CRISIS MANAGEMENT
A PRE-PLAN IN ACTION
Drew Leemon
Risk Management Director
drew_leemon@nols.edu

Katie Baum Mettenbrink
Risk Services Manager
kbm@nols.edu

www.nols.edu
OVERVIEW OF NOLS CRISIS RESPONSE AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SCENARIO

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE

FORUM FOR DISCUSSION
DEFINITIONS

- **Crisis**: An event that is, or has potential to be, a turning point in the organization. A crisis may overwhelm the organization’s available staff and resources and impact its ability to operate.

- **Emergency**: An event that may require urgent response but is within the scope of the organization’s resources and does not threaten its ability to operate.
NOLS CRISIS CASES

1989: Fatality, Wyoming, mountaineering
1992: Fatality, Wyoming, avalanche
1996: Fatality, Wyoming, river crossing
1999: Fatality, Alaska, glacier travel
2011: Multiple injury incident, Alaska, bear attack
2011: Fatality, India, backpacking
2018: Cardiac arrest, Wyoming, WEMT
CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL

1. Provides guidance for your response and management
   • Many things happen at once

2. Prioritize tasks and actions, and deploy resources

3. Pre-determine certain actions and decisions
**NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC**

**Incident and Field Response**
- Administration Notified
  - Incident Director
  - Incident Leader/Field Support
    - Continuity Manager
      - Maintain day-to-day operations & business continuity
    - Documentation Manager
      - Manage response log, collect field documents, maps, etc
    - Field Manager
      - Communicate with people on the scene
    - Evacuation Manager
      - Arrange evacuation/field support

**Family Relations**
- Notify Family
  - Family Support
  - Internal
    - Staff
    - Trustees
    - Other Families
  - External
    - Media
    - Associates
    - Partners
    - Clients

**Communications**
- Internal Review
- External Review
  - Gather facts & evidence
  - Facilitate review
  - Write, vet, finalize, & release report(s)

**Investigation**
- Internal Review
- External Review

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AN INCIDENT OCCURS

DAY ONE

- 6:30 PM, Friday, July 28
- The on-call emergency contact person receives an emergency satellite phone call from an instructor stating there has been a fatality on ABW 7/2 and she provides latitude and longitude coordinates.
- The connection is poor and suddenly cut off.

What happens next?

What are the immediate first actions to take?
LEADERSHIP

INCIDENT DIRECTOR & LEADER

- Organize team structure
- Establish objectives and priorities
- Communicate among teams
- Develop contingencies
- Make/facilitate decisions
- Determine course continuation options
- Assemble personnel resources
- Assign roles and responsibilities
- Plan for long duration response
- Knowledge of law enforcement, SAR, investigation requirements
- Knowledge of land agency requirements
AN INCIDENT OCCURS

All we know is:

- Which group it is
- Their location
  12 miles in wilderness in a river valley
- Immediate questions include:
  - Is the situation stable?
  - Who is the deceased?
  - What happened?
  - What support is needed?
  - How will we communicate?

What are your next steps?
NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC

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Family Relations

Communications

Investigation

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FIELD OPERATIONS

What we did:

- Established satellite phone contact

We learn:

- Her name
- She died that morning during a river crossing
- She was a member of a five person hiking group
- Everyone else is OK
- The group is now camped near the body
- A runner party left earlier for a road head 12 miles away
- Want to end the course early
FIELD OPERATIONS

What we did:

- Support
  - Began arrangements for a ground team to hike in
  - Organized additional supplies:
    - food
    - fuel
    - phones
    - batteries

- Evacuation
  - Notified the sheriff’s office
  - Contacted a horse packer
  - Contacted four helicopter companies
  - Got permission to land in Wilderness
FIELD OPERATIONS

What we did:

- Helicopter arrived on scene that evening
- Body was taken to a town 250 miles away
- Sheriff’s deputy to investigate scene in morning
- Prepared two staff to fly in and hike out with group
- Runner party arrived at road head in evening
  - Vehicle and driver waiting
What we did: Day Two

- Deputy sheriff and staff flew to the course
- Deputy returned and briefed crisis team on situation
- We continued to support other courses (about 25 at that location)
What we did: Days Three & Four

- Course came out late afternoon
- Psychological stress discussion next morning
- Counseling made available for students and staff
- Normal end-of-course tasks
- Group activities for students
- Instructors stayed involved with students
NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC

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AN INCIDENT OCCURS

All we know is:

- Who the deceased is
- We need to notify the family

- How is the family contacted?
- Who informs them?
- What factors are considered?
FAMILY RELATIONS

What we did:

- President (or designee) telephoned family
- Organized, compassionate, and caring
- Sample script

Hello. Mr./Ms____I am_____(title)____from NOLS. _______(name of student) was____(hit by rock/fell/in an accident) while on their NOLS course. I am terribly sorry to have to tell you that ________(name) (died/was seriously injured).
FAMILY RELATIONS

What we did:
- Designated family liaison (consider divorced parents)
- The parents could not come to Lander
- Issues of family members at location
- Family interaction with students and staff
- Family members visit incident site
- Grief counselors, clergy, or therapists
FAMILY RELATIONS

What we did:

- Ask if organizational representative can attend funeral or memorial
- Stay in regular contact with family
- Stay in touch with other course members
NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC

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Communications

Investigation

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AN INCIDENT OCCURS

- Word spreads fast
- Who needs to be informed?
- We only have basic information of what happened

- Who are your audiences?
- How is communication managed?
- What do you need to watch out for?
## COMMUNICATION

### What we did:

1. Assign a communication leader/spokesperson
   - **Internal Audiences**
     - Trustees
     - Insurance
     - Families of other students
   - **External Audiences**
     - Media
     - Law enforcement

2. Communication coordinated with incident director
COMMUNICATION

What we did:

- Factual statement
  - Who, what, when, and where
- Basis for a press release
- Provided it to media
- Posted it on website
- Social media plan
For immediate release

date
time

Contact:

person’s name
phone#

NOLS Headquarters

Concise Descriptive Headline

LANDER, Wyo.—One sentence with age, where from, how died/injured where incident occurred and date.

Ed Wild, of (town, state) was on a 30-day backpacking trip with the National Outdoor Leadership School when he was (struck by rock or slipped and drowned or struck by lightning).

Provide a brief description of NOLS response including efforts to get the body out, NOLS emergency response system, evacuation method, how remote incident site was, authorities that helped or were contacted.

“We are deeply saddened by this tragedy,” said (name), President of NOLS. “We do not know details at this point because the course has not come out of the field, but we’re working to find out all we can. Our thoughts and sympathy are with the family and we remain in close contact with them.”

NOLS was founded in 1965 by legendary mountaineer Paul Petzoldt. Since then, over 85,000 students have graduated from NOLS, which teaches leadership, teamwork, environmental ethics, and wilderness technical skills.

NOLS
284 Lincoln Street
Lander, WY 82520
(307) 332-8800
www.nols.edu
COMMUNICATION-EXTERNAL

What we did:

- Media
  - Internet/social media
  - Television
  - Print
  - Radio
COMMUNICATION-EXTERNAL

What we did:

- Factually accurate story
- Short lived story
- Media interviews
  - On site
  - Skype
- Watched for erroneous information
- Kept records of all media stories
COMMUNICATION-INTERNAL

What we did:

- Limit use of email
- Informed all staff
  - Held all staff meeting at HQ
  - Inform other NOLS locations and staff in field
  - Watch for staff judging the incident
- Called each family of other course members
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Communications
- Internal: Staff, Trustees, Other Families
- External: Media, Associates, Partners, Clients

Investigation

WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

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AN INCIDENT OCCURS

- We need more information
- Need facts to assess our legal exposure
- Need facts to prevent rumors
- We really want to understand what happened

- How would you get additional information?
- How would you investigate the incident?
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

Three phases of investigation and documentation

1. Field
2. Administrative
3. Incident review
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—field

- Witnesses
  - Just the facts (who, what, when, & where)
  - Written accounts by leaders
- Evidence, photos, sketches
- Site visit
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—administrative

- Student factual interviews
- Staff factual interviews
- Course records
- Other information sources
**INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION**

**What we did—administrative**

- Incident accounts
- Field evacuation report
- Weather reports/logs
- Maps & descriptions
- Student journals
- Travel plans
- Field safety report
- Course log(s)
- Instruction checklist
- Photos and diagrams
- Student file(s)
- Contact logs w/family
- Contact log w/media
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—incident review

Internal review

- Captured the story
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Recommendations for change (if any)

![Diagram showing Risk Potential, Objective or Environmental Factors, Subjective or Human Factors, and Program Factors]
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—incident review

External review

- Yes or no?
- Who安排s
- Plan soon after incident
- Specific charge to reviewers
- Release of review
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SUMMARY
“Learn to be calm in the face of chaos.” Reinhold Messner
1. Have a thorough plan with clear and immediate action
2. Five components of effective crisis management
   - Leadership—Field Support—Family Relations—Communication—Investigation
3. Know your resources
4. Be ready for the long haul
ACTION ITEMS

“Keep a cool head and a warm heart.” United Educators

1. Use the NOLS schematic as a guide to develop a crisis plan
2. Identify key players in your organization who will be involved with crisis management and assign roles and responsibilities
3. Practice your crisis plan. Run a drill to identify strengths and gaps.
“A crisis is a brutal audit of prepared plans.”  Weick and Sutcliffe

Thanks

Drew Leemon
drew_leemon@nols.edu

Katie Baum Mettenbrink
kbm@nols.edu

A PDF of this presentation can be found at

www.nols.edu/wrmc