

# Use a crisis communication program to guide your staff in an emergency.



With today's access to social media and the ability to record events on mobile devices, no one can predict when an incident will go viral or cause a media storm. And when you're scrambling for answers when the media asks questions, you can easily leave the wrong impression. That's why it's wise to prepare for any type of event, and have a crisis communication program in place to help you respond accordingly. Events viewed as newsworthy might include:

- Storm or fire damage to your school bus fleet
- An employee injury on duty
- A bus involved in an accident
- A revealing news story about your staff or procedures

These are all situations that can surface without warning, and developing a crisis communication program can help you handle the media and provide your staff with much needed guidance in emergency situations.

## What's the risk to your business?

A solid reputation is a key ingredient for any successful school bus operation. When events occur that cause damage and injury, your reputation depends on how you react. Having a crisis communication program in place can help educate your employees on how to handle media inquiries, respond to phone calls to your company, and create a smooth process for solving problems quickly.

## Get involved with your community before an incident occurs.

Meeting with your local emergency services groups before any incidents occur will help you establish a strong working relationship with them. During these meetings, you can acquaint the emergency personnel with your equipment, covering features such as the various ways to exit a bus. It's also a way to have your staff meet the emergency personnel and answer any questions they may have.

Another way to be involved locally is to send out press releases to the local newspapers and radio stations highlighting community efforts and involvements, the purchase of new buses, or a new initiative for the environment. By doing this, you can provide local media with a reliable contact and project a positive image.

Establish a relationship with local emergency services groups before any incidents occur.

## Practical advice for creating a communications program.

During a crisis, critical information may be demanded from school district officials, parents, employees, local and national news media, and the local community. To help respond to questioning, some owners and managers use a single sheet of essential information to address the situation at hand. This is called a **crisis communication card**. During a crisis, the media and public will want to know:

- The specific details of the event
- The chronology of events
- Information about policies or procedures in place to mitigate or respond
- Steps being taken to investigate, resolve or recover from the crisis

Important items to include on your crisis communication card are:

- Company hotline numbers
- Contact information for the company spokesperson
- A list of do's and don'ts as reminders for the staff taking calls
- Key facts about the company (e.g., number of employees and buses, names of the districts that the bus company serves)
- Contact list for owners, managers and any staff that may need to be notified of an event
- A standard response for addressing callers' needs so all employees can respond uniformly

## Training employees can help protect your business.

The media may attempt to interview employees other than the designated company spokesperson, so it's important to prepare them to know what to say when approached. Saying "no comment" can often lead media sources to draw their own conclusions, so it's best to have your staff direct any inquiries to the spokesperson. Your management team must appear poised, articulate, confident and professional. And when your staff is trained to be sympathetic and informative, a positive outcome more often results.



Use a crisis communication card to capture essential information.

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