CRISIS MANAGEMENT
A PRE-PLAN IN ACTION
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METHOD

OVERVIEW OF NOLS CRISIS RESPONSE AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SCENARIO

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE

PLAN FOR QUESTIONS
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.
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
1. Provides guidance for your response and management

2. Prioritize tasks and actions, and deploy resources

3. Pre-determine certain actions and decisions
Day 1

6:30 PM, Friday, July 28

On-call emergency contact person receives a satellite phone call from an instructor stating there has been a fatality on ABW 7/2 and she provides latitude and longitude coordinates.

Connection is poor and the call is cut off suddenly.
LEADERSHIP

INCIDENT DIRECTOR & LEADER

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

What we did: Day 1 evening

- Established satellite phone contact; gather additional details
- Began preparing to support the group with people and supplies
- Connected with law enforcement
- Initiated evacuation planning; helicopter retrieved the body
FIELD OPERATIONS

What we did: Day 2

- Deputy sheriff and staff flew to the course
- Deputy returned and briefed crisis team
- Runner party arrived at the road head; met by driver/vehicle
- Continued to support other courses (~25 at that location)

What we did: Day 3

- Course arrived at trailhead in late afternoon; vehicles waiting
- Returned to campus: showered, ate, connected with families
FIELD OPERATIONS

What we did: Psychological Support

- Psychological stress discussion next morning
- Counseling made available for students and staff
- Normal end-of-course tasks
- Group activities for students; instructors stayed involved
- Resources in the crisis plan for response team, students, instructors, and other staff
**NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC**

**Incident and Field Response**
- Emergency Notification
  - Incident Director
  - Incident Leader
  - Family
  - Field Management
  - Evacuation Management
  - Documentation Management
  - Continuity Management

**Communicate with people on the scene**
- Arrange evacuation/field support
- Manage response log, collect field documents, maps, etc
- Maintain day-to-day operations & business continuity
FAMILY RELATIONS

If this were your program:

- 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 for initial notification
- Stayed in contact over time

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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).
Other considerations:

- Designate family liaison (consider divorced parents)
- Can organization representative attend funeral/memorial?
- Family onsite at your location? If so, consider:
  - Interactions with students and staff
  - Visit to incident site?
  - Grief counselors, clergy, or therapists available?
AN INCIDENT OCCURS

If this were your program:

- Who needs to be informed?
- How is communication managed?
- What do you need to watch out for?
COMMUNICATION

What we did:

- Established leadership: Communication/Media Leader
- Factual statement and media message form the baseline message for all audiences
- Two broad audience categories:
  
  **External**
  - Media
  - Associates
  - Partners
  - Clients

  **Internal**
  - Staff (field/town)
  - Trustees
  - Other students
  - Other families
  - Legal counsel
  - Insurance
What we did: External Audiences

- Stand-by / buy time statement
- Press release
- Use of website
- Social media plan
- Media engagement: do our best to cooperate and respond to media inquiries
COMMUNICATION

What we did: Internal audiences

- Informed all staff
  - Held all-staff meeting(s)
  - Inform other NOLS locations and staff in field
  - Watch for staff judging the incident
- Called each family of other course members
- Directed people to the website
NOLS CRISIS MANAGEMENT SCHEMATIC

Incident and Field Response

Emergency Notification

INCIDENT DIRECTOR

Incident Leader
- Field Management
  - Communicate with people on the scene
- Evacuation Management
  - Arrange evacuation/field support
- Documentation Management
  - Manage response log, collect field documents, maps, etc
- Continuity Management
  - Maintain day-to-day operations & business continuity

Family Relations
- Notify Family
  - Family Support

Communications
- External Media Leader
  - Spokesperson
  - Comm Mngr.
  - Social Media Coord
  - Media
  - Associates
  - Partners
  - Clients
- Internal Comms Leader
  - Staff (field/town)
  - Other students
  - Trustees
  - Other Families
  - Legal counsel
  - Insurance

Investigation

FIELD MANAGEMENT

DOCUMENTATION

CONINUITY

FAMILY RELATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS

INVESTIGATION
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

Three phases:

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

What we did—administrative

- Google Doc
- Student factual interviews
- Staff factual interviews
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—documentation sources

- Witness statements (written)
- Instructor statements (written)
- Interview notes
- Maps and location coordinates
- Photos and diagrams
- Weather & Environmental records
- Incident response logs (Gdoc & others)
- Course paperwork
- Daily travel plan
- Outfitting records (gear/rations)
- Briefing information
- Evaluations (student, instructor, program)
- Contact logs w/family
- Reports from other agencies (SAR, law enforcement, land agency, FOIA requests, etc.)
INVESTIGATION & DOCUMENTATION

What we did—incident review

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

External review
- Yes or no, and other considerations
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.
SO, WHAT ABOUT THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC?

Our plan served us well when the pandemic escalated. It provided structure and guidance for our response.

- Leadership roles and decision-making structure
- Evacuation and field ops systems to pull all courses
- Communications structure guided messaging to high volume of stakeholders (internal and external)
- Extensive use of Google Docs
- Tools still being used in ongoing response: International Decision Matrix, psychological first aid resources
“A crisis is a brutal audit of prepared plans.” Weick and Suttcliffe

Thanks

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A PDF of this presentation can be found at www.nols.edu/wrmc