for practical use. Basically, guidelines are needed so that staff and volunteers can act as a team in difficult times when the eyes of the media and the public are upon us.

The objective of crisis communication is planning to ensure that published and oral reports of any situation are factual and represent the position of Girl Scouts of Central Maryland fairly and accurately.

GSUSA, in its publication Communications in Girl Scouting, reminds us of the following:

Although Girl Scout members recognize that individual councils are responsible for providing activities and services to the members within their jurisdictions, the vast majority of Americans perceive Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. as one enormous organization. Whenever an event occurs in one council's jurisdiction, many people will assume that it is a function of Girl Scouts everywhere. The positive or negative image that results is applied equally to all Girl Scouts.

Therefore, it is imperative that all facts regarding a crisis incident are accurately reported and documented.

### **Defining Crisis Situations:**

**Non-catastrophic Situations:** Non-catastrophic situations are generally of local concern and might vary from a rumor that Girl Scouts have taken a position on abortion to a water shortage at camp. The end purpose of communications in these circumstances would be to communicate to all concerned (campers, parents, the membership, media) the facts of the situation as quickly and as accurately as possible.

**Catastrophic Situations:** Catastrophes of a national or local nature present more difficult problems. Complicating factors include:

1. The extreme urgency of the situation.
2. Increasing pressures exerted by news media and the public.
3. Immediately unknown factors such as originating cause and extent of loss.

In addition, initial reports from the scene of a catastrophe are notoriously inaccurate.

In a crisis situation, the immediate concerns are caring for any injured, orderly handling of individuals on the scene and providing information to the council emergency contact person as quickly and accurately as possible. Individuals at the scene should not be concerned with notifying families, friends or the general public. Assigned council staff will handle all notification of families as well as the media and GSUSA.

## **The Crisis Communication Plan is Based on the following Assumptions:**

1. Containment is the key to successful resolution of a crisis or sensitive situation. Containment means confining comments about any difficult situation to the incident and the locale in which it took place and avoiding references to other councils or similar situations that have occurred elsewhere. It also means refraining from speculation about the incident and issuing statements only when facts have been verified. When the facts are not known, requests for information can be politely answered by saying that a statement will be issued as soon as the council has verified the facts.
2. In order to assure containment in time of crisis, the council appoints official spokespersons. They-and only they-have the right to speak for Girl Scouts of Central Maryland. All members--both staff and volunteers--should refer media inquiries to the proper spokespersons. Designated spokespersons are the **Chair of the Board, CEO, Vice-President of Advancement, and the Director of Media Relations.**

## **What to do in a Crisis:**

1. Follow the directions attached, assigning one or more persons to tend to the sick or injured; another to calm other girls or adults present; another to serve as contact person with the council.
2. Insure that all medical attention is taken care of and all emergency services notified.
3. Notify the council office (see attached procedures).
4. Assign someone to receive any media people who may have picked up the alert on the police or other emergency radio. **Do not** issue any statements or speak informally to reporters. Keep girls and other adults in a place away from the incident and the media. Simply indicate to reporters that a statement will be issued as soon as accurate information is available. Be courteous, but indicate that the adults on hand have as their main responsibility to care for the girls present.
5. Observe the following procedure:

**Do not** make any written or verbal statements regarding the causes or circumstances of the incident except to the police or other authorities. **Do not** admit guilt or accept responsibility.

**Do not** make any statements or comments to the media. Refer them to the official spokespersons.

## **Preparing Your Group for an Emergency**

Children, as well as adults, need to be prepared in advance of an emergency. At the beginning of an event, the person in charge or her designate should review emergency procedures with everyone.

1. If camping on council owned properties, review evacuation procedures in the event of fire or other natural disaster.
2. If using non-council owned sites (campgrounds, hotels etc.), the person in charge should obtain evacuation procedures, identify exits, remind girls and adults of basic fire safety, e.g., do not use elevators, crawl close to the ground etc.
3. In addition to preparing girls and adults for fire and other natural disasters, they should know what to do in case of prowlers. Admittedly, this is more difficult, but that is no reason for a safety conscious organization like Girl Scouts to omit it. We must, however, present this issue in a way that assures girls rather than merely frightening them.

### **The following points can serve as guidelines:**

Children will be less fearful if they are involved in a discussion of "what would be a good thing to do if..."(we had a fire, you saw a stranger around our campsite) than if the leader merely tells them what to do.

Children need to know that they should awaken someone during the night, or even scream if they need help. They need to feel sure that their fears won't be dismissed or ridiculed either by adults or other girls.

### **Procedures:**

1. Event staff should not endanger the children or themselves by trying to pursue an apparent prowler.
2. Certain points should be kept in mind in dealing with a child who has been frightened by a prowler--real or imagined.
  - a. An adult should never tell a child that "it really wasn't anything," that "there's no need to be afraid," or that it is "just your imagination." Frightened children need to be allowed to experience their fear, to know that it's okay to be afraid and to talk about their experience.
  - b. If the child remains at the event after experiencing a significant fear, it is to be expected that she will need more reassurance than other children for a while.
  - c. In the event a child is harmed in any way, a staff person should remain with her at all times, another person should be assigned to gather the remaining girls in another place to calm and reassure them, and a third should be charged with following council emergency procedures for informing the authorities and the council office.

## Procedures to Follow in Case of a Serious Accident or Major Incident

A serious accident is defined as any event which requires resuscitation or admission to the hospital for more than 48 hours, or results in death. A major incident is anything, such as camp evacuation, cookie tampering etc. that may have a possible negative effect on GSCM or which may come to the attention of the media.

### Procedures:

In the event of a serious accident or major incident, the following procedures should be strictly adhered to:

1. If an accident, give priority attention to requirements at the scene of the accident or emergency. Provide all possible care for the sick or injured. Obtain medical assistance.
2. In the event of a car accident or fatality, also notify the police. Do not disturb the victim or surroundings. Vacate the immediate area of all persons who are not needed for assistance.
3. Notify the Council Service Center in the following manner:

From 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, call **(410) 358-9711 or 1-800-492-2521**.

After normal office hours and on the weekend, call **(443) 421-0025**. This is an organization cell phone. The staff member carrying the cell phone will return your call within 15 minutes if they are not available at the time of the call.

For property emergencies (broken pipes, etc), call the following number:

Conowingo	410-585-5217
Ilchester	443-740-0639
Whippoorwill or Woodlands	410-585-5215
GSCM Service Center (or if no answer above)	443-421-0025

4. When reporting an accident, please have the following information:
  - a. **WHO:** Injured person(s)' name, address and phone number; parent, guardian or emergency contact.
  - b. **WHAT:** Nature of the injury or incident
  - c. **WHERE, WHEN:** Location of the injury or incident. Phone number where person in charge may be reached. When did the incident happen?
  - d. **HOW:** What are the possible causes? What is likely to occur from here?

**NOTE:** At the time of an emergency, the telephone should be kept clear from all except emergency calls. One person should be in charge of the phone. This person will keep a log of all incoming and outgoing calls, recording time of call, person making call and a brief summary of the conversation.

5. The staff person who returns your emergency call will notify the CEO. Parents/guardians and other appropriate persons will be notified and any needed arrangements with parents/guardians for emergency treatment, will be handled by the appointed staff persons.

**GIRL SCOUTS OF CENTRAL MARYLAND**

**Emergency Log**

**Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Contact** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**What? (Describe what happened)**

**Where, When? (Describe the location of the incident. Where are the parties now? When did this happen?)**

**Possible Causes: (Indicate what might have caused the incident and what is likely to occur from here.)**

**GIRL SCOUTS OF CENTRAL MARYLAND  
EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS**

**I. IN CASE OF ACCIDENT:**

Staff Nurse or First Aider:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Car designated as emergency vehicle: Make \_\_\_\_\_ License # \_\_\_\_\_

Driver's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest Hospital: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

**II. POLICE:**

Closet barracks: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Special arrangements: List \_\_\_\_\_

**III. FIRE:**

In Case of fire: Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Special arrangements: List \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. EVACUATION PLAN (Fire and/or storm)**

**V. EMERGENCY CONTACTS:**

Troop or Group Emergency Contact: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

COUNCIL-OWNED PROPERTY: Bill Ensor, Director of Capital Construction & Property Services, GSCM

Cell Phone #: (443) 421-0025 Office Phone #: (410) 358-9711

Toll Free Phone #: 1-800-492-2521

Other than council-owned property: Name of Owner \_\_\_\_\_

Owner Phone # (s) \_\_\_\_\_

**VI. BUS COMPANY:**

Name of Bus Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person of Bus Company: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

**VII. GENERAL EMERGENCIES:**

In the event of a major disaster (flood, hurricane, civil disturbance, etc.) in your area or the area of the planned activity or the route to it, obey the instructions of the civil authorities in charge.