

Crisis Communications Plan for Council Staff and Volunteers

The purpose of the Crisis Communications Plan is to establish procedures and standards for the volunteers and staff of Girl Scouts of Central Maryland (GSCM). It is designed to serve as a frame of reference for training, as well as 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 (e.g., campers, parents/caregivers, 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 counsel 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 ensure 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 who are the **Board Chair, CEO, CMDO, CDO, CFO, and the Director of Marketing and Communications.**

What to do in a Crisis:

1. Follow the attached directions assigning one or more persons to tend to the sick or injured; another to calm other Girl Scouts or adults present; another to serve as contact person with the council.
2. Ensure 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 Girl Scouts 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 adults on hand have as their main responsibility to care for the Girl Scouts 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 their 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 Girl Scouts and adults of basic fire safety (e.g., do not use elevators; crawl close to the ground; etc.).
3. In addition to preparing Girl Scouts 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 Girl Scouts 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...*” (i.e., we had a fire; you saw a stranger; etc.) than if the adult(s) in charge 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 will not be dismissed or ridiculed, either by adults or other Girl Scouts.

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 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 it is OK 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 the child at all times, another person should be assigned to gather the remaining Girl Scouts 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 there is 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 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM 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.

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

Conowingo	(410) 585-5217
Whippoowill or Woodlands	(443) 421-0025.

4. When reporting an accident, please have the following information. **An Emergency Log is provided on page 5 of this plan to aid in capturing these details:**
 - a. **WHO:** Injured person(s)' name, address, 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/Caregivers and other appropriate persons will be notified and any needed arrangements with parents/caregivers for emergency treatment will be handled by the appointed staff persons.

Emergency Log

Note: This log serves as a tool for capturing information at the scene of an incident or accident. Following the incident, please complete a separate GSCM Incident/Accident Report which will ask for more complete details regarding the incident and any injured persons.

Who is involved? *(Names, Addresses, Phone Numbers, Parent/Caregiver Names and Contact Information for injured person(s))*

What happened? *(Describe the nature of the emergency, incident, or accident)*

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

How? *(Indicate what might have caused the incident and what is likely to occur from here?)*

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:

Closest 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/Group Emergency Contact: Name _____
Phone # _____

COUNCIL-OWNED PROPERTY:

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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 enroute to it, obey the instructions of the civil authorities in charge.