

Crisis Preparedness Training

March 17 & 18, 2010

N.C. State University, Raleigh

Participating universities via videoconference include the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University and University of California, Davis.



Table of Contents

Crisis Planning and Preparation	
Background	3
Overview of Crisis Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Defining and identifying a crisis □ Key stakeholder audiences and their needs □ “The Four Rs” 	4-7
Crisis Communications Process	8-10
Crisis Response and Communications Tools	11-13
Potential Crisis Scenarios	14-16
Templates/Worksheets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Crisis Management Plan Template □ Crisis Audit Questions □ Critical Steps □ Crisis Team Identification List □ List of Useful Third Party Resources □ Crisis Contacts for Media Inquiries □ Media Contact Log □ Crisis Media Guidelines □ Message Tips □ Media Interview Tips □ Eight Questions the Media Always Ask □ Working with the Government □ Sample Recall-related News Release □ Contact Information for N.C. Producers 	17-38

Background

This document was created for N.C. MarketReady at North Carolina State University with the express purpose of providing crisis communications templates that can be utilized by agricultural entities. Each agricultural organization (growers, shippers, commodity boards) has the ability to customize these crisis communications templates with specific details regarding their specific businesses. While each group will have its own unique challenges, this document acts as a guide from which a crisis program may be put into place.

As a result of conducting crisis audits over the years, we continue to conclude that the majority of farmers and shippers are very thoughtful about their operations and realize they are vulnerable to a food crisis situation of some type whether it is food safety, weather or labor related. These crisis communications plan templates will provide a useful roadmap for each entity to utilize as they customize their own program.

Overview of Crisis Management

Few things are as important to an industry's success as its reputation, which can be significantly threatened when confronted with a crisis. Every industry is susceptible to crises because they result from a wide variety of factors.

Definition of a Crisis

A crisis is a situation that:

- Is unexpected
- Has elements of the unknown and escalating intensity
- Interrupts normal business operations
- Impacts an organization's external reputation
- Impacts an industry's (as well as an individual company's) financial performance

In the food industry, these events take on additional importance because food has a daily impact on people's lives.

The difficulty in managing a crisis is that effective crisis response is about both action and perception. An industry does not decide by itself whether the event in which it is embroiled is a crisis. The perceptions and reactions of all influencers and key stakeholders apply, including retailers, wholesalers, growers/shippers, regulatory agencies, other industry associations and the media. These groups determine the impact on the reputation of an individual operation, the agricultural community in North Carolina and the produce industry overall.

Identifying a Crisis

It is difficult to anticipate and prepare for a crisis; however, it is possible to establish a structure and process for information gathering, decision-making and communications, thereby building a culture of crisis preparedness.

Internal and external communications play a crucial role in managing issues with key stakeholders before they develop into crises.

Following are scenarios that provide the potential for negative exposure for North Carolina commodity boards, farmers and shippers:

- Contamination
- Product recall
- Consumer illness
- Labor issues
- Weather related crop failure

Warning signs that a potential crisis is developing include:

- Contact from another producer or the industry association
- Consumer complaints
- Notification of a legal issue
- Contact from a news media outlet
- Contact from a regulatory agency
- Contact from a customer (i.e. retailer, wholesaler, grower/shipper)
- Publication or broadcast of a negative news report
- Increased Internet discussions

The following primary crisis communications objectives can help maintain the industry's reputation:

1. Identify roles and responsibilities of a crisis management team
2. Centralize the control and flow of information
3. Act quickly and consistently at the onset of a potential crisis in a forthcoming, honest manner
4. Protect the industry's market in the short- and long-term

Key Stakeholder Audiences and Their Needs

When a crisis strikes, it is extremely important that key stakeholder audiences must have a clear understanding of your messages. During a crisis, the affected organization must disseminate its messages and, in return, listen for important feedback. The organization will approach this through direct communications with key stakeholder audiences and also through trickle-down information provided by working with the media.

The media often “shapes” the issue/crisis and may sensationalize the situation. Therefore, the media must be viewed as an audience and as an “information venue” for important issue/crisis situation messages. **It is important to note that any affected agricultural organization communicates through the media, not to the media.**

However, the media cannot be the only channel used to deliver messages. Your organization must communicate directly with key stakeholder audiences affected by the issue at hand such as retailers, other industry associations, consumers, etc. The following is a list of key stakeholders and the needs that must be met in order to ensure a successful crisis resolution.

Employees – It is important to communicate to your employees – whenever you are set to release information to the public. Each worker represents your company as an ambassador. Please note that every crisis does not rise to the level of public communication so demonstrate great care in not alarming employees of potential issues that never manifest into anything of consequence.

Growers/Shippers – Growers/shippers can be a powerful resource in helping control a crisis because they have the strongest relationships and highest credibility with two of the external audiences (retailers and consumers). For grower/shipper representatives to be most effective, they will need to be fully briefed on the situation and have information at hand to answer difficult questions from their contacts. Quickly disseminating information from a credible source may significantly lower the long-term risk to the industry overall.

Retailers – In the event of a crisis, retailers will play as important a role as advocates in disseminating proper information, providing guidance and support to consumers and ensuring the strength of the North Carolina produce industry. Retailers (at the vice president of perishables, consumer affairs director level) should be provided with information to answer difficult questions and the means/materials to share within their organization.

Industry Associations – Key affiliated industry-related associations should receive all external communications on an FYI basis. If it is helpful to have the association take a position on the issue, they should be approached to participate in the communications process. They can provide a third-party perspective or they might be able to recommend experts who would be willing to speak on behalf of the North Carolina produce industry, in addition to potential N.C. State specialists.

Regulatory Agencies – It is important to communicate with relevant regulatory agencies – such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); Food and Drug Administration (FDA); N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR); and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Public Health (NC DPH), early in the external notification process to meet any legal requirement and because they are likely to be contacted by journalists if a story reaches critical mass. In addition to receiving all required notification, these agencies should receive all media statements prior to broad distribution and contact should be made with the media spokesperson so that they have a personal contact with your commodity group or farming operation.

Consumers – Because they are the intended end audience, communications to consumers should be a top priority. All distributed information should place the situation in its proper context, provide clear, concise information on the steps consumers should take, provide a contact to answer additional questions and provide a sense of concern regarding consumers' overall well being. Consumer questions/comments should be centrally and continually monitored and evaluated to determine if there is rampant misinformation that needs to be corrected or if follow-up communication is required.

Wholesalers – Depending on the nature of the crisis, wholesalers may not need extensive communication. However, if they are involved in the crisis, they should be part of the development of the messaging and, if necessary, speak publicly regarding their role in the situation. They should also receive relevant external communications due to their ability to disseminate information throughout the industry.

Media – It is important to be both proactive and conservative with the media. A crisis is best contained when the media receives a timely, forthright explanation of the issue from the affected organization rather than other sources; however, the information must be concise and reiterated constantly to ensure that there is a shared, clear understanding of the situation. During media follow-up, special attention must be paid to adhering to deadlines, being responsive and providing contact information to those identified via the templates outlined in this document. Great care must be taken to place the situation in the appropriate context. There is a possibility that many reporters covering the story will not have food industry background. Communication must provide them with this information so that they can accurately present the scope of the problem. Any information given to the media will be widely disseminated (particularly if it runs on syndicated newswires) so there must be great attention placed on its accuracy and the implications of its distribution.

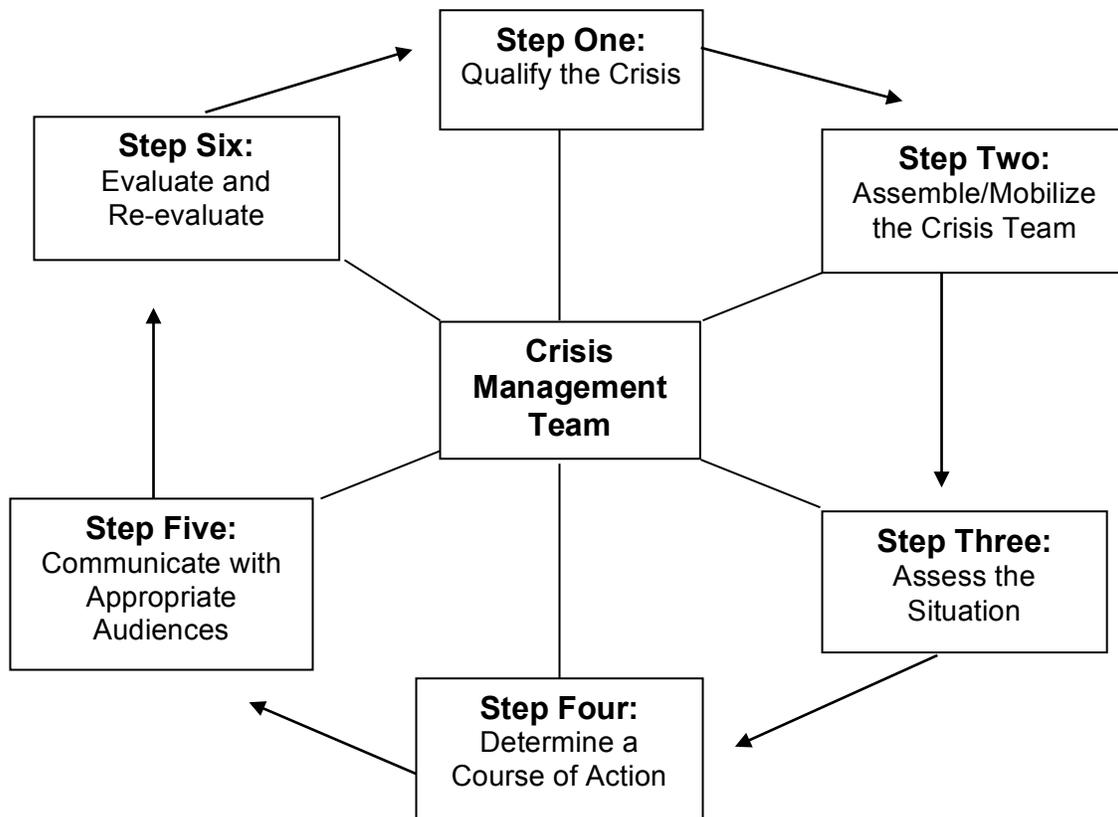
“The Four Rs”

Every situation is different; however, a successful crisis communications initiative relays specific key messages to all key stakeholder audiences. These messages are referred to as “The Four Rs” of crisis communications but may not be applicable in every situation.

Regret:	The first thing you should do is express concern that a problem has developed – even if it was not the industry’s fault.
Responsibility:	Whether the cause of the problem was the operation’s fault or not, the operation should be prepared to take responsibility for solving the problem. Your actions will reinforce its words and provide a credible demonstration of the operation’s commitment to doing the right thing.
Reform:	Your various stakeholder audiences must know the operation is taking steps to ensure the problem will not happen again.
Restitution:	If appropriate, detail how you and the industry will help those who have been affected by the problem.

Crisis Communications Process

The following is a six-phased approach to crisis management that will enable you to communicate during a crisis situation in a proactive, rapid manner. In addition, once your crisis management program is started, it is important to revisit the six-step cycle on an ongoing basis. The evaluation phase will often provide new information that will change the scope of the crisis and the course of action.



Step One: Qualify the Crisis

When early warning signs of a situation arise that have the potential to cause harm or promote negative perceptions about the North Carolina produce industry or its products, you must act swiftly to initiate the crisis management plan. These signs can include an initial positive test for Salmonella or breaking news stories on your industry. When a concern begins to take shape, the management team must evaluate conditions and determine what action(s) needs to be taken.

Step Two: Assemble and Mobilize a Crisis Management Team

This step sets the tone for the entire process and is a key step in successfully resolving a crisis. Getting all appropriate parties involved in the planning process will prevent problems down the road. (Refer to the “Crisis Team Identification List” at the end of this document).

Step Three: Assess the Situation

The next step is to gather an accurate overview of the events that have taken place to date, assess the situation and separate facts from rumors/speculation. Pinpoint and qualify the source of all information.

- Confirm information from reliable sources
- Identify what information has been made public or is general knowledge within the organization, whether rumor or truth
- Determine if the crisis will affect more than one commodity
- Determine the potential for media coverage and when it might occur
- Determine if a government or agency response is expected
- Determine if the crisis will involve special interest groups or other third parties

The team must focus on the facts and fully assess what caused the event and the potential impact of the situation – including worst-case scenario and worst possible outcome – what the best solution would be, and what action or component of the crisis event offers the best opportunity to influence stakeholder audiences' perceptions.

Step Four: Determine a Course of Action

This step is important in that it ensures the industry appears united: one clear message coming from one credible voice in a timely manner.

- Remove the source of the crisis: The source and substance of the issue must be dealt with.
- Contain the problem: In the best scenario, the situation is contained locally, avoiding damage to the operation's overall credibility or reputation as well as maintaining its financial stability.
- Communicate honestly and factually: Keep key stakeholder audiences informed of your actions. Also, correct factual errors or misinformation immediately. Use the information gathered to this point to develop messages tailored to each stakeholder audience.

Step Five: Communicate with Key Stakeholder Audiences

The next step is to talk to the key stakeholders honestly, openly and in a timely fashion. It is important not only to speak, but also to listen to rumors, perceptions and misinformation that might be circulating among key stakeholders and respond quickly and appropriately. At this time, determine *which* stakeholder audience to consider targeting, *who* should be in charge of communicating with each stakeholder (spokesperson/s) and "threshold questions" to consider when determining *when* to target each stakeholder audience group. Threshold questions are the initial starting point questions you ask each stakeholder. Examples of threshold questions are in the following chart:

Stakeholder	Potential Communication Vehicles	Threshold Questions
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-mail or newsletter Personal contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do they need to know about the source of the problem? How is the company resolving the situation? What are the employees expected to do regarding the situation?
Retailers and Growers/Shippers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information packet and/or letter Personal contact E-mail or e-newsletter 800 number Web site Advisory board meeting Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do they need to know about the source of the problem? What actions do they need to take to resolve the situation? What information will they provide to their consumers, customers and/or employees?
Wholesalers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 800 number Phone calls Web site Media Electronic communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the incident involve a wholesaler? Are there other companies that could have been impacted by the wholesaler? Is the wholesaler prepared to communicate? Does the situation create uncertainty in other wholesalers' minds about North Carolina-grown produce?
Industry Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference calls Personal meetings Faxed statements E-mail Web site Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could the association be an ambassador for you? Will the association help solicit testimony from experts on the issue?
Regulatory Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference calls Personal meetings E-mail Web site Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What actions are they taking regarding the situation? What are the implications of their actions?
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web site 800 number Media, including social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will consumers react? To whom will they direct their questions? What (mis)information have they already received?
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial response statement News release Web site External Q&A News conference/briefings Advertising Third-party groups By-lined editorial E-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the news media get information on the situation whether you give it to them or not? Will the operation's reputation be affected unless information is aggressively released through the news media? Is there a broader, national industry group that can more appropriately handle the situation? Can this become an industry issue rather than an individual operation's issue?

Another key component of step five is to track all communication efforts and monitor the impact of those communications. (Please refer to the "Media Contact Log" at the end of this document).

Step Six: Evaluate and Re-evaluate

In this step, the parameters of the crisis should be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, with frequency determined by the situation at hand. New information will emerge on a regular basis and the overall crisis plan should reflect the latest learnings. Messaging and stakeholder outreach will continue to evolve until the crisis is resolved.

Crisis Response and Communications Tools

It is important to release information about the situation as quickly as possible – reputations can be significantly damaged in a short period of time if the industry’s voice is not represented. There are great benefits in being the first to comment on a crisis situation because it empowers you to set the tone of the coverage. In addition, a response should take into account the questions that are likely to be asked regarding your role in the situation and address as many of these questions as proactively as possible. Including this information will streamline the communications process and reduce the potential for negative exposure.

An initial statement for all stakeholder audience groups should include:

- Statement of problem, its cause, and – if possible – a solution
- Concern over incident
- Date and time of problem (if applicable)
- Magnitude of problem
- Response to problem (ongoing and evolving response)
- Involvement of regulatory agencies (if appropriate)
- Explanation of how the organization will make restitution (if appropriate)
- Actions taken to contain problem (recall, etc.)
- Actions underway to prevent recurrence

As the situation unfolds, a variety of factors will influence the tone and content of the messaging. Your communications must be continually evaluated to ensure that it is consistent with the latest information and external concerns. (Refer to the “Eight Questions the Media Always Ask” at the end of this document).

You will most certainly face the following questions immediately:

- Who first learned of the problem?
- When did you know about this problem and what did you do about it at the time?
- Will the industry change or stop what has led to the crisis? If not, why?
- Has anyone fallen ill or died?

At various points throughout the crisis it will be necessary to revise written statements and/or news releases and media alerts on the situation.

You should be as open as possible with the media and totally accessible to reporters during a crisis. In addition, stakeholder audiences must be kept informed of decisions and plans, as well as have the opportunity to follow newsworthy activities. Equally as important is to avoid communicating inaccurate and/or conflicting information.

Communications Tools

There are several communications tools that are useful in a crisis situation, such as a dedicated phone line, a laptop and a portable printer. At the end of this notebook are crisis communications templates that can be tailored to fit your specific needs.

Templates include:

- ❑ Crisis Communications Checklist
- ❑ Crisis Management Plan Template
- ❑ Crisis Audit Questions
- ❑ Critical Steps
- ❑ Crisis Team Identification List
- ❑ List of Useful Third Party Resources
- ❑ Crisis Contacts for Media Inquiries
- ❑ Media Contact Log
- ❑ Crisis Media Guidelines
- ❑ Message Tips
- ❑ Media Interview Tips
- ❑ Eight Questions the Media Always Ask
- ❑ Working with the Government
- ❑ Sample Recall-related News Release
- ❑ Contact Information for N.C. Producers

Other useful items include:

Crisis Contact Card – You should create a small card with the management team’s phone numbers, cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses. This card should be laminated and provided to all employees as part of your crisis preparedness steps. The card could also potentially include the number for an outside public relations firm. The reverse side of the card should contain a top 10 list of “What to do in the event of crisis.”

What To Do In A Crisis:

1. Nothing is “off the record”
2. Never say “no comment”
3. Avoid jargon; speak in personal terms
4. Don’t speculate; deal in facts, not rumors
5. Don’t repeat negative questions or phrases
6. If you don’t know the answer, say so
7. Make sure you understand the question before answering
8. Don’t argue; maintain your poise
9. Speak only for your organization or company
10. Maintain control and stick to your agenda

Crisis Section of Web Site – You can also create a section in your Web site that would be activated only in times of crisis. The section could contain one area of information/answers for media and another with “how to” information and interviewing tips for grower members. With social media like Facebook and Twitter applications, among others, careful attention needs to be placed on communicating via this method. We recommend assessing social media response on a case-by-case basis.

Issues Team – You should assemble a risks and issues team prior to a crisis that would help identify potential threats to the industry. The team, made up of commission/association group presidents, would meet bi-annually to anticipate potential threats to the industry as well as discuss and agree upon industry response.

Potential Crisis Scenarios

Situation One: Produce Contamination

There are a number of situations that could compromise fresh produce quality. Product tampering incidents most often are serious, yet isolated, events. However, if tampering is deemed to be widespread or the consequences are serious, a recall may be necessary. More common would be some type of contamination issue from a food safety outbreak that would result in a recall. Concerns regarding cooking/food storage issues may also directly affect the consumer and tie back to a North Carolina commodity group, grower or shipper.

The crisis team should be notified of all food safety incidents immediately. Provide all the details that have been collected (such as time incident reported to retailer/grower-shipper; name of reporting person; name of person who discovered the issue if not reporting person; and where, when and how product was found). If possible, quantify the magnitude of the problem.

Initial Response Statement

It is crucial for North Carolina agricultural organizations to provide an initial response that is honest and accurate, even if all the facts have not been determined. An immediate stand-by message should contain the following information:

- A value statement
 - Example: *The industry's foremost concern is for the lives and safety of consumers.*
- Commitment to stopping whatever has led to the crisis
- Compassion for those who have been negatively influenced by the situation
- Cooperation with all involved parties to reach a resolution

As soon as possible, the statement should include a factual account of what took place and what you and the industry are doing to resolve the situation. Additional language could include:

- *Our sympathies are with (the affected individuals) and their families and friends who have been affected by this.*
- *At this time, it is premature to discuss possible sources or causes. We are working with (agencies involved) to facilitate the investigation.*

Potential Stakeholder Audiences

- Employees
- Retailers
- Industry associations
- Consumers
- USDA, FDA, other appropriate state regulatory agencies
- Wholesalers/distributors
- News media

Potential Vulnerabilities Requiring Communication

- Retailers and foodservice organizations stop stocking North Carolina-grown produce
- Consumers stop buying North Carolina-grown produce
- Sales drop significantly in the short term

Potential Questions Media or Regulatory Agencies May Ask

- How many shipments of North Carolina-grown produce are involved?
- Where was the product grown?
- How much product is involved?
- How can the affected product be identified?
- Have you or affiliated organizations notified the FDA?
- Are you going to issue a recall and at what level?
- What federal, state and/or local agencies have been notified?
- If not a recall, but a product withdrawal, what arrangements are you making to recover the affected product? (from distributors, wholesalers, retailers, consumers)
- What should consumers do with the product they have at home? (discard, return to retailer, return to grower/shipper)
- Will the industry refund the cost of the product?
- Is it safe for consumers to eat the product they have on hand?
- What would the medical/health consequences be if the product were consumed?
- Has this item ever had a quality problem before?
- What exactly is the nature of the problem?
- How long will it take to correct the problem?
- What are the financial implications?

Situation Two: Labor Shortage

A lack of labor could be disruptive to the industry in many ways, including the ability to get product safely to market.

Initial Response Statement

You should be prepared to respond to inquiries from media and other key stakeholders about the situation. It is crucial for you to provide an initial response that is honest and accurate.

Potential Stakeholders to be Notified

- Employees
- Retailers
- Growers/shippers
- Consumers
- Industry associations
- News media

Potential Vulnerabilities Requiring Communication

- Lack of labor significantly affects harvest or packing of North Carolina-grown produce

Potential Questions

- What is the industry's position on labor (particularly the H2a program)?
- How will the crops be harvested?
- How large is the size of a particular commodity (farm gate value)?
 - What is the industry going to do?



• What is the industry going to do?



Crisis Communications Checklist

Do you have everything you need in your crisis “toolkit”? Items to have in toolkit, *at the ready*, before a crisis hits include:

- ❑ Crisis Management Plan Template
- ❑ Crisis Audit Questions
- ❑ Critical Steps
- ❑ Crisis Team Identification List
- ❑ List of Useful Third Party Resources
- ❑ Crisis Contacts for Media Inquiries
- ❑ Media Contact Log
- ❑ Crisis Media Guidelines
- ❑ Message Tips
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- ❑ Sample Recall-related News Release
- ❑ Contact Information for N.C. Producers

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Crisis Management Plan Template

The specific communications templates/worksheets that follow in this document provide the basis for which your organization can develop a customized crisis management plan. Each crisis management plan should at the very least have the following elements:

Crisis Audit Questions and Answers

This audit needs to take place first – it provides your organization with a chance to recognize vulnerabilities and issues facing your industry that could become crises.

Development of a Crisis Management Team

Put together a team of the most relevant contacts within your organization to handle/manage the crisis. Identify a spokesperson or team of spokespeople, depending on the nature of the issue/crisis.

Development of Crisis Team Contact Sheet/Card

It is necessary to have a crisis contact sheet/card available in quick view. This sheet/card needs to have personal phone and e-mail accessibility so that contacts can be reached at any time.

Development of a List of Useful Third Party Resources

This is a list of constituents who can validate and support your position when a crisis strikes. They may include representatives in food safety, the NCDA&CS, USDA, FDA, CDC, commodity boards and other associations.

Conduct Media Training

There are many tips that are gained from professional media training. Contact a public relations firm that specializes in crisis communications to ensure your team has received the proper training to set you up for successful media relations during a crisis.

Situational Analysis

Have a clear method of assessing the situation including: gathering an accurate overview of the events that have taken place to date; historical background; and separation of facts from rumors/speculation. Then, a timely course of action can be determined with clear message points.

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Message Development

Develop key messages that are relevant to the situation/crisis. Keep them simple, short and memorable.

Internal Process that Allows Company to Act Quickly

The goal is to be prepared to react immediately. Taking too much time to assemble a team, analyze the situation, develop messages and react can literally destroy an organization. The above steps should be finalized within 24 to 48 hours.

Evaluate and Re-evaluate

In this step, the parameters of the crisis should be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, with frequency determined by the situation at hand. New information will continually emerge and the overall crisis plan should reflect the latest learnings.

Crisis Audit Questions

A self-audit will help you recognize vulnerabilities and issues facing the industry and your operation.

1. How long have you been in business?
2. Are you a member of a specific commodity board/association? Which one?
3. How many employees do you have? Permanent _____ Seasonal _____
4. What are the top three issues facing your industry and business? Why?
5. Which certifications do you have?
6. Where do you think growers of your crop(s) are the most vulnerable before the product leaves your farm? In other words, if there was a food safety crisis at your operation, what do you think it would (most likely) be?
7. If a food safety crisis were to hit your operation right now, whom would you call?
8. Who is the designated spokesperson for your industry and company?
9. Have you or anyone at your company ever been news media and message trained?
10. Are you experiencing a labor shortage, or do you have enough workers?
11. Do you have legal counsel for your business, board, group?
12. Regarding a potential crisis, what keeps you up at night wondering/worrying?

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Critical Steps

After it has been determined that there is a crisis... the following steps need to be followed within the first 24 to 48 hours.

Qualify the Crisis

Evaluate the conditions of the crisis to determine what actions need to be taken.

Assemble and Mobilize a Crisis Management Team

Notify all members of the crisis team immediately.

Assess the Situation

Gather an accurate overview of the events that have taken place to date, assess the situation, and separate facts from rumors and speculation.

Determine a Course of Action

This step is important in that it ensures the industry appears united: one clear message coming from one credible voice in a timely manner.

Communicate with Key Stakeholder Audiences

Talk to the key stakeholders honestly, openly and in a timely fashion. It is important not only to speak, but also to listen to rumors, perceptions and misinformation and respond quickly and appropriately.

Evaluate and Re-evaluate

In this step, the parameters of the crisis should be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, with frequency determined by the situation at hand. New information will emerge on a regular basis and the overall crisis plan should reflect the latest learnings.



Company Crisis Team Identification List

This list includes key members of your organization including: CEO/COO; contact who will act as spokesperson; legal counsel; labor/HR contact; food safety/quality assurance executive (if on-staff) and other appropriate contacts.

Name _____

Title _____

Work phone _____

Cell phone _____

Home phone _____

Work E-mail _____

Personal E-mail _____

Name _____

Title _____

Work phone _____

Cell phone _____

Home phone _____

Work E-mail _____

Personal E-mail _____

Name _____

Title _____

Work phone _____

Cell phone _____

Home phone _____

Work E-mail _____

Personal E-mail _____

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List of Useful Third Party Resources

Food Safety Experts

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

University/Cooperative Extension Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

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(Useful third party resources – pg.2)



State Department of Agriculture Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

USDA Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

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(Useful third party resources – pg.3)



FDA Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

CDC Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

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(Useful third party resources – pg.4)



State Department of Health Staff

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

Commodity Board Organization

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

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Regional/State Agricultural Association

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

National Agricultural and Produce Associations

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Office Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail _____

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Crisis Contacts for Media Inquiries

If you receive an urgent media call or e-mail regarding food safety, please contact:

Name/Title _____

Commodity Board _____

Address _____

Phone/Cell _____

E-mail _____

Name/Title _____

Name of Company _____

Address _____

Phone/Cell _____

E-mail _____

Name/Title _____

FDA/USDA _____

Address _____

Phone/Cell _____

E-mail _____

Name/Title _____

NCDA&CS _____

Address _____

Phone/Cell _____

E-mail _____

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Media Contact Log

After closing the loop with a reporter, please add contact information to your organization's address book for further communications.

Date of Inquiry _____

Time of Inquiry _____

Reporter/Editor _____

Media Outlet _____

Phone Numbers _____

E-mail Address _____

Media Question(s) _____

Media Deadline _____

Date & Time of Response to Media _____

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Crisis Media Guidelines

If the media calls you regarding a crisis, here are the suggested guidelines:

1 – Stay Calm

When a crisis occurs, reporters are assigned the story at the last minute and are trying to learn as much as they can under a very tight deadline. Even though they are under a lot of pressure and demand quick information from you, **REMAIN CALM**. Remember that you do not have to match their emotional state. Simply remain respectful and gather their information in a manner free from agitation, excitement or passion.

2 – Gather the Facts

Take notes of what the reporter has communicated to you regarding the crisis. He or she may ask some preliminary questions about the crisis and want immediate reaction from you. Please remember that everything you say to a reporter should be treated as “on the record” so please only gather their information and **DO NOT RESPOND ON THE SPOT** to their questions. Tell them you or someone else will get back to them as soon as possible because you have to learn more about what happened. After receiving the inquiry, immediately report it to your supervisor.

3 – Contact Crisis Team

Contact your crisis team **IMMEDIATELY** after receiving a media inquiry. Utilize your crisis contact cards for updated information. Share the following information:

- Name of reporter
- Name of media outlet
- Reporter’s contact info (phone numbers, e-mail)
- Deadline for story
- Reporter’s questions

4 – Monitor the Situation

IMMEDIATELY SHARE NEW INFORMATION you learn regarding the crisis and media inquiries with the crisis management team. The open flow of communication is critical during a time of crisis. We want to present a united and effective voice to the media during a crisis. It is important for everyone in your organization to follow these crisis guidelines because it helps our industry communicate our key messages effectively with the media and the public at large.

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Message Tips

Developing your key messages for each crisis scenario is critical. Following are some guidelines for message development and also communicating messages through the media.

Develop Three Key Messages

- Keep messages simple, short, memorable
- Internalize – don't memorize
- Tailor messages to specific topic
- Modify per audience
- Consumer vs. trade media

Work the Message with Proofpoints

Proofpoints are messages that primarily contain statistics or any other numerically-based facts that back up your primary message

- Identify appropriate spokespeople
- Provide key messages with salient proofpoints
- Prepare for follow-up questions
- Provide numbers or specifics to back up key messages
- Media appreciates detailed information
- Organize messages for easy reference

Example Structure

- Message #1
 - Proofpoint #1
 - Proofpoint #2
- Message #2
 - Proofpoint #1
 - Proofpoint #2
- Message #3
 - Proofpoint #1
 - Proofpoint #2

Deliver the Message

- Make your point, follow up with proofpoints
- Bridge and flag your messages
- Consider body language cues
- Consider verbal communications cues

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Keys to Becoming an Effective Spokesperson

- Visualize
- Internalize
- Personalize
- Simplify

Handling Interviews

- Goal is to advance your messages
- Understand and acknowledge that the story is news
- Don't underestimate reporter
- Stay focused on key messages

Preparation is the Key

- Know the media outlet
- Know reporter's style and stories
- Know yourself
- Know your messages

Manage the Process

- Interview is NOT a friendly conversation
- Interview is a business meeting between individuals with different agendas
- Get facts before responding to questions
- Always call a reporter back
- Ask what information is reporter looking for
- Don't immediately respond if unsure

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Media Interview Tips

- Get accurate spellings of reporter and outlet
- Seize the moment
- Remember name of your organization
- Prepare for likely and tough questions

- Never say “No Comment”
- Not sure of a fact – admit it
- Never speculate

- Be concise
- Be concrete
- Back up generalizations with specifics
- Avoid in-house language or jargon
- Make sure interviewer correctly rephrases your answers

- Don’t fill silences
- Don’t answer for other people
- Don’t volunteer information
- Don’t provide positive or negative reviews of questions to reporters
- Don’t answer the hypothetical “What if” question

- Everything is “ON THE RECORD”
- Don’t be caught off guard
- Don’t be evasive
- Literally stay on your toes

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Eight Questions the Media Always Ask

1. What happened?
2. Who is in charge?
3. Has this been contained?
4. Are victims being helped?
5. What can we expect?
6. What should we do?
7. Why did this happen?
8. Did you have forewarning?

Questions the Crisis Team Must Ask Itself

1. What happened?
2. How do we know?
3. Who is responsible?
4. Why did it happen?
5. Who is affected?
6. What should we do?
7. Who can we trust?
8. Who needs to hear from us?
9. What should we say?
10. How should we say it?

Eight Questions the Media Always Ask from University of Iowa Study. Questions the Crisis Team Must Ask Itself from Eric Mower & Associates Workshop, June 2008.

Handout for N.C. Cooperative Extension workshop on Dealing with Controversial Issues – Working with the News Media.

Contacts: Leah Chester-Davis, leah_chester-davis@ncsu.edu or 704-250-5400;
Natalie Hampton, natalie_hampton@ncsu.edu or 919-513-3128;
Dee Shore, dee_shore@ncsu.edu or 919-513-3107

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Working with the Government

Governmental agencies play a big role on how a crisis is perceived by the public. Whether communicated directly through the Internet or media stories, governmental messages can have a tremendous impact on the livelihood of food companies.

The produce industry has worked very closely with the FDA in trying to develop a balanced approach that protects everyone. The FDA's Reportable Food Registry is an electronic portal for food suppliers to report when there is a reasonable probability that food products may cause serious adverse health consequences. The FDA provides food safety guidance for the food industry at www.fda.gov.

The FDA will issue press releases/media advisories during recalls so they can alert consumers of their concern regarding certain products. They will also post company releases on their site as well as a service to consumers.

Sample Recall-related News Release

Austinuts of Dallas, Inc. Announces Voluntary Recall of Honey Mustard Pretzels

Contact:

Blair Bernier
214-739-6887

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Dallas, Texas - March 17, 2010 - Austinuts of Dallas, Inc. has issued a voluntary recall for Honey Mustard Pretzels, Lot number 61150/0280, because the product may be contaminated with Salmonella.

Salmonella is an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons infected with Salmonella often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection with Salmonella can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses such as arterial infections (i.e., infected aneurysms), endocarditis and arthritis. For more information on Salmonella, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

The Austinuts Honey Mustard Pretzels were only distributed at Austinuts' building in Dallas, Texas in **16 ounce clear zipper bags**. Consumers having any of these products are urged to destroy them.

NO OTHER AUSTINUTS' PRODUCTS ARE PART OF THIS RECALL. No illnesses have been reported to date in connection with the above product. The pretzels were manufactured by National Pretzel Company of Lancaster, PA and were coated with a seasoning mix that included hydrolyzed vegetable protein recalled by Basic Food Flavors, Las Vegas, NV, because it may be contaminated with Salmonella.

Consumers with recall questions may contact Austinuts of Dallas, Inc. at 214-739-6887 during normal business hours, Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Central Standard Time (CDT). Consumers with questions or concerns about their health should contact their doctor immediately.

For information on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) ongoing investigation, visit FDA's Web site at www.fda.gov.

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Contact Information for N.C. Producers

Producers faced with the possibility of a food safety issue, should first contact the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. NCDA&CS has working agreements with the USDA and FDA. If contact with these agencies is warranted, NCDA&CS will coordinate those efforts.

Matthew Agle
Industry and Community Relations Coordinator
NCDA&CS Food and Drug Protection Division
919-733-7366 x 394
matthew.agle@ncagr.gov

Brett Weed
Manufactured Food Regulatory Program Coordinator
NCDA&CS Food and Drug Protection Division
919-733-7366 x 393
brett.weed@ncagr.gov

Dan Ragan
Director
NCDA&CS Food and Drug Protection Division
919-733-7366
dan.ragan@ncagr.gov

Another agency to contact, depending on the product and issue at hand, might be the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Larry D. Michael, REHS, MPH
Branch Head
N.C. Division of Environmental Health, Food Protection Branch
N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources
919-715-0927
Larry.Michael@ncdenr.gov

Contact your local health department to monitor the incidence of reported illnesses. Monitor updates from the CDC and FDA on their Web sites. The N.C. Department of Human Health, Division of Public Health would be involved with any investigation of food-borne illness outbreaks to assess the disease issue.

David Bergmire-Sweat, MPH
Food-borne Disease Epidemiologist
N.C. Division of Public Health, Communicable Disease Branch
N.C. Department of Health and Human Services
919-715-4818
david.bergmire-sweat@dhhs.nc.gov

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(Contact information for N.C. producers – pg. 2)

Assistance from N.C. State University will come through N.C. Cooperative Extension. The first step is to contact your local Cooperative Extension Center. The local agents will alert the appropriate specialists. Visit www.ces.ncsu.edu for a listing of contacts in each county.

If you become aware of an issue that may generate media inquiries across the state, thereby possibly affecting the industry, please e-mail or call one of the following who will implement N.C. Cooperative Extension's Issues Management Plan.

Ben Chapman
Assistant Professor, Extension Food Safety Specialist; N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force Co-chair
NCSU – Family & Consumer Sciences
benjamin_chapman@ncsu.edu
919-515-8099

Leah Chester-Davis
Coordinator of Communications and Community Outreach; N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force, Communications Working Group Co-chair
NCSU – N.C. MarketReady
Leah_chester-davis@ncsu.edu
704-250-5406

Diane Ducharme
Extension Associate, Horticulture & Food Safety; N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force Co-chair
NCSU – N.C. MarketReady
diane_ducharme@ncsu.edu
704-250-5402

Chris Gunter
Assistant Professor; N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force Co-chair
NCSU – Horticultural Science
chris_gunter@ncsu.edu
919-513-2807

Trevor Phister
Assistant Professor, Food Science; N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force Co-chair
NCSU – Food, Bioprocessing & Nutrition Sciences
trevor_phister@ncsu.edu
919-513-1644

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