



Communication and media handling during a crisis

When a crisis strikes, the way you communicate can make all the difference, determining whether the situation spirals out of control or whether it builds trust and credibility. So, how can we ensure effective communication when accidents occur?

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When faced with a crisis, communication is not just a tool, it's a lifeline. Whether the situation involves a maritime casualty, a cyber security breach, or a challenge to corporate integrity, managing your stakeholders - including the media and the wider public - should be an essential part of the overall response.

As the world's largest marine insurer, Gard handles more maritime claims than anyone else in our industry. Some 16,000 to 18,000 claims annually, to be more precise. Most of them do not attract public attention, of course, but those that do can potentially impact not only the claims handling process but also the broader reputation of those involved. Poor communication can trigger anger, delay processes and escalate costs, whereas clear messaging can help to mitigate harm and build trust. At the end of the day, crisis communication is all about sharing key information while showing care and accountability for the impact of the incident. A proactive approach is critical to achieving that goal.

Preparation is key

The time to create a crisis communications plan is not *after* disaster strikes, but well in advance. If you don't already have a communications plan in place – or lack the internal resources to develop one – consider seeking external support. Several PR consultants specialise in shipping and the maritime industries, and ideally, the relationship with such consultants should be built in 'peace time' – not in the middle of a crisis.

At Gard, we have our own in-house communications team, and we also collaborate with external service providers when needed. However, we do recommend that Members and clients seek their own independent PR advice.

Acknowledge the situation

In a crisis, setting the right tone and establishing credibility early on is important – shying away from the situation is rarely a good idea. The media will often expect frequent updates after a major incident, and delays can easily lead to speculation or misinformation. Issuing an early statement, even if it is just a brief one, helps to acknowledge the situation, express empathy for those affected, and you can signal that more information will follow when available.

Stick to the facts

If the incident has a wider impact, media interest is likely to be high for some time. Regular press briefings or frequent updates will help to maintain a good flow of information and prevent speculation. Resist the temptation to speculate about possible causes or potential outcomes. Instead, focus on the verified facts. Messaging should be factual, consistent and clear, and it should be repeated across different channels to reduce any confusion or speculation. Be clear on what you can and cannot share, and if possible, point journalists in the direction of impartial sources and topic experts.

Ideally, all statements should be channelled through a trained spokesperson to maintain consistency and prevent mixed messages. This also helps to reduce the 'noise' and disturbance for other key personnel who need to have their focus elsewhere during the crisis.

Related reading: [Stepping up to the mic: how to prepare for a crisis press conference - Navigate Response](#)

Show compassion

Expressing empathy is equally important. Acknowledge the impact on those affected, and provide clear updates on response efforts, such as search and rescue operations, collaboration with authorities, and the actions implemented to minimise harm.

Recognise the challenges faced by those involved as well as your company. Admitting the rarity and complexity of the situation can also help to 'humanise' your organisation and strengthen trust and understanding.

Crew and social media

In a maritime casualty, the crew and their families are among the most important stakeholders. Make sure that they get timely, clear, and empathetic information before anything is released to the press. Many communication agencies will have specific training and support for communicating with crew and their next of kin during a crisis.

Responsible use of social media is also a whole topic of its own, and in a high-severity incident, monitoring and managing these channels well will be essential to prevent or minimise misinformation. Keep a close eye on both editorial and social media for any false claims, and if possible, respond swiftly with factual updates to correct the narrative.

Finally, the media is not an ‘adversary’ to be shied away from when dealing with a maritime casualty. On the contrary, engaging proactively with journalists is likely to be beneficial if done correctly, helping to shed light on key issues and putting pressure on parties whose actions may help to mitigate the consequences.

Get support

In sum, handling the media during a crisis requires preparation and resources. It can be challenging, but asking for help goes a long way. Good crisis communication can help reduce losses, protect your reputation and enhance trust with key stakeholders.

At Gard, we offer a wide range of drills and training programs, including emergency response drills, tabletop exercises and various scenario rehearsals for our customers. For further information, explore Gard’s [Loss Prevention Services](#) and [our Crisis Response support](#) , all designed to help shipowners and operators prepare for and manage incidents and casualties as effectively as possible.

When it comes PR and media handling expertise, [MTI Network](#) and [Navigate Response](#) are among the firms specialising in shipping and the maritime industries. There are also other service providers operating at a national, regional or global level, offering tailored support for their clients.

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