

Communications Strategies in Times of Crisis: When the Public Eye is Centered on Your Port

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Handout Materials

Crisis Communications Response/Roles	Page 2
Investigating the Port's Budget	Page 4
Information Flow / Incident Progression	Page 6
Crisis Response Checklist	Page 7
Crisis/Disaster Procedures Flowchart	Page 13
Key Messages	Page 14
Delivering Messages	Page 15
Holding Statement	Page 16
Example: Port of Long Beach Executive Director Strategy	Page 18
Why Good Companies (and Good Ports) Say Dumb Things	Page 26
Presenter Bio	Page 28

Crisis Communications Response/Roles

What Triggers a Coordinated Crisis Communications Response?

As soon as the county learns of an incident or issue which will require a coordinated response, key staff should gather at county offices, the site of the situation, or via conference telephone call. An initial set of questions should be considered by those gathering to coordinate the county's response:

1. What has occurred and who are the victims (or who has the potential to be affected)?
2. What will be the role of the Community Corrections Partnership? Of the individual members?
3. What property/facilities have been damaged or are threatened? Note public or private property.
4. How and why did this situation take place?
5. What is county's position on this matter and response to the situation?
6. Who needs to be informed?
 - a. Employees
 - b. Neighbors
 - c. Public (or subgroups, such as seniors, parents, etc.)
 - d. News media
 - e. Law and order groups
 - f. Victims' rights organizations, advocates
7. Does it have political or other high-profile characteristics?
8. Should these audiences be informed proactively or responsively? Will responding proactively alleviate or exacerbate the situation?
9. What internal resources/expertise can be called upon for assistance?
10. What external resources/expertise or allies can be called upon for assistance?
11. What can be done to anticipate how this crisis or issue may evolve and to contain further escalation of the matter?
12. Who should be the PIO?
13. What communications resources will be needed?

Types of Crises (general)

The following list includes examples of the types of crises which would require a coordinated public information effort. This list is not exhaustive.

Agency investigation	Computer system issues, including loss of data or stealing of data
Controversial lawsuit	Employee accused of high-profile crime
Accusation of discrimination based on race, sexual preference, or gender	Sexual harassment case
Serious injury to employee or resident (particularly at a county facility)	Explosion
Protest	Rape or assault on agency property or in agency facility
Strike	Chemical spill
Physical violence between co-workers	Radiation leak
Theft	Top official caught lying
Embezzlement	Oil spill
Lavish or inappropriate spending by staff or elected/appointed officials	Facility closing
Death of top staff or elected/appointed official	Union grievance
DUI arrest of official	Transportation issues, including roadway closure or public transit shutdown
Plane crash	
Train crash	
Major service interruption	

Who is the Public Information Officer?

The county PIO serves as the lead communications strategist. The Department Director who initially coordinates the city's response (i.e., whose department is most directly affected) can also take overall responsibility for public information. However, should the Department Director's duties to manage the incident require a significant amount of time or focus, the Department Director may designate another staff member to serve as PIO. Unless otherwise determined, the duties will be handled by staff in the following order:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Role of the Public Information Officer

The designated PIO is a key staff member supporting the Department Director or management team coordinating the city's response to the crisis. The PIO recommends public information strategies, develops public information materials (often with the assistance of other departments or agencies), and implements the public information program.

Basic Public Information Officer Responsibilities

The basic responsibilities of the PIO include the following:

- Respond to inquiries from the news media and the public;
- Monitor the news media to detect and correct misinformation and to identify emerging trends or issues;
- Advise Department Director and/or staff team coordinating the county's response on public information issues, and advocate for the community to ensure its public information needs are addressed;
- Be the public's representative; and
- Coordinate, clear with appropriate authorities, and disseminate accurate and timely information related to the crisis.

Investigating the Port's Budget . . . A Reporter's Checklist

The Budget

- *Spells priorities of a local government*
- *Check for responsiveness: citizens' concerns, development plans, mission statement*
- *Check against promises and pledges*
- *Get raw data; plug into spreadsheets*
- *Multi-year: 3-5 years; a decade's worth*
- *Compare with preceding years*
- *Proposed vs. final*
- *Distribution across sectors, departments*
- *Public hearings*
- *Line items*
- *Budget threshold limits*
- *Regular and supplemental budgets*
- *Budget realignments*
- *Budget codes*

Budget: Balancing Act

- *Income (Revenue) = Spending (Expenditure)*

Income: Taxes

- *Are there new or higher taxes?*
- *Who are tax exempt? Who got tax breaks or discounts?*
- *Who are the tax delinquents? Were they fined? Who benefits from tax amnesty?*
- *Who are the top taxpayers?*
- *How healthy are industries that make up the local tax base?*
- *How diverse is the local tax base?*
- *When was the last time the local government updated assessment values?*
- *What are tax valuations of public officials and their friends compared to their neighbors?*

Income: Other means

- *Regulatory and service fees*
- *Aids and grants*
- *Corporate: Loans, bonds, economic enterprises*

Spending (Expenditure)

- *Spending vs appropriated amount*
- *Comprehensive annual financial report*
- *Accomplishment reports*
- *Budget document*
- *Agencies involved in budget review and accountability*

Contracts: What to look at

- *Is there an appropriation?*
- *Is it in the procurement program?*
- *Who's on the vendors' list?*
- *Check everything: From big- to small-ticket items*

Contracts: Red flags

- *No public bidding*
- *Rigged bidding*
- *Narrow specifications*
- *Splitting of contracts*
- *Change orders*
- *Cost overruns*
- *Overpricing*
- *Under-deliveries and non-delivery (ghost delivery)*
- *Inferior or substandard products or service*
- *Double payments*
- *Red tape*

Contracts: Also look for...

- *Conflict of interest*
- *Corruption*
- *Sources of information*
- *Comparative analysis*

Payroll

- *Nepotism*
- *Special and confidential positions*
- *Casuals*
- *Appointments to juicy positions*
- *Ghost employees*
- *Employee overtime*
- *Incentives, benefits for select group*

Perks

- *Expense account*
- *Travel*
- *Cell phone calls*
- *Acquisition/use of government property and supplies for personal use*
- *Discretionary spending: intelligence funds, development funds*

Audits

- *Who audits?*
- *How thorough the audit?*
- *Which agency or unit is unaudited?*
- *How did auditors audit?*

Information Flow / Incident Progression

Step 1: Gathering Information

The first step in the process of getting information to the public during a crisis is information gathering. Information is collected from a variety of sources, a few of which include:

- **Department Directors/Department Staff**, who alert managers who will determine the need for a public information response.
- **First Responders**, emergency personnel who arrive at a scene, if applicable.
- **News Media**, who often learn of situations via calls from the public or others involved.
- **Field PIOs/Others On Scene**, if there's a specific site where an incident has occurred.
- **PIOs From Other Agencies, Organizations**, if the issue/incident involves more than just your agency.

Step 2: Verifying Information

The next step in the process is to verify the accuracy of the information that has been collected by consulting, among others:

- **Department Directors/Department Staff**
- **County Manager**
- **Field Staff**
- **Subject Matter Experts**
- **Others**

Step 3: Coordinating & Planning

The next step in the process is to coordinate among all involved on the need for a public information effort and the strategies and tactics needed to prepare and deliver information to key audiences.

- **Consult This Information**
- **Prepare Key Message(s)**
- **Obtain Approval**
- **Determine, Prepare Communications Tools**

Step 4: Disseminating Information

The next step in the process is to disseminate information to the public. This step involves:

- **Using Multiple Methods.** In most situations, it's imperative to use as many different communications tools as possible.
- **Monitoring the Media.** Media monitoring is invaluable for ensuring that your message was understood by the news media and reported accurately and completely to the public. Address important inaccuracies before they are reported incorrectly a second time.

Crisis Response Checklist

Within the First 60 Minutes

- Contain the immediate crisis
 - Ensure that calls have been made to all appropriate emergency responders (i.e. call 911 if appropriate)
 - Coordinate and cooperate with emergency responders
- Follow internal notification process
 - Notify CAO's office and elected/appointed officials
 - Notify appropriate Department Directors
- First meeting or conference call to quickly assess and gather known facts
 - What happened?
 - How did it happen?
 - When did it happen?
 - What was the cause?
 - Were there any injuries?
 - What was the extent of the damage?
 - Is there any current or ongoing danger?
 - What recovery efforts are underway?
- Notify front line staff to direct calls from media, community, government, and family members to administrative support, an appropriate team member, or a pre-recorded voice mailbox
- Notify appropriate staff of the possibility that media may show up. Direct the media to a predetermined holding area, if possible
- Organize a public information response, based on what is known. Discuss whether to wait for more information or communicate proactively
- Draft appropriate holding statement/press release/talking points
- Draft potential Q&A document
- Outreach to and coordinate with outside agencies
- Determine if outside experts are needed
- Provide initial holding statement to the media

First 90 Minutes

- Determine crisis level and response needed
- Ensure clear understanding of internal roles and responsibilities
- Each team member should assume their role
- Assess the need to bring in subject matter experts or additional outside resources
- If the situation dictates, be sure that at least one PIO is at the incident site
- After discussing proactive vs. responsive communication, decide on best communication method
 - Holding statement
 - News release
 - Individual reporter briefings
 - Phone notification of key audiences
 - Web site
- Identify spokespeople and potential third party subject experts for media
- Update key management on the public information response
- Send internal communication to employees
- Begin media and Internet monitoring
- Identify location for media briefings that is away from the incident site
- Discuss level of crisis response - Is this a local crisis? What are the national implications? What are the implications for employees? What are the implications for the public?
- Administrative assistance:
 - Record or update all facts
 - Screen media, government agency, and public calls and provide information to the appropriate staff
 - Distribute public information materials
- Disseminate public information tools, as appropriate
- Consider all other interested parties/stakeholders/audiences and communicate appropriately

First Half Day

- Conduct team update
- Identify security, legal and liability issues
- Discuss and approve public information strategies/tactics
- Assess the need for additional resources. If the response becomes 24/7, sufficient personnel must be available to staff all shifts
- Update key stakeholders not already reached
- Continue communicating with employees
- Prepare and train designated spokesperson to communicate with external audiences
- Assess need to hold news briefing or other proactive communications
- Evaluate news coverage and correct inaccurate information
- Receive update from county staff in the field, if applicable
- Communicate, as appropriate, with the media
- Coordinate with outside agency PIOs, if applicable

By End of Day One

- Shift from reactive to proactive communications (emphasize concern and efforts to resolve the crisis and prevent future incidents)
- Evaluate news coverage and correct inaccurate information
- Assess need to address rumors circulating internally or on Internet
- Monitor the continuing crisis situation to determine next steps:
 - Conduct news briefing as events warrant
 - Provide periodic updates and individual interviews to the media
 - Post updates to the Web site
- Evaluate the need for and prepare or update any of the following communications documents:
 - News releases or media advisory
 - Internal list of questions and answers
 - Letters to key stakeholders
- Ensure all facts are documented and well-organized
- Ensure action steps are documented and well-organized
- Assess need for additional resources
- Assess need for further support from technical experts or third party experts
- Brief or update legislative and regulatory audiences, where appropriate
- Receive briefing from field staff
- Brief or update the media
- Continue coordination with outside agency PIOs

Day Two

- Control messages and spokespeople
- Continue shift from reactive to proactive communications (emphasize concern and efforts to resolve the crisis and prevent future incidents)
- Evaluate overnight news coverage and news coverage to date
- Monitor news coverage and the Internet to assess stakeholder, media, and public reaction to the crisis
- Evaluate the continuing crisis situation to determine next steps:
 - Conduct news briefing as events warrant
 - Provide periodic updates and individual interviews to the media
 - Post updates to the Web site
- Evaluate the need for and prepare any of the following communications documents:
 - News releases or media advisory
 - Internal list of questions and answers
 - Letters to key stakeholders
- Prepare and train designated spokesperson to communicate with external audiences
- Maintain list of all facts
- Revise and update key messages and talking points
- Prioritize responses to external audiences
- Assess need for additional resources
- Receive briefings from field staff, technical experts
- Prepare a communications plan for the day and communicate with internal audiences
- Brief key legislators, local government officials, if applicable
- Update the media
- Continue coordination with outside agency PIOs

Ongoing

- Control messages and spokespeople
- Continue shift to proactive public information (emphasize concern and efforts to prevent future incidents; explain how incident happened, when available)
- Evaluate news coverage
- Monitor news coverage and the Internet to assess stakeholder, media, and public reaction to the crisis; gauge ongoing information efforts based on this assessment
- Evaluate the continuing crisis situation to determine next steps:
 - Conduct news briefing as events warrant
 - Provide periodic updates and individual interviews to the media
 - Post updates to the Web site
- Update public information documents
- Update list of all facts
- Revise and update key messages and talking points
- Prioritize responses to external audiences
- Assess need for additional resources
- Receive briefings from field staff, technical experts
- Prepare a public information plan for ongoing information efforts and communicate with internal audiences
- Continue to identify key audiences and provide information efforts accordingly
- Continue coordination with outside agency PIOs
- Determine when to conclude efforts; announce the conclusion to the news media

Crisis/Disaster Procedures Flow Chart

Step 1: Notification of Occurrence

- Assess Magnitude
- Notify CAO, other managers, if appropriate
- Notify Department Directors, elected officials if directed
- Monitor occurrence to determine if go to Step 2



- 1. Where did the incident occur?*
- 2. What happened?*
- 3. Are there injuries or deaths?*
- 4. Who is involved and responsible?*
- 5. When did events occur?*
- 6. How could it have happened?*
- 7. Where might the problem expand?*

Step 2: Information Gathering

- Determine extent of situation
- Confirm facts; answer questions in box right ►
- Coordinate at incident scene, if situation requires
- Make determination if a full communications team should be organized



Step 3: Activate CCP Emergency Public Information Team / Plan

- Coordinate information flow with affected county agencies
- Inform Management, Department Directors, Public Information staff



Step 4: Initiate Response / Action Plan

- Draft materials (holding statement, press release, Q&A, fact sheet, web presence, employee notice)
- Make staffing assignments
- Determine need for Media Briefing area



Step 5: Initiate Internal Information Dissemination

- Inform managers not yet aware of or involved about the incident
- Disseminate alerts to all employees, board/commissioners, chamber of commerce, CBOs
- Work with HR to manage information about injured/impacted employees, if applicable



Step 6: Initiate External Information Dissemination

- Distribute media statements/materials
- Conduct briefings (phone, Media Briefing area)
- Post information on web site / activate site (inform media about web site as information source)
- Determine if other agency PIOs should gather to address media's needs
- Evaluate all external audiences and need for various available communications tools



Step 7: Incident Information Flow

- Continuous update of statements / releases using all appropriate communications tools
- Maintain incident log (written, visual: stills, video) & contact log
- Implement media monitoring for accuracy; correct reports as needed
- Evaluate need for additional staffing resources / implement shift system to meet staffing needs



Step 8: Conduct Incident Wrap-Up / Post Incident Review

- Analyze media coverage, community feedback
- Provide feedback regarding crisis response
- Revise crisis public information plan

Key Messages: The “Key” To Communicating

“Key messages” are the main points that all readers/listeners should know about the county, the response to the incident, and its ability to resume normal operations. These are employed in crises and disasters. Typically, three to four key messages will be developed for each major area of the crisis or disaster response.

A key message is the core content for all the CCP public information tools. A key message is not a fact or statistic, but rather a statement that succinctly communicates what the public needs to know about the county’s perspective on the incident.

Message Development Questions

- What are the facts? What happened?
- Who are your audiences? Who has been affected by this event? Who is upset or concerned? Who needs to be alerted to this situation?
- What are those audiences’ perceptions and information needs?
- What do the media want to know? What should they know?
- How should you show empathy?
- What are your policies on this issue?
- What are you doing about this issue? How are you solving the problem?
- What can you do to keep this from happening again?
- What other agencies or third parties are involved? What are they saying?
- What should the public be doing?
- When will more information be available?

Delivering Messages: Transitions/Flags/Bridges

“Transition to Message” Phrases

- That’s an interesting question, it reminds me of . . .
- Before I forget, I wanted to mention . . .
- Let me put it in perspective . . .
- What’s important to remember, however . . .
- What I really want to talk to you about is . . .
- What’s most important is . . .
- And don’t forget . . .
- Before we get off that subject/topic, let me add . . .
- That’s not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is . . .
- That’s a good point, but I think you’d be interested in knowing that . . .
- What I’m here to talk to you about is . . .
- Let me just add . . .
- That reminds me . . .
- Let me answer you by saying that . . .
- Let me give you some background information . . .
- Let’s take a closer look at . . .
- That’s an important point because . . .
- What you should know is . . .
- What that means is . . .
- Another thing to remember is . . .
- Now that you’ve covered _____, let’s move on to _____ . . .
- You may be asking why _____ is true . . .
- While _____ is certainly important, don’t forget that _____ . . .

Flags

Flag your messages by calling attention:

- The key thing is...
- The best part about...
- What you really need to know is...
- There are three points we need to remember...

Turning Negatives to Positives

- Yes, that’s been said, but let’s not forget that...
- I agree with you about _____, and I think it illustrates an interesting point...
- What we do know is...
- The real question here is...

Holding Statement

Preparing an Initial "Holding" Statement

The public information staff assigned to preparing materials should prepare an initial holding statement at the onset of the incident. Reporters will likely call before all the facts have been gathered. In such an instance, a simple statement acknowledging the situation shall be prepared. The short statement avoids "no comment" and acknowledges that the county recognizes the need to cooperate with the media and inform the public. This document will be the foundation for all future written communications. By following a few basic principles when writing the holding statement or news releases, the county will better meet the news media's needs.

1. Tell the most important information in the lead paragraph.
2. Answer four of the five "Ws"--Who, What, Where, and When. Explain WHAT the incident is. Identify WHO is involved in the incident as well as the resources and equipment involved. Tell WHERE and WHEN the incident occurred. Explain WHAT action the county is taking to mitigate or respond to the incident. Do not explain WHY the event occurred unless complete information is available and has been approved. Attempting to explain the WHY without complete information is merely irresponsible speculation and can seriously undermine communication efforts.
3. Write remaining information in descending order of importance. If the media cuts off the bottom of your story, they will cut information that is least important to the public.
4. Explain technical points in simple language. A direct quote can add the human element to otherwise technical information and help explain a situation or event in layman's terms. Tell the real story. Avoid using language that is overly bureaucratic.
5. Be concise. A good news release is judged by the quality of information it communicates, not by its length. Stop writing when you've said all you need to.

Workplace Violence at County Facility (Sample)

Messages

- The violent act that occurred at the County of _____ Hall of Administration/facility/property has activated a comprehensive emergency response. County officials have diligently prepared for many types of incidents, including ones like this.
- The incident was contained within one facility, and although investigations and related follow-up activities will continue for several days or weeks, all other facilities are in full operation.
- The County's top priority is the safety and security of our citizens, businesses, visitors, and employees.

Sample Copy for "Holding" Press Release

The violent act that occurred at the County of _____ Hall of Administration/facility/property has activated a comprehensive emergency response. County officials have diligently prepared for incidents of this nature.

The incident was contained within one facility, and although investigations and related follow-up activities will continue for several days or weeks, all other county facilities are in full operation. The County's top priority is the safety and security of our citizens, businesses, visitors, and employees.

The following emergency personnel and agencies responded to this incident:

We know of the following fatalities/injuries. State and federal privacy laws limit our ability to provide any additional information:

The following facilities were affected:

Other information:

Example: Port of Long Beach Announces Interim Executive Director

Port of Long Beach – Interim Executive Director Announcement Plan

Situation: The Board of Harbor Commissioners has named current Chief Harbor Engineer Al Moro as the interim executive director of the Port. He will serve in this role until the Board has appointed a permanent executive director.

Key communication strategy: As a way of maintaining/ensuring confidence in Port leadership/management during this interim period, all target audiences should learn about the appointment of the interim executive director (and all search-related steps) officially and directly from the Port.

Key messages:

- The Board acted unanimously to select Al Moro as the leader of the Port during this interim period
- Al Moro’s deep knowledge about Port operations, staff, and the major initiatives underway, along with his strong management skills, make him the perfect choice to lead the Port on a steady path forward as the search is under way for a permanent director
- Al is highly respected by the commissioners, extremely well-regarded within our industry, and very well liked throughout the Port staff.
- The Port has a comprehensive strategic plan, extremely professional and talented staff, and committed board to ensure we continue to serve the goods movement industry with stellar service

Materials:

1. List of stakeholders who need to be made aware of the announcement, either via meeting, phone call or email
 - a. List in order of priority and who “owns” the call/email
2. Press release
3. Commissioner quotes
4. Email transmittal of press release; talking points
5. Al Moro key messages
6. Internal Q&A

Day of announcement:

President Wise to begin notifications, per the list/method outlined below. Instructs when each audience to be notified.

Communication will be via meeting, telephone call or email transmittal of the press release attached (see details below).

- Directors to make as many personal calls as possible to key audiences
 - Directors to forward press release to additional targets as they determine appropriate.
- Commissioners to make key calls as available/appropriate.

List of stakeholders/owners:

City:	Call or Email:	Owner:
Mayor	Call	Susan
City council	email	Susan and Board
City manager's off.	Call	Al
Chief McDonnell	Call	Al
Chief Duree	Call	Al

Other governmental/regulators:

POLA	Geraldine Cindy M.	Al Susan
County	Don Knabe	Susan or Board
State	Alan and Bonnie	Susan or Board
Fed	Janice Hahn Alan Lowenthal	Susan or Board Susan or Board
Coast Guard	Call:	Al
ICE	call/email	Security

Internal Port:

Board	Call	Susan
Chris	Call	Susan
Managing directors	Meet	Susan
Directors	Meet and email	Susan and Commission
Port employees	Email from all Commissioners	Susan and Board
Engineering div.	Meet (then email)	Al

Customers/Tenants/Industry:

PMSA	call	Susan
Shipping lines	call, email	Susan or Board
Rail	call, email UP, BNSF, PHL	Susan or Board
Pilots	call, email	Al
Union	call, email	Susan or Chris
SFI, other CIP	email	Letter from Susan

Media:

George Economides	call	Art
Ron White, LA Times	call	Art
All media	email	Art
Special	calls	Art
{ex.: Harry Saltzgaver, Karen Meeks, JOC		Art

Long Beach Community:

LB Chamber	email	TBD
Influential neighbors	email	from Susan, John coordinates

Port of Long Beach Names Chief Harbor Engineer as Interim Executive Director

Today, the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners announced the appointment of Al Moro, chief harbor engineer, as the Port of Long Beach's interim executive director. Moro, who joined the Port in 1997 as a civil engineer, currently oversees all administrative and technical activities for the Port's engineering programs, including nearly \$4 billion in capital improvement projects.

"The Board is extremely pleased that we have unanimously selected Al Moro as our interim executive director. He is highly respected by all of the commissioners, very well regarded in our industry, and well liked by the Port staff. Al will lead the Port of Long Beach on a steady path forward as the search begins for a permanent director," said Susan Anderson Wise, president of the Board of Harbor Commissioners.

Moro's appointment will go into effect following a formal vote on June 17, said Wise. Moro, who said he would not be a candidate for the permanent position, replaces Chris Lytle, who announced on May 23 that he was leaving the Port of Long Beach to head the Port of Oakland.

"I am honored to have been selected by the Board of Harbor Commissioners to serve the Port of Long Beach as interim director," Moro commented. "A major goal of mine will be to provide stability and continuity during the transition. It's important for our customers to know that there will be no delays in the construction of our major projects."

As chief harbor engineer, Moro oversees all administrative and technical activities for the Port's four engineering divisions, including construction management. He supervises 135 engineers, surveyors, technicians, and support staff, and manages the Port's extensive capital improvement program, including the replacement of the Gerald Desmond Bridge.

Moro has more than 40 years experience as a professional engineer. He is active with the American Society of Civil Engineers, the American Association of the Port Authorities Facilities Engineering Committee, and the Western Dredging Association. He holds a bachelor's degree in engineering from UCLA and an MBA from Cal State Los Angeles.

The Port of Long Beach is one of the world's premier seaports, a primary gateway for trans-Pacific trade and a trailblazer in innovative goods movement, safety and environmental stewardship. With 140 shipping lines connecting Long Beach to 217 seaports worldwide, the Port handles trade valued at \$155 billion each year and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs in Southern California.

Media Contact: Art Wong, Port of Long Beach Acting Director of Communications/Public Information Officer, (562) 283-7702, (562) 619-5665 (cell), or art.wong@polb.com.

Quotes from Members of the Port of Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners:

"With the selection of Al Moro we have an executive who knows our staff, our industry and our projects to lead the Port as our interim executive director. We are extremely pleased that Al has agreed to accept this appointment," said Commission President Susan A. Wise.

"In Al Moro, we have an outstanding, can-do administrator at the helm. He has the engineering experience and knows how to handle major capital improvement projects," said Commissioner Doug Drummond.

"Al Moro brings a wide range of expert skills to this position, and he is absolutely the right person to help guide the Port during this transition," noted Commissioner Rich Dines.

"We all know Al, and he's absolutely the best person to fill the position of interim executive director," said Commissioner Nick Sramek.

"I have worked closely with Al Moro these past few years and I have been extremely impressed with his ability to manage large projects, provide steady leadership and work well with staff, industry and other government agencies," commented Commissioner Thomas Fields.

Transmittal email with press release to external audiences; talking points:

The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners is very pleased to announce that Chief Harbor Engineer Al Moro has been named as interim executive director of the Port. Al has experience, skills and reputation that make him ideally suited to lead us in the months ahead. With this position now filled with a proven port professional, we can now turn our attention to conducting a search for a permanent Port director. Al is not a candidate for the permanent position. Throughout his 16 years at the Port, Al has been an important part of its tremendous progress, most recently heading the Port's \$4 billion capital improvement program. You can expect Al to connect with you soon. He looks forward to answering any questions you may have and hearing how we can continue to help you and your business/organization/etc. (modify depending on audience).

Transmittal email with press release to internal audiences; talking points:

The entire Board of Harbor Commissioners is very pleased to announce that Al Moro has been named as interim executive director of the Port. I know that you'll join each of us in supporting Al during this critical juncture. With Al leading the organization, we can now turn our attention to conducting a search for a permanent Port director; you'll see in the attached press release that Al will not be a candidate for the permanent position. Al has been an important part of the Port's tremendous progress during his 16 years here, and he is ideally suited to lead us in the months ahead. As he assumes this new role, you can expect Al to meet with staff throughout the Port, answer any questions you may have, and hear what's important to you.

AI's Key Messages

- The Port of Long Beach is moving rapidly on numerous major capital improvement projects and I am excited to work with the Board and the staff to continue this progress and maintain our position as the nation's best managed Port
- It's important for our customers to know that there will be no delays in the construction of the major projects we have under way. We remain committed to delivering world-class facilities that make us the port of choice for goods coming into and going out of America
- A major goal of mine will be to provide the stability and continuity needed to carry out the ambitious strategic plan already in place here at the Port. I'm looking forward to working with the Board and the highly dedicated and talented staff that we have to meet the Port's goals.

Internal Q&A:

Why were no current managing directors selected as the Interim?

By naming Al Moro, we not only appointed a seasoned maritime professional who knows the Port's issues, its people and its projects, we have been assured by Al that he is not a candidate for the permanent position. This allows any other Port managers to apply should they wish.

Are you concerned that Al has not worked closely in the shipping industry/with customers?

We have witnessed Al work extremely closely and well with our tenants, customers, community members, and many others with whom we rely on to carry out the Port's business. We are highly confident that he'll quickly establish close working relationships with our shipping line partners and others in the industry. We also have a very talented trade staff who will work closely with Al and the entire Board to ensure we continue to meet the needs of our customers.

When is Al's first day?

Al's appointment will be effective on June 17, and he will assume his new role shortly thereafter.

What is Al's compensation?

The compensation for the interim position will be \$xxx,xxx.

How long will Al serve as interim?

Al has assured us that he will serve as interim until we have filled the permanent director's position. Al's appointment allows us to take the time necessary to carry out a thorough search and find the right director for the Port.

What will be Chris' last day?

Chris' last day with the Port will be July xx; however, he will be taking vacation prior to that date.

Will there be a going away event for Chris?

The Board would like to invite the shipping industry, the community, and the Port staff to a "thank you" event in honor of Chris' service to us. The event is expected to take place on June 20 at (details).

Was the Board in agreement about the selection of Al?

Yes; the Board voted unanimously in support of appoint Al Moro to this position.

Who was consulted about this decision, e.g., customers, community, management, Chris?

The Board works extremely closely with the entire management team of the Port. We know of Al's capabilities and quickly realized that Al brings to the interim assignment extensive knowledge and expertise of the Port, of our projects and issues, and of our staff.

Will AI be a candidate for the permanent position?

No.

Was the mayor involved in making this choice? Was he informed?

The mayor was informed about the Board's decision.

Will AI be expected to fill the open managing director and assistant executive director positions?

AI will work with the Board to set expectations about both Board and management priorities for the coming months. He will ensure that all Port operations continue to run smoothly, including the recruitment and filling of staff vacancies.

Who will lead the Port's capital improvement program now that AI has assumed this new role?

AI will work with the Board to set expectations about both Board and management priorities for the coming months. One of the reasons AI was selected was his experience with major capital programs. We expect he will continue to be extremely involved in these efforts through the Managing Director of Engineering.

Why Good Companies (and Good Ports) Say Dumb Things

Being quoted in a news story often is viewed as a high-wire act by many business executives. Part of this anxiety comes from occasionally seeing embarrassing or simply daft comments in the press attributed to seemingly intelligent business people. At the same time, most businesses have a responsibility (and an enlightened self-interest) to create a dialogue with the media and to respond to press questions. The majority of U.S. companies now recognize that talking to the press is part of doing business. Increasingly rare is the situation expressed by Tom Cooper, former president of Bank of America, who noted, "Business people complain like hell about what's in the newspaper, then they turn around and refuse to talk to reporters."

Nonetheless, misunderstanding and distrust still mark the general business approach to the press, and interviews are put in the category of necessary but distasteful. How can business executives fulfill their responsibility to answer press questions, yet have confidence that the comments attributed to them and their companies will not be embarrassing? As a first step, they might see if their own organizations' shortcomings are reflected in the following list of ten major reasons why good companies say dumb things:

Shooting from the Hip - Talking before thinking is an error that cuts across all levels of an organization. It can arise from the unrestrained exuberance of management, exaggerations by line personnel or the release of unverified information by staff people. Intelligent comments in the press most often are the result of accurate and up-to-date information combined with forethought and preparation.

Reporting Relationship - Generally, the greater the distance between the CEO and communications staff, the greater an organization's propensity for saying dumb things. In some companies, communications is placed under the marketing or legal function and broad corporate goals may be, quite naturally, subsumed to the more narrow objectives of the operating or staff units. Under marketing, corporate comments may trend toward the promotional, while the lawyer's natural urge to protect against liability by saying little, can result in corporate comments that seem obtuse or unresponsive.

Organizational Hurdles - Some companies have such a complex and cumbersome organizational structure that a timely response to media inquiries is nearly impossible. In these instances, a newspaper could go to press with a story leveling charges against a company, noting that the company response was "No comment."

Attempting to Control Information - Some organizations seek to control information, particularly bad news, with the goal of limiting negative reaction. But attempting to hide the facts of a story only puts a company in a position of covering up, severely damaging its reputation. The tendency to stonewall reaches absurdity when managements face problems and say, "Don't tell the communications people, they may have to talk to the media."

Failure to Anticipate, Plan and Prepare - In crisis situations, a company's communication ability is severely tested, often bringing a higher incidence of potentially damaging comments. Through effective crisis communications planning, a company can anticipate and better manage its comments in stressful situations.

"Why Should We Talk to the Press?" -- An enlightened approach to the media is not universal. Some managements do not accept the legitimate right of the media to ask questions of public companies or large private entities. This attitude often is combined with a lack of appreciation for the power of the media to influence, for good or bad, the perception of the company. Talking to the media can help an organization build a reservoir of understanding and goodwill with constituencies and the public.

Who Talks to the Press? - Some managements still fall into the trap of saying, "Have the PR people talk to the media, that's what we pay them for." Reporters are quite willing to talk with knowledgeable sources, but they also want access to the people who are managing and operating the company. There are issues and concerns which management must be open to discuss with the media. Otherwise, the organization looks foolish or appears to have a siege mentality. Management can help reporters write from an informed position, and more readily assure accurate, fair and balanced coverage.

Inadequate Briefing - Some embarrassing comments in the press are the result of inadequate preparation. Any dialogue with the media should be taken seriously, and briefings by media relations professionals can help executives tell their company's story more effectively and focus their comments on the interests of the reporter.

Unauthorized, Unprepared, Undaunted - A survey conducted for a major company found that individuals who were the very least qualified to talk to the media had the greatest confidence in their ability to answer press questions; while more knowledgeable and experienced individuals expressed caution. Having unauthorized or unprepared people talking to the press without fear can be a communications nightmare. While reporters may bridle at an organization's desire to funnel inquiries through a company's PR staff, this practice helps a company provide qualified spokespersons.

Communications People Not Involved - Most CEOs would not consider a financial issue without input from the chief financial officer nor make a legal decision without the general counsel's advice. However, many managements make policy and operating decisions with vast communications implications, with little or no involvement by the company's public relations professionals. One company, for example, made a quick personnel decision to have employees sign a silence agreement as part of their severance package. The furor rapidly escalated to a nationwide story based on the company's alleged attempt to stifle first amendment rights. The story above also is an example of an organization inescapably saying dumb things in the press because it has, in fact, taken dumb actions. Here, there is no remedy but to substitute good actions for bad actions, admit error and apologize.

Contrary to popular culture, the core of media relations and press communications is not the "spin doctoring" of messages. Communication that best helps an organization achieve its goals is based on a foundation of accuracy, honesty, completeness and candor. Certainly, the press is not perfect and errors inevitably will arise in stories. However, an efficient organizational structure, effective communications staff, and appropriate policies and practices can decrease dramatically the instances of good companies saying dumb things in the media.

Maurice E. Healy is president of Healy, Partners & Company, a San Francisco-based public relations and communications firm. Reprinted with permission.



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Scott's work includes strategic communications, key message development/training, crisis communications, and public relations for a wide range of organizations that include Port of Long Beach, California State Lottery, League of California Cities, City of San Francisco, City of San Jose, City of Palo Alto, City of Santa Clara, City of Chula Vista, City of Mountain View, City of Beverly Hills, City of Reno, Fairfield Police Department, Bechtel Corporation, Calpine Corporation, Waste Management, Inc., Intel Corporation, Government Outreach, Inc., and many others.

Scott is a past president and lifetime member of the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO), a CAPIO Paul Clark Award winner in recognition of outstanding contributions to the public information field, grants chair of the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame, a past executive board member of the City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA), a past board member of the Bay Area Cable Excellence Awards, a guest lecturer at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication, and a crisis communications trainer at the California Specialized Training Institute.

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