

# **City of Powell**

## **Crisis Communication Plan**

### **Overview and Purpose**

This Crisis Communication Plan is designed to aid the City of Powell staff in responding to a public health emergency or other disaster that occurs within the City limits and/or the surrounding area. It also serves as an all-hazard response plan should Powell need to assist other communities that are acting as lead agencies during a disaster response.

The first responsibility of those following the crisis communication plan is to determine and develop the appropriate messages to address the emergency, with the awareness that the coordination and dissemination of such messages are of vital importance (tell it all, tell it fast and tell the truth).

The primary goals of the City of Powell's Crisis Communication Plan are to create a vehicle to provide the public (residents and other interested parties) with accurate information in a timely fashion; prevent panic; serve as a timely and credible information source for various media outlets; and coordinate public response with other appropriate agencies or communities as necessary.

### **Crisis Communication Team**

The team is essential for identifying appropriate actions to be taken following any emergency. The team should be composed of individuals who are key to the situation, and may include (but not be limited to) the Public Information Officer, City Manager, Police Chief (or Deputy Chief), Law Director and Public Service Director. The job of the team is to create a plan of action, determine what other agencies may need to be involved and officially name a spokesperson (typically the Public Information Officer, depending on the situation). The designated spokesperson will be the primary contact for the duration of the emergency. Should the emergency involve other agencies (fire department, health district, etc.), it is important to obtain the identity of those agencies' spokespersons so communication with residents, media, etc. can be coordinated if needed.

## **Crisis Communication Policies**

All information released to the media and the public by the City's Public Information Officer and any other source shall be accurate, truthful and timely. If other sources are sharing information, that communication must be coordinated with the Public Information Officer so all parties are on the same page.

When communicating during the early stages of an emergency, there is no second opportunity to "get it right." The City's credibility and reputation depend largely on what is said (and not said) and when. Therefore, keys to success are providing easy-to-understand, accurate information in a timely fashion. Information provided must be verifiable, and consistent communication is important.

In an effort to minimize public anxiety during a crisis, comprehensive information regarding the nature of the problem must be provided, along with instructions that will keep the public safe. The City must be perceived as being a credible source of information, even if that information is slow to be provided. The City must share its role in the crisis with the public, and offer regular updates on when new information might be available.

### **Goals**

Get the message out early – Provide a statement to the public and media that the City is aware of the emergency and is involved in the response.

Get the message out accurately – Monitor media releases on the emergency and be ready to correct any misinformation that is published or broadcast.

Get message updates out continuously – Make sure the media knows when (and where) to get updates.

Provide facts, not speculation – All parties involved with communicating must be saying the same thing with regard to the emergency. Don't talk "off the record."

Get the message out simply – Inform the public in simple terms about the emergency. (Should this be a large-scale emergency that requires a fully operational Joint information Center to be opened, refer to the Central Ohio Public Information Network Crisis Communication and JIC Plan.)

## **PIO Responsibilities**

### **Within the first 30 minutes following notification of an emergency:**

ALL media calls will be routed to the PIO to ensure reporters receive consistent messages. This also will allow other City staff members to respond to the emergency without media interruptions.

### **Within the first hour:**

The PIO, in conjunction with the Crisis Communications Team, will:

- Determine a media strategy
- Designate a spokesperson
- Determine when (or if), where and how frequently media briefings or press conferences will be held.

### **Within the first two hours:**

The PIO will create and distribute an initial media release, providing any information regarding the situation, what is being done and when additional information will be available. All information will also be provided on the City's Web site as soon as possible, and the Web site will be listed as a "go to" source of updated information for the public.

### **As needed:**

In the event of a health emergency, the PIO will work with the Health Commissioner and/or Health District spokesperson and get clearance on all information before releasing it to the public and the media.

In the event of a large-scale emergency, coordinate with other agencies to ensure effective, timely and consistent messages. Coordinate this information through the Joint Information Center should one need to be opened.

Provide necessary background information to those needing it, then monitor media coverage.

Obtain information on response and recovery plans, and understand and convey that information in a timely fashion.

### **Debriefing and Evaluation**

The PIO, recognizing debriefing and evaluation as key components of emergency response and communication, will take part in all “after action” meetings and provide information as part of routine follow-up to any emergency. This will be done in an effort to improve operations in preparation for a future emergency.