



Crisis Communications Plan

Updated 8/29/2022

Introduction

In an emergency or other crisis, effective and timely communication helps to protect life, public safety and property and provide timely guidance to the Louisville community.

Emergency communications are a vital tool during an emergency to preserve the safety and security of the community. This plan outlines the different communication tools available and suggested use of each tool, as well as provides operational guidance for staff.

There is no one tool that will enable the City to fully warn everyone in a timely manner because each system has limitations. It is imperative to utilize multiple tools to effectively broadcast warning messages to the community and as many residents, employees and visitors as possible.

All messages must be accurate, clear and consistent. Within the constraints of the available tools, all messages should be accurate and detailed information about the situation and what actions to take. During the course of the emergency, regular updates to the community are highly advisable.

The media also aids in warning dissemination. To assist in maintaining accuracy of City messages, the media should receive consistent information with the warning messages. The City Manager's Office will ensure that the media has access to updated information throughout the emergency as necessary to ensure the safety of the community, first responders and other support personnel.

Purpose

The Crisis Communications Plan outlines the roles, responsibilities and procedures of key City officials and departments that will guide the City in sharing information promptly and accurately with all audiences during a crisis.

A crisis or emergency is defined as a significant event or incident that disrupts, or has the potential to disrupt, the City's normal activities and operations. This could include a fire, earthquake, severe weather, crime or other event that presents a threat and typically involves a response from police, fire, utilities and/or emergency medical personnel.

This plan is to be flexible and used in conjunction with other emergency decision-making procedures of the City. This plan solely describes the crisis communications roles, responsibilities and procedures that will be followed by the City's Crisis Communications Team and does not address other response and recovery procedures that will likely also be implemented.

Elements of this plan are tested periodically, as well as annually in conjunction with City-wide emergency exercises and drills. All appendices are checked and updated for accuracy and completeness annually.

Objectives

The guiding principles of the Crisis Communications Plan are to communicate incident/event facts as accurately and quickly as possible, updating information regularly as circumstances changes, to ensure the safety of the Louisville community and to continue operation of essential City services. Objectives of the plan include:

- To understand the process for decision-making during an emergency
- To understand communications procedures for events that do not result in the activation of the Emergency Operations Center
- To understand communications procedures for events that result in the activation of the Emergency Operations Center
- To assemble the Crisis Communications Team that will assess, implement and support the appropriate emergency communications from the incident.
- To factually assess the situation and determine whether emergency notification communications are warranted and the requisite urgency of the notification(s).
- Implement immediate actions to:
 - Define the immediate actions needed to inform the community about the situation.
 - Identify all key audiences that need to be notified of the situation.
 - Communicate in an accurate and timely manner about the situation.
 - Monitor all media (broadcast, print, radio, social media, etc.) coverage of the incident/event and manage rumors.
 - Restore a sense of confidence and order.

Decision-Making

The Louisville Chief of Police or their designee will make decisions in regards to alerts/evacuations for the city. If the emergency does not reach the level of Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation, the City will determine appropriate communications for key audiences. If an alert/evacuation is determined to be necessary, Boulder County Dispatch will follow the City's direction from the Police Chief. Dispatch will not make decisions on location, time, messaging and how an alert/evacuation is determined. Alerts will be sent via Everbridge (reverse call/text to landlines and cell phones that are registered by the owner) and IPAWs by Boulder County (reverse call/text to all individuals within a specific geographic area – registration is not required).

Crisis Communications Team

Any member of the Crisis Communications Team (CCT) may activate this plan in order to begin the initial group assessment of the incident/event. Each time the plan is activated, the CCT member whose department has the lead response role is responsible for notifying the appropriate members of the City's senior leadership of the status of the incident and provide ongoing status reports.

Given the urgency of communicating critical information to the community and the media, the CCT will be convened as quickly as possible. Based on the timing, location and severity of the

incident, this may occur either in person or virtually through a conference call. The initiator of the conference call will determine when a sufficient number of the team members have joined the call before discussions begin. A log will be maintained to record the proceedings and activities of each call.

The CCT is comprised of employees from several City departments. These individuals play a critical role in communicating information about the crisis. The CCT will develop and regularly update a list of key team members and their 24/7 contact information. Each department must have a minimum of two designated and trained individuals to ensure adequate 24/7 coverage. This confidential contact information will be maintained as part of the notification procedures.

Response

Implementation

The CCT will implement some or all of the steps outlined below based on the circumstances, coordinating with all key personnel. Throughout a crisis, the team will meet frequently to review changing facts, assess whether key messages are reaching audiences and determine whether strategies need to change.

Immediate Response

Based on the available crisis information and after conducting a situation assessment, the CCT will determine what, if any, public messaging should be sent out. Messaging may address:

- What happened?
- To who did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- How did it happen?
- Is there an immediate call to action to communicate?

Communication tools to disseminate messaging include:

- Mass notification system (Everbridge – managed by Boulder County)
- Wireless emergency alerts (IPAWS – managed by Boulder County)
- City's website (news item/eNotification/emergency banner)
- City staff notification (AlertMedia)
- Social media (Facebook/Twitter/Next Door)
- Channel 8 – government access channel
- Press release/conference

Notifying Key Audiences

The CCT will determine which groups need to be informed first. It is important to keep in mind that people will seek and trust other sources of information (news reports, social media, word of mouth, etc.) in the absence of official communication. Effective communication will help quell rumors, maintain trust and ensure public safety. Key audiences include:

- Residents
- Employees
- Visitors

- Students
- Parents
- City/regional leaders
- News media
- State/federal officials

Determine Spokesperson(s)

This can either be the Public Information Officer (PIO), their designated alternate, a senior leader of the City or member of the CCT who has knowledge of the crisis and has been assigned to provide key messages and emerging facts to the public/media. The individuals selected will manage briefings, media questions and formal press gatherings.

Developing a Fact Sheet

As soon as possible after the incident, a fact sheet will be prepared to supplement communication with key audiences and information provided to the media by the spokesperson. It will be approved by senior leadership and checked for accuracy by those with a direct knowledge of the crisis.

Alerting the Media

The spokesperson will determine the best approach for coordinating with news media. A news media briefing center may be opened to coordinate the information flow and assure that the correct people are involved in collecting and disseminating information. Consideration will be given to appropriate media staging locations that can accommodate vehicles such as satellite trucks. Communication with the media must occur frequently as new information is known.

Monitor Traditional and Social Media

To anticipate any problems in the way information is flowing to the news media and to social media, the CCT will have members monitor media and provide a listening reports if the incident is anticipated to be of longer duration than a normal working day. Additional resources may be needed to assist in monitoring of media by request.

Approval of Outgoing Information

Typically the CCT should use a collegial approach of multiple approvals before distributing communications, including emails and press releases. That system may not work in a crisis. The City is committed to trying to meet these expectations. It recognizes the need for unusually fast decision-making during a crisis to enable rapid, accurate communication. Final approval of all communications rests with the spokesperson.

Activation of Emergency Operations Center

If an emergency reaches the level of Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation by the Boulder Office of Disaster Management (BODM), additional coordination with partner agencies will be required. The spokesperson should contact the **Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15 desk at the EOC by calling 720-564-2972 (this number should not be shared publically)**. Please keep in mind that emergency alerts will likely be going out quickly and the phone line may not be initially answered. If this happens, the spokesperson should work with Police/Fire to determine the best point of contact at the EOC.

The spokesperson should coordinate with the ESF 15 desk on any content or messaging that the City wants pushed out on the BODM website (<https://www.boulderoem.com/>). ESF 15 will post evacuation polygons once issued by Dispatch, which are requested and authorized by the Police Chief. Alerts and warnings will be coordinated among multiple jurisdictions with the Police Chief and other incident commanders involved in the alerting process. As Dispatch issues evacuation orders, the alert is automatically posted on the BODM website.

The City is responsible for communicating alerts and warnings via its own channels. Once stood up, ESF 15 will post evacuation orders on the BODM website and social media platforms as time/staffing allows. PIOs from affected cities and towns need to call into the ESF 15 desk and make contact with staff to determine coordination needs.

The EOC may establish a Joint Information System to provide a mechanism to organize, integrate and coordinate information to ensure timely, accurate, accessible and consistent messaging across multiple jurisdictions and/or disciplines with nongovernmental organizations and the private sector.

Joint Information System

The Joint Information System (JIS) incorporates PIOs from multiple agencies. This structure is sustainable because recovery will be a long commitment in duration and require integrating public information activities to ensure coordinated and consistent message development, verification and dissemination.

PIOs may be asked to identify key information that needs to be communicated to the public, craft messaging, prioritize communications to ensure timely delivery of information, verify accuracy of information, vet public messages, coordinate releases and schedule and coordinate all media activities. Members of the JIS may include Boulder County, the Boulder Office of Disaster Management, State of Colorado, FEMA and neighboring jurisdictions.

Public messaging that involves other agencies or jurisdictions should be shared with the JIS and approved by all members before issuing. Likewise, communications from other partners should be shared with the City and approved before being issued.

The lead coordinator of the JIS is the Boulder County Recovery PIO. Any questions or concerns should be directed to this point of contact.

End of Crisis

When an incident has ended, the CCT will provide an “All Clear” message to the key audiences and routine communications processes can resume.

Within one week of the crisis, the spokesperson will convene the CCT for a formal review of lessons learned and suggested improvements. This discussion will result in the City developing a formal after-action report that can be shared with the CCT and other senior leadership as necessary.

Education and Plan Maintenance

It is the responsibility of the CCT to provide education to the Louisville community about how and when they will get messages in an emergency. The procedure may be similar to those used to educate the community in emergency preparedness and other safety protocols.

This plan shall be updated at least annually. The PIO will update this plan and conduct a review by the CCT. The PIO will also oversee updates to the contact information for the CCT.