

# JOHN C. SCHMIDT

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75 ALVIN SLOAN AVENUE • WASHINGTON, NJ 07882

973-632-8214 • [wordschmidt@msn.com](mailto:wordschmidt@msn.com) • [linkedin.com/in/wordschmidt](https://www.linkedin.com/in/wordschmidt)

## 2024 PENNSYLVANIA BUILDING OFFICIALS CONFERENCE Crisis Preparation/Management – Best Practices

Being prepared for a potential crisis is an important first step towards being able to mitigate risks and protect your and your municipality's reputation. In order to be prepared:

- Have a team of critical personnel with specific roles that can be mobilized and allowed to focus on the situation.
- Draft communications plans, key messages, and Q&A for any situations that can be anticipated.
- Conduct regular training sessions and crisis communications drills based on varying events to ensure everyone on the team knows her/his role.
- Identify and train spokespeople who will serve as the face of the municipality.
- Communicate information about crisis communications preparation to employees, letting them know that in the event something occurs, it's important not to post information on social media or speak to the press unless they are instructed to do so.

### Crisis Response Team

- Team leader/point person
- Mayor/designated elected official
- Municipal administrator/manager
- Municipal attorney
- Emergency management director
- Police/fire/EMS chiefs
- Public health director
- Public works director
- Functional specialists, such as HR, communications, social media, IT, and administrative support

### Crisis Response Center

- Dedicated inbound lines
- Wi-Fi
- Cell/landline phones
- Backup generator
- Computers/laptops
- Printers/printer paper
- Flip charts/white boards
- Stationery
- Pens/pencils
- Table/chairs
- Batteries
- Television
- Radio
- Catering services

## Crisis Communications Plans

- **Situation analysis** - What happened, who/how many it affected, what is happening as a result, who responded, how it's being addressed, updated as needed.
- **Goal** - Broad, long-term outcome (focus on municipal reputation).
- **Target audiences** - Those who are impacted and/or who need to be informed (start with those who are most affected).
- **Objectives** - Measurable results designed to achieve the goal (e.g., transparent and timely response).
- **Strategy** - How the plan will be implemented with continuous updates.
- **Tactics** - Detailed communications (best way to communicate with those who are most affected), plus statements to traditional and social media (date/time stamp), and targeted traditional and social media outlets.
- **Key Messages** - The information that needs to be communicated (lives and safety are highest priorities).
- **Team** - Crisis response team.
- **Timetable** - Might present moving target.
- **Evaluation** - Factual reporting on situation; positive reporting on response.

## Crisis Training and Drills

- Provide an overview of the crisis scenario, discuss important factors, walk through different response scenarios, and practice developing messaging.
- Can be used to assess:
  - the plan and process used to respond to the crisis, and,
  - the participants and their ability to follow the plan and respond to the event.
- When conducting a drill:
  - utilize a facilitator when possible,
  - develop a realistic scenario,
  - build a timeline and list of events,
  - focus on strategy, not tactics,
  - adapt if team moves in an unexpected direction, and,
  - document and review results.

## Using a Spokesperson During a Crisis

- Select the most appropriate person for the situation, someone who is:
  - at ease in front of a camera or microphone,
  - personable and likeable,
  - able to build confidence and trust by demonstrating empathy, gravitas, knowledge, and reassurance,
  - knowledgeable about the facts, understands the Q&A, and owns the messaging, and,
  - strong enough to handle hostile questioning.
- Provide the spokesperson with:
  - up-to-the-minute updates on the situation,
  - key messages that need to be conveyed, and,
  - the Q&A document, including questions that can't/shouldn't be answered, and information about the media and/or audience.

## **Q&A Documents**

- Ask and answer the tough questions:
  - What happened?
  - When/where/why/how did it happen?
  - How many people were affected?
  - What was the cause of the incident?
  - Does this incident still pose a threat to the public?
  - How is it being addressed?
  - Has this ever happened before?
  - Could this have been prevented?
  - What precautions are typically in place to prevent something like this?
  - What preventative measures will be implemented now?
  - When is the situation expected to return to normal?
- Be transparent and truthful.
- If answers are not yet known or available, the best response is “that’s still under investigation,” or “we still don’t have the answer to that.”
- Always get back to the reporter once the information is known.

## **In the Event of A Crisis: The Crisis Response Checklist**

- Mobilize the crisis response team
- Establish a command center
- Identify key audiences for communications
- Draft incident and communications plans
- Create the Q&A document
- Draft and review all communications
- Develop the media list
- Set up protocol for media inquiries
- Prepare spokesperson(s)

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