

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MINING & RESOURCES ORGANISATIONS

When Something Goes Wrong: The Crisis Communications Playbook.

A step-by-step guide to protecting your organisation in the first 24 hours after an incident.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- The 24-hour response timeline
- Who says what and to whom
- Pre-written statement templates you can adapt today
- The 8 mistakes that turn incidents into disasters
- A readiness self-assessment for your organisation

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WHY COMMUNICATIONS FAILS IN A CRISIS

Most mining companies have a safety plan. Almost none have a communications plan.

When an incident hits, most organisations discover their communications gap at the worst possible moment. A site manager with a journalist on the phone. A regulator requesting a statement by 5pm. Social media running ahead of any official response. The damage that follows is rarely from the incident itself. It is from what was said, who said it, and how long it took.

No plan on file

When an incident happens, no one knows who is authorised to speak, what to say, or who to call first. Every decision is made under pressure with no framework.

Wrong spokesperson

A site manager or junior employee becomes the face of the organisation. Their unguarded response becomes the headline. The damage is immediate and lasting.

Too slow to respond

The media and social media fill the information vacuum. By the time an official statement is issued, the narrative has already been set by others.

The truth about crisis communications

- **The first 24 hours are everything.**

Research consistently shows that how an organisation communicates in the immediate aftermath of an incident determines long-term reputational outcome. Not the incident itself.

- **Silence is a statement.**

Every hour without a response is interpreted as evasion, indifference or guilt. You do not need all the answers to communicate. You need a holding statement and a process.

- **Preparation takes hours. Improvisation costs millions.**

A crisis communications plan takes one to two days to build properly. The cost of not having one can be regulatory action, project delays, lost contracts and community opposition that runs for years.

THE 24-HOUR RESPONSE TIMELINE

What to do, and when.

Time is your most critical resource in a crisis. This timeline assumes the incident has just occurred. Every minute without a structured response is a minute the narrative is being written by someone else.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| 0-15 min | Confirm and contain Verify the facts internally. Do not speculate. Activate your crisis team. Identify who is speaking and who is not. No one speaks to media, regulators or community until a spokesperson is confirmed. |
| 15-60 min | Issue a holding statement You do not need all the answers. Issue a short statement confirming you are aware of the situation, that safety is the priority, and that a full update will follow. This stops the vacuum filling with speculation. |
| 1-3 hrs | Notify key stakeholders directly Call your regulator before they call you. Brief your board or leadership team. Notify any directly affected community members. Direct, personal contact before a public statement prevents the perception of evasion. |
| 3-6 hrs | Prepare a full media statement Issue a detailed statement with known facts, actions taken, and next steps. Identify your spokesperson and brief them. Avoid speculation on cause or liability. Stick to what you know. |
| 6-12 hrs | Monitor and respond Track media coverage and social media. Correct factual errors directly and promptly. Brief your workforce. Internal silence breeds rumour. Prepare for follow-up media enquiries with a Q&A document. |
| 12-24 hrs | Ongoing stakeholder management Provide a formal update to regulators. Continue direct stakeholder communications. Begin documenting for any investigation or inquiry. Review your communications response for gaps and correct them. |

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS MATRIX

Who says what, and to whom.

Different audiences need different information delivered through different channels. Getting this wrong causes as much damage as the incident itself. Use this matrix to plan your stakeholder communications before an incident happens.

| | |
|---|---|
| Regulator / Dept of Mines Direct phone call | Within 1 hour Known facts, actions taken, full cooperation. |
| Board and Leadership Phone or secure message | Within 30 minutes Full brief, decisions required, spokesperson confirmed. |
| Media Written statement | Within 1 hour Known facts only. Safety is the priority. Full update to follow. |
| Workforce and Contractors Site briefing and email | Within 2 hours What happened, what is being done, do not speak to media. |
| Affected community Direct personal call | Within 3 hours Impact acknowledged, actions taken, direct contact provided. |
| Investors and joint venture partners Direct call or briefing note | Within 4 hours Situation overview, actions taken, next steps only. |
| General public and social media Approved public statement | After media statement Approved statement only. No staff or contractor comments. |

Spokesperson rules

- One spokesperson per audience. Mixed messages destroy credibility.
- Match seniority to the audience. The CEO speaks to investors. Not the site manager.
- Brief your spokesperson before every interaction. Five minutes prevents a career-defining mistake.
- Never speculate on cause or liability until investigations are complete.

PRE-WRITTEN STATEMENT TEMPLATES

Words you can use today.

These templates are starting points. Adapt them to your organisation, your incident type and your stakeholders. The most important principle: say something accurate and early, rather than something comprehensive and late. Fields in [brackets] are to be completed with your specific details.

TEMPLATE 1

Holding Statement (within 60 minutes)

[Organisation name] is aware of an incident that occurred at [location] at approximately [time] on [date]. The safety of our people and the community is our first priority. We are currently assessing the situation and working with relevant authorities. We will provide a full update as soon as further information is confirmed. Media enquiries: [spokesperson name], [contact number].

TEMPLATE 2

Full Media Statement (within 6 hours)

[Organisation name] can confirm that [brief factual description of incident] occurred at [location] at [time] on [date]. [Number] persons were [description of impact, if applicable]. [Emergency services / relevant authorities] attended and [current status]. We are cooperating fully with [regulator / investigation authority]. Actions taken to date include: [list actions taken]. The wellbeing of [affected parties] remains our absolute priority. We will not speculate on cause at this time. A further update will be issued at [time]. For further information: [spokesperson name and contact].

TEMPLATE 3

Workforce / Internal Communication

To all [organisation] team members: I want to update you directly on the incident at [location] today. [One or two sentences of confirmed facts.] Our immediate priority is [safety / supporting those affected / restoring operations]. I ask that you direct all media enquiries to [spokesperson name] at [contact]. Please do not comment to media or on social media on behalf of the organisation. I will provide further updates as the situation develops. [Name, Title].

8 MISTAKES THAT TURN INCIDENTS INTO DISASTERS

What goes wrong when you improvise.

These are not hypothetical. They are the patterns that appear in almost every poorly managed corporate crisis. Each one is avoidable with preparation.

1

Waiting until you have all the facts before communicating

You never have all the facts in the first hour. Silence is interpreted as evasion. Issue a holding statement with what you know.

2

Sending the wrong person to speak to media

An untrained spokesperson under pressure will go off-script. Media training is not about polish. It is about message discipline when the questions are hostile.

3

Speculating on cause before investigations are complete

One sentence guessing at the cause of an incident can define your legal position for years. Confirm facts only. Reserve cause for the investigation.

4

Treating social media as a secondary channel

Social media is the first place most people will hear about your incident. Ignoring it does not mean it is not happening. You need a presence in that conversation.

5

Communicating differently to different audiences

If your media statement contradicts your community statement, journalists will find it. Every external communication must be consistent. Brief all spokespersons from the same document.

6

Allowing employees to speak to media without authorisation

A single unguarded comment from a contractor or site worker becomes the quote that defines the story. Your internal comms must be faster than the journalists at the gate.

7

Going quiet after the initial statement

One statement and then silence signals the situation is worse than reported. Commit to regular updates. Even "no change to report" is a statement worth making.

8

Failing to call the regulator before they call you

Proactive contact with your regulator signals transparency and cooperation. Waiting for their call signals the opposite. Call them within the first hour regardless of whether notification is strictly required.

CRISIS READINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

How prepared is your organisation?

Answer each question honestly. There are no trick questions. The gaps you find here are the gaps that will cost you when something goes wrong.

- | | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|---------|
| 1. | Do you have a documented crisis communications plan? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 2. | Have you identified and briefed your media spokesperson in the last 12 months? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 3. | Do you have pre-approved holding statements ready to issue within 60 minutes of an incident? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 4. | Do you have a current stakeholder contact list that includes your regulator, board members, and key community contacts? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 5. | Does your workforce know what to do if approached by media? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 6. | Have you reviewed your online reputation in the last six months? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 7. | Do you have a defined process for monitoring media and social media during an incident? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |
| 8. | Have you tested your crisis response plan with a scenario exercise in the last 12 months? | YES | NO | PARTIAL |

How to interpret your results

7-8 YES

Strong foundation. Review your plan annually and run a scenario exercise to keep it current.

4-6 YES

Significant gaps. A crisis today would cost considerably more than preparation would.

0-3 YES

High risk. You are one incident away from a reputational event you cannot control.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If this guide revealed gaps, here is how to close them.

You do not need to address everything at once. Start with the highest-risk gaps and build from there. The organisations that come out of crises well are not the ones that had none. They are the ones that were prepared.

1

Build a crisis communications plan

Document your incident types, spokesperson assignments, escalation process, approved messaging and stakeholder contact list. This is a one-off investment that protects you indefinitely.

2

Train your spokespeople

Media training is not polish. It is message discipline under pressure. At minimum, your CEO and site manager should have done a formal media training session in the last 12 months.

3

Audit your online reputation

Search your company name. Read the first two pages of results. Understand what a journalist, regulator or investor finds before they engage with you. Then act on what you find.

4

Run a crisis scenario exercise

A tabletop exercise takes two hours and reveals more gaps than a plan review ever will. Walk your leadership team through a realistic scenario and identify where the process breaks down.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Hype Machine

This guide was written by the team at Hype Machine, a PR agency based in Mackay, Central Queensland. Our principal holds a Bachelor of Journalism and has worked in communications and public relations across the resources sector. We understand how the media covers mining incidents, how regulators respond, and what organisations in this industry need to do to protect their reputation when it matters most.

Ready to build your crisis communications plan?

Talk to Hype Machine. We work with mining operators, contractors and resource sector businesses across Queensland and Australia.

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