

## **Southeast Michigan Community Alliance Crisis Communication Plan**

It is not uncommon for a company large or small to find themselves undergoing image repair as a result of a crisis. A crisis is typically unexpected disasters, emergencies or other unusual events that usually happens when you least expect it. But, with proper preparation and planning, a company can sustain their credibility with the media and its publics as well as avoid further embarrassment.

In order for a crisis communication plan to work, management, staff and SEMCA providers should be familiar with this process and implementation if a crisis arises. In addition, these procedures should be revisited when changes occur.

Management and staff are required to follow these guidelines should a crisis arise. In addition, providers are required to follow these guidelines in the event a crisis happens involving a program funded by SEMCA. As a result, SEMCA and its providers will be able to maintain a positive image in the community and a working relationship with the media.

### **Preparing for a Crisis:**

It is important to be familiar with the following elements of SEMCA's communication plan in the event of an unforeseen crisis or one that develops over time. It is also important that the crisis communication team analyzes the problem and knows the facts before responding to any inquiries.

**SEMCA's Crisis Communication Team** consists of the Chief Executive Officer (primary spokesperson in the event of a crisis), Chief Operating Officer (second spokesperson if director is not available) and public relations specialist (multimedia administrator, secondary). All players should know their role when a crisis does occur. *It may be necessary for SEMCA's lawyer and/or financial manager to provide counsel in the event of a crisis.*

### **Michigan Works! Crisis Example:**

**Scenario:** Disgruntled customer at Michigan Works! Service Center opens fire after he has an altercation with center employee and instantly leaves the scene. Two customers are shot. The media knows what happened and they notify staff they are on their way. Service Center Staff calls SEMCA public relations who notify SEMCA's Chief Executive Officer immediately.

**What's NEXT:** Given the center director has notified the police and emergency services → Center director contacts SEMCA public relations → public relations specialist notifies SEMCA Chief Executive Officer and work force development manager → PR specialist works with Chief Executive Officer to develop a statement → Chief Executive Officer

will use prepared statement in all interviews → release with prepared statement AND FACTS is distributed to the media → if the crisis calls for a press event, the PR specialist will communicate this to the media.

\*\*\*All media calls should be directed to SEMCA's public relations specialist ASAP\*\*\*  
Always REFRAIN from saying: "I can't comment" or "No comment." This statement implies that the organization is guilty of something.

### **Prepared statement example:**

*(Briefly state how the injured customers/families are doing if known)... SEMCA and name of service center/provider's top priority is keeping our customers safe while continuing to provide services... We are working with investigators and will continue to keep the community informed of our progress.*

### **How to handle a Crisis:**

- **COMMUNICATION** - Convey to employees the issues surrounding the crisis. By being upfront at the onset of a crisis, employees will be at ease to not start rumors. This will encourage employees to feel comfortable by keeping them informed throughout the entire process. In addition, initial communication will reassure to employees that the company has their best interest in mind.
- **INFORM THE MEDIA:** Inform the media by stating the facts. Prepare a statement to the media to address the public's concerns about the issue. One spokesperson of higher ranking should handle all media inquires so messages will be conveyed accurately.
- **REINFORCEMENT:** Notify the shareholders i.e. board members, provider that maybe associated with the crisis that the company is being proactive by admitting to responsibility and carrying out their crisis communication plan.
- **UPDATE:** Continue to educate employees, media, customers and shareholders about the facts surrounding the crisis by sharing recent findings, accepting blame and reassuring them that the organization is doing everything to rectify the problem.

### **Tips and Techniques (source Public Relations Society of America)**

- Give the media as much information as possible; they'll get the information (perhaps inaccurately) from other sources.
- Don't speculate. If you do not know the facts say so and promise to get back with the media as soon as possible. Then make sure you keep your promise.

- Protect the integrity and reputation of the organization.
- Report your own bad news. Do not allow another source to inform the media first.
- Develop policies to minimize crisis situations – Try to anticipate potential emergency situations and develop policies to avoid them. In many crisis situations, you will be asked by the media what policies you have on that particular situation.
- Do not say anything “off the record”. Do not respond with “I can’t comment” or “No comment.” This statement implies that the organization is guilty of something. Instead you should say “SEMCA’s Chief Executive Officer will be making a statement shortly.”