

**Hoffman Estates Park District**  
**Section XXIV**

**Crisis Communication**

**Crisis Communication**

A crisis (as it pertains to the Park District) is defined as any event that attracts keen public or media interest. Crisis may include the following: an accident, drowning, allegations of abuse, presentation of a legal action, a criminal act, allegations of official misconduct, etc. For crisis involving weather, fire, floods, hazardous materials, earthquakes, utility emergencies, civil or national disorders, ozone or heat alerts or serious illnesses or injuries, employees should refer to the *Emergency Action Plan*.

Any staff member, who discovers a situation he/she thinks may be a crisis or a potential crisis that would concern the public or media, must contact his/her supervisor who will then contact the head of the crisis team immediately. The head of the crisis team will decide whether to implement the crisis communication plan or simply to monitor and handle the situation carefully. If the head of the crisis team is unavailable, staff members will contact the next individual listed on the crisis team contact sheet who will initiate the crisis communication plan.

**A. Front Line Staff**

1. Administer first aid/CPR if trained to do so.
2. Contact local police and EMS.
3. Minimize further loss (if property related).
4. Contact supervisor and provide him/her with all the details immediately available.
5. Notify employees at the site that an emergency exists.
6. Inform PDRMA (see page 6 for number) so they may conduct a comprehensive accident investigation as soon as possible.
7. Gather the employees involved in order to obtain a full and accurate account of the incident. Fill out the proper incident/accident report careful to document the emergency and the response.
8. Cooperate with local emergency service and police personnel.
9. Continue to compile accurate information as quickly as possible.
10. Do not talk to the media. See Subsection V.

**B. Supervisor Staff**

1. Contact head of crisis team.

**C. Crisis Team Members**

1. Crisis team head contacts crisis team members.
2. Crisis team head contacts Board.

3. Crisis team meets to share information and confirm facts.
4. Interview staff involved.
5. Review the "fast facts" (available in the crisis management folder at each facility) pertinent to this particular crisis.
6. Designate the following: someone to monitor radio and television; someone to clip newspapers; someone to verify the facts obtained thus far.
7. Take immediate, corrective measures.
8. Draft a response statement (should indicate concern for public welfare, sympathy for the victims and a statement of corrective actions).
9. Inform clerical team (including office staff and receptionist of their duties. See Subsection III, part C, #5).
10. Draft a statement and/or press release and distribute to media. (This option may be adopted in lieu of a formal press conference.)
11. Schedule a press conference (if necessary).
12. Spokesperson addresses the media (via press conference, press release or interview).

*Reveal only the verified facts.*

*Do not reveal names of victims.*

*Do not assign blame.*

*Do not speculate.*

*If you do not know an answer, say so, and then find the answer.*

#### D. Action plan for the Crisis Team

The following is a list of questions the crisis team should address immediately. Check as completed:

- Have proper authorities been informed?
- Have the Park District attorneys and Board members been informed?
- PDRMA notified?
- Victim's families notified?
- Crisis been investigated? Possibility of second crisis?
- Damage estimated? Qualitative and Quantitative?
- How will team assure public crisis is under control?
- Has the media been made comfortable?
- Will a press conference be scheduled?  
If so, at 1685 W. Higgins rd in the board room.
- Does spokesperson have updated information and rehearsed possible responses?
- Crisis center will be designated at the TCIA. All files and records will be kept there.
- Have all inaccurate statements reported been balanced or verified by fact?
- Have photos or videotapes been taken or made to document damage?

## E. The Crisis Team and Their Roles

### 1. Chain of Responsibility/Crisis Team Members

All decisions and public/media response will come through a consensus of the crisis members. The Executive Director (and/or his/her designate) will be responsible for making official statements to the press. Note: In the absence of the head of the crisis team, the first available team member will be responsible for implementing the crisis communication plan, you may check off names as contacted.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Executive Director – Spokesman and head of the crisis team
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Administrative Services
- \_\_\_\_\_ Deputy Director
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Recreation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Park District Attorney
- \_\_\_\_\_ PDRMA Representative

### 2. Spokesperson

The primary spokesperson is the Executive Director. In the absence of the Executive Director, the first available team member listed below will be responsible for making official statements to the media on behalf of the crisis team. The spokesperson will be responsible for making official statements to the media on behalf of the crisis team.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Executive Director – Spokesman and head of the crisis team
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Administrative Services
- \_\_\_\_\_ Deputy Director
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Recreation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Park District Attorney
- \_\_\_\_\_ PDRMA Representative

### 3. Roles of the Crisis Team Members and Staff Responsibilities

#### a. Executive Director/Official Spokesperson/Crisis Team Head:

The Executive Director will be responsible for coordinating the Park District's crisis management plan. The Executive Director will also be the voice of the Park District throughout the crisis, but may also request that other employees (including department heads) with specific knowledge of the affected departments speak to the media on occasion. Crisis team

members should provide only the information that has been approved by the spokesperson and the crisis team.

b. Division Directors

The Division Director coordinates and processes incoming information on the crisis. The Division Director is responsible for securing accident/ incident reports and must process and monitor information like witness statements, telephone calls, radio and television reports and investigation reports by the Director of Administrative Services, PDRMA and local authorities. The Division Director is also responsible for securing the following information and presenting it to the crisis team at their initial meeting. The Division Director is also responsible for updating the spokesperson about changes as they occur.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Division Directors will not make any statements or comments about the incident. All comments will issue from the spokesperson or those individuals designated by the spokesperson. Division Directors provide only the information that has been approved by the spokesperson and the crisis team.

- \_\_\_\_\_ What happened? When did it happen?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Who was involved? What is his/her status?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Where did the incident occur?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Why did it happen?
- \_\_\_\_\_ What was the result? What is being done to control or minimize the crisis?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If the answers to the above questions are not available, when will they be?

c. Director Parks, Planning & Maintenance

The Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance will ensure that the crisis management team has access to the necessary buildings, facilities and power sources. Depending upon the crisis, the Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance will coordinate efforts with the Village Public Works Department, the Police Department, Utility Companies, etc.

The Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance will also be responsible for establishing and maintaining the physical aspects of the media center. The media center is a place where the press can monitor the crisis and receive up-to-date information. The Hoffman Estates Park District's media center will be at the Triphahn Center & Ice Arena, 1685 W. Higgins Road, Hoffman Estates IL (Board Room). The Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance will also be responsible for obtaining any audio/visual

equipment including, but not limited to, television, VCR, radio, microphone, etc.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance will not make any statements or comments about the incident. All comments will issue from the spokesperson or those individuals designated by the spokesperson. The Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance should provide only the information that has been approved by the spokesperson and the crisis team.

d. Program Managers and/or Supervisors

Program Managers may be required to assist the Director, spokesperson, Division Directors, crisis team members, public relations manager, Director of Administrative Services or clerical staff. Assignments may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Providing specific information on programs or facilities. Include content, participant population (non-names), enrollment, staff, training, safety measures, etc.
2. Help assemble accurate information so that the crisis team may craft an official response.
3. Contact the news media as directed by the spokesperson or public information coordinator.
4. Obtain information about callers and inquiries.
5. Record and date all statements given to the media.

4. Board Members and Their Role

If a Commissioner is asked about a crisis situation, he/she is encouraged to respond by stating the following: **"The situation is under investigation. The Park District will release appropriate information upon completion of its investigation."** This statement provides the crisis team with time to complete its assessment and formulate its response plan. Please note that Commissioners are encouraged to refer all questions to the designated spokesperson. The Executive Director/Crisis Team Head will consult with and update the President of the Park Board of Commissioners (and other Commissioners) as soon as possible after an incident to assess the situation and inform the Board of the Park District's response.

5. Employee/Commissioners: How to Deal with the Media

During a crisis, all information released to the media and the public will come through the crisis team via the designated Park District spokesperson. Employees who witness the event, responded to the event, or are in some way knowledgeable about the event may be approached by the media.

EMPLOYEES/COMMISSIONERS SHOULD DIRECT ALL INQUIRIES FROM REPORTERS OR OTHER INDIVIDUALS TO THE PARK DISTRICT SPOKESPERSON FOR ACCURATE INFORMATION.

Here are a few guidelines for employee/commissioners who are approached by reporters or other members of the public.

1. You do not have to speak to the press. A good response is as follows:  
**I am not the proper person to answer that question. You may want to discuss that with our official agency spokesperson ( Name of proper person)**
3. It is permissible to express sympathy for any involved individuals, but direct specific questions to a spokesperson.  
**DO NOT SAY, "NO COMMENT."** It tends to imply guilt. Instead say, "**It would be premature to discuss this matter until further investigation is completed**" and then refer the reporter or individual to the Park District spokesperson. Don't joke. Don't say anything you wouldn't want to see in print. Don't make an "off-the-record" statement. The confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

4. Crisis Team Emergency Contact List

In the event of a crisis or emergency, the highest-ranking staff member will contact the following individuals in the order in which they are listed to implement the Crisis Management Plan. Please make note of the date and time each team member was contacted. If you do not receive an answer, move to the next person on the list.

Name

Time / Date

**Craig Talsma**

**Executive Director / Media Spokesperson**

Office: (847) 310-3604; Cell: (847) 561-2200  
4475 Sundance Circle, HE 60169

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**Amy Rivas**

**Director of Administrative Services**

Office: (847) 781-3634; Cell: (630) 945-7032  
ADDRESS

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**Brian Bechtold**

**Deputy Director**

Office: (847) 781-3679; Cell: (847) 722-7652  
7 Richmond Circle, South Elgin 60177

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**Jennifer Sweeney**

**Director of Recreation**

Office: (847) 310-3606; Cell: (847) 997-7068  
ADDRESS

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**Dustin Hugen**  
**Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance**  
Office: (847) 285-5465; Cell: 773-653-9424  
315 S Vail Avenue, Arlington Heights 60005

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**Brett Davis**  
**Executive Director, PDRMA**  
Office: (630) 769-0332

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**Steven Adams**  
**Attorney, Robbins Schwartz**  
Office: (312) 332-7760

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After the crisis team has been contacted and a meeting set up, the crisis team head will call the Board president and the remaining members of the Board.