

Radio and Television News Directors Foundation

50 Questions You Need To Ask When Preparing Crisis Coverage

Planning

1. Is a crisis coverage plan needed for this station in this market?
2. Should an existing plan be updated in view of 2001 developments?
3. Are there clear lines of emergency authority in the station and newsroom?
4. Has a clear plan been circulated in writing and discussed with employees?
5. Are any crisis coverage procedures worth rehearsing?
6. What are the first steps expected in a crisis coverage situation?
7. What is next in planning for extended coverage?
8. Should supervisors be placed in the field in hazardous situations?
9. Are journalistic policies clear for hostage situations, acts of violence, terrorism, health emergencies and other crisis?

Communications

10. Is the station's phone system up to a crisis situation?
11. Are there enough cell phones for reporters, crews and managers?
12. Can all senior managers and personnel be reached at all times?
13. If phone systems go down, what is the option?
14. What role could two-way radios or quick-buy "radio store" equipment play?
15. Can scanner information be updated to include special operations channels for police, fire and EMS, civil defense, military and health?
16. Are new crisis coverage microwave and satellite truck field surveys needed?

Special Equipment/Computers

17. Where can specialized road vehicles be rented in an emergency?
18. Where can specialized clothing and gear be quickly obtained to cope with hazardous materials or other special needs?
19. What is the station's access to helicopters, airplanes and boats?
20. What are the options if the newsroom and/or master control computers go out?
21. Should the station arrange for off-premises computer backup for all computers including news, routing, sales and personnel?
22. Are there up-to-date building directories, and crisscross phone directories and area maps for communities in the market?

Health/Hospitals/Medical

23. Do the strongest lines of communications exist with area hospitals? Would they cooperate with information and allow broadcasting from their facility if necessary?
24. Does the station have access to health professionals who can contribute to broadcasts in health and medical emergencies?
25. Do you have a plan and medical personnel to provide stress management to the staff, or immunization and other medical help that may not be available in a crisis?

Station

26. How quickly can the station mobilize and actually get on the air?
27. Should plans for station evacuation routes and procedures, and alternative power and transmission be updated?
28. Should there be arrangements for sleeping and feeding staff members and guests at the station, or at hotels and restaurants near the station, if dictated by the crisis?
29. Is an alternative newsroom site possible if the station was no longer accessible?
30. How are staffers notified in an emergency? What is a backup plan?
31. Is broadcasting possible if the normal ability to transmit is lost?
32. Is partnering possible? With cable? Local PBS station? Nearby sister station? Competitor? Radio station? Newspaper? A private home or business?
33. Should there be practical meetings with other stations on pooling of coverage, resources and possible joint broadcasting in a severe local or national crisis?
34. What is the plan if the network can no longer feed the station?

Personnel/Security

35. Are employee security identification cards adequate, with ID photos?
36. Is more station and newsroom security personnel needed 24/7?
37. Should gear be sent home with crews (including microwave trucks with editing)?
38. Should the station create a crisis task force cutting across all station functions?
39. Is the staff address list up to date with home and cell phone numbers and addresses and those with home video cameras, and are these plotted on a map?
40. Are the arrangements clear about contacting people on days off and vacations?
41. What is the plan for supplying and feeding remote crews and relieving them, and for creating a system of platoon staffing?
42. Should non-newsroom station personnel be used to augment the newsroom staff in crisis situations?

Contacts

43. What police, fire and EMS phone numbers and scanner frequencies are needed beyond the normal, everyday ones?
44. What additional federal law enforcement contacts are needed?
45. How can the station improve contact with local government command centers, health officials and National Guard officials?
46. Are hurricane, flooding, snow, and hot weather contacts and resources updated?
47. Are traffic report arrangements adequate in a crisis and what is the backup?
48. Can the station improve plane crash, train crash, bus crash coverage preparedness?
49. Are local university, foundation or government resources available in providing experts on health, geography, language, law, or other appropriate subjects?
50. What can we learn from the crisis experiences of Oklahoma City and New York City television stations, and KJBR-TV in Duluth, MN, which burned down?

This information is provided to you by

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For other suggestions, visit the web sites of the following organizations: Columbia Journalism Review (www.cjr.org), The Poynter Institute (www.poynter.org), or NewsLab (www.newslab.org).