

2020 Joint Coastal Plains/AL Chapters and Florida Section Air and Waste Management Conference Crisis Communications



What You Might Face

- **PFAS/PFOS/PFOA in wastewater and residual**
- Increasing and Expanding Federal and State Regulations
- **Aging Infrastructure and Infrastructure Failures**
- Unexpected shutdowns of critical collection and/or treatment equipment or systems
- **Water quality permit violations or sanitary sewer system overflows (SSOs)**
- Citizen litigation
- **Environmental group challenges to local agency action**
- **Impacts to public health and the environment that capture the public's attention:**
 - ❖ algae blooms
 - ❖ levels of mercury in fish
 - ❖ bacteria issues resulting in beach closures
 - ❖ perception issues associated with land application of biosolids, and safety of recycled water
- Overturned tankers/explosions
- **Environmental disaster in another state/area**



Crisis Communications



- > **When social media lights up.**
- > **When traditional media turns the cameras on you.**
- > **Who we are.**
- > **What we do.**

Legal controversies today are tried in the Court of Public Opinion – as often as in the Court of Law.



The Damage Control Playbook

Rule #1: Tell the truth

Rule #2: Tell it first

Rule #3: Tell it all

Rule #4: Tell it fast

Rule #5: Tell it to the people who matter most

Rule #6: The media's job is not to inform or educate



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The Three Vs

Villain

Victim

Vindicator



NO COMMENT = GUILTY!



GUILTY

What happens when you ARE the villain?



Case Study

PFAS in the City of Blissville

PFAS \neq CRISIS

PFAS = ISSUE

City of Blissville found PFAS in ground water near its production wells. We helped the city conceive and execute a communications program for its water department, which serves more than 400,000 people. Source of PFAS was nearby Fire Training Center who was not being particularly cooperative.

Things to Consider

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Who is going to say it?

What is City going to say?

When is the City going to say it? **Proactive or Reactive?**

- ✓ **Proactive, Vindicator**

- ✓ **Reactive, VILLIAN**

Whom will the City say it to? Identified all key stakeholders.

How is City going to say it? What tools were we going to use?

Five Objectives

1. Reinforce City's history of protecting the water that serves the community, its role as a champion for the environment and an advocate for public health.
2. Demonstrate City's responsiveness, even though it did not create the problem.
3. Put the issue into context for the residents.
4. Education. Education. Education.
5. Ensure the City was the trusted source of information.

Suite of Documents

A	City of Blissville Cease and Desist Email/Letter to Fire Training Ctr
B	Informational Email to Communities that use Blissville water
C	Call-to-Action Email to Community Leaders
D	Press Release
E	City of Blissville Water Customer Email
F	Talking Points for Public Officials
G	City of Blissville Employee Email
H	Talking Points for City Employees
I	Master Q&A
J	Fact Sheet on PFAS
K	Blissville Email to State Representatives
L	Talking points for sit down with reporter

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2020				
TIME	AUDIENCE	METHOD	DOCUMENT (SEE KEY BELOW)	WHO DISTRIBUTES?
afternoon	Fire Training Center CEO	• Email	• A	City Manager
4:00 P.M.	Blissville Daily News	• In-person meeting	• D • A • J	N/A
TBD				
TIME	AUDIENCE	METHOD	DOCUMENT (SEE KEY BELOW)	WHO DISTRIBUTES?
TBD	All City of Blissville employees	Email	• F • G (attach to email)	City Manager
TBD	Local government officials of surrounding cities and counties, who buy their water from Blissville	Email	• B • C (attach to email) • K (attach to email)	City Manager
TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal and state government representatives Blissville officials, relevant boards and commissions The Source Water Protection Group and related groups, as appropriate City, county and state health departments, other appropriate regulatory agencies 	Email Follow-up phone calls, as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L A (attach to email) D (attach to email) I (use to prep for calls) 	City Manager/ Mayor
TBD	Consumers	Email	• E	Director Water
TBD	Media	Email	• D • F (attach to email) • J (attach to email)	Public Affairs
TBD	City Web & Social Media Sites	Post	• D • J	Public Affairs

Guiding Principles

- Be proactive
- Put the story in context
- Be transparent and responsive
- Reinforce appropriate framing through tone
- Humanize your communication
- Craft all communications with the understanding that they will be forwarded to the media
- Use outside resources/3rd party verification

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