



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 9510

CRISIS MANAGEMENT POLICY



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1. Crisis Communication & Response Plan

When crises occur, we are often left wondering who to call first and how to properly respond. We are pleased to now have a plan in place that can be followed to ensure that the matter is handled with the utmost care. You'll want to get familiar with this new resource for clubs.

Note: This document is also available on the District Website

2. Introduction

Tragedy and crisis can strike at any time. Many types of event could be the cause of a situation that would place a Rotary club officer or board member, an entire club, the District Governor or other Rotarians in a situation that requires their utmost and immediate attention. Examples of such events include a traffic accident, a violent crime, a youth protection issue or a simple case of bad judgment; a natural disaster such as a hurricane, earthquake or flood; or an event caused by an action or inaction of a Rotarian or non-Rotarian.

When such an event occurs, it is important to have a plan in place that can be followed to ensure that the matter is handled with the utmost care. Key objectives are to ensure that those involved in the incident are kept safe, that communication with those who need to know is completed quickly and professionally, and that other action is taken swiftly and professionally when needed.

Additionally, in our internet-driven information age, written and video content can be transmitted in a matter of seconds, which makes it important that when a crisis erupts, our Rotary district responds with a clear message, presented honestly and in a timely manner.

3. What Constitutes a Crisis?

A "crisis" for the purposes of implementing the Rotary District 9510 crisis plan is an unanticipated, unusual event or occurrence arising out of, or closely related to, a Rotary Club project, event, or program that results in, or is likely to result in, physical or psychological harm, serious injury, or death to a participant, or that is or can be detrimental to the public image of Rotary.

Examples include a death or injury stemming either from natural disasters impacting a Rotary project, event, or program (such as fire, flood or earthquake) or human caused (such as accidental or intentional mass casualty event). A “crisis” can include suspected illegal activities where the victim or suspected perpetrator is a Rotarian, a Rotary club, or the District; or other event that involves a Rotarian, a Rotary club, or the District that impacts persons or property in a substantial, negative manner.

These events may include youth involved in Rotary functions and activities, such as RYLA students, Interactors and Rotary Youth Exchange students. Such youth programs have carefully designed youth protection plans that take precedence over this plan and that are to be followed prior to implementing this plan. Refer to the District 9510 Youth Protection Policy on the District 9510 website.

4. Purpose of this Policy

In the event of a “crisis” it is imperative to operate pursuant to established guidelines to ensure the communication of accurate, timely, and consistent information to Rotarians and the public, and to provide for the immediate care and protection of all individuals involved in the situation, as well as their families.

It is always the policy of District 9510 to deliver the highest level of transparency and cooperation consistent with applicable law and government policy.

5. Policy and Parameters

1. The District Governor currently in office is the only officer of Rotary International in the District. As such, he or she is the main contact between the District and RI and between the District and the Club, event or activity manager of the Rotary activity involved when a crisis occurs.
2. The District Governor holds final responsibility for Crisis Management in District 9510. In the absence of the District Governor, or in the case of his or her inability to act, then, the following individuals, in the order listed, shall hold final responsibility:
 - a. The Immediate Past District Governor
 - b. The Vice Governor
 - c. The District Governor-Elect
3. The District Governor will annually appoint a Crisis Management Advisory Team as part of the District Leadership Team to provide support and guidance as needed.
4. Only the District Governor or his/her designate as set forth in paragraph 2, above, will activate the Crisis Management Advisory Team, or individual members of the team, when required.
5. An individual Rotary club’s president or designee will represent an individual club if the incident requires, as requested by the District Governor.

6. Crisis Management Advisory Team

The Crisis Management Advisory Team appointed by the District Governor each year will consist of:

1. The District Governor as Chair
2. The District Governor-Elect
3. The Immediate Past District-Governor
4. The District Vice-Governor
5. The District Youth Protection Officer
6. An attorney at law who is familiar with local law and can give immediate advice as to confidentiality, potential legal action and liability
7. The District Public Image Chair
8. A district Spokesperson who may serve as liaison to the media.

In addition, others may be asked to serve on the Crisis Management Team for a specific incident as required and determined by the District Governor:

9. The Area Governor, if the incident reported happens in a distant community where local presence is important
10. The chair of the committee responsible for the activity where the incident originated, if applicable
11. Others at the request of the District Governor, including the District-governor Nominee.

7. When a Crisis Develops

1. The Rotary club president or other Rotarian who becomes aware of a crisis shall immediately contact and consult with the District Governor. If the District Governor is not available, the next person on the list of designated individuals with final responsibility for that year is contacted in the order listed. *All youth program staff shall follow the detailed reporting procedures of their individual program.*
2. The District Governor or designee determines the need to consult the crisis management team and decides if the team or certain members of the team should be activated. The District Governor has sole discretion as to which members of the team, if any, should be activated.
3. In situations requiring law enforcement or other emergency service involvement, the Crisis Management Team will cooperate with law enforcement in all respects and follow the direction of responsible law enforcement and emergency officials.
4. The District Governor will contact Rotary International and the RI Director.
5. The District Governor will confirm that law enforcement has been contacted, if applicable and not already involved.

6. The District Governor will designate a Rotary incident spokesperson. This should be someone who is on top of the issue, communicates well, and is comfortable interacting with the media.
7. The District Governor will ask presidents and assistant governors to communicate appropriate and approved information to affected clubs, and instruct all Rotary club members to refer press inquiries to the spokesperson.
8. The District Governor may communicate with Assistant Governors, District Leadership Team members, clubs and/or individual Rotarians if needed.
9. The District Governor will direct the Spokesperson to prepare a statement that accurately states the facts, expresses Rotary's position, and conveys the appropriate tone (sympathy, apology, commitment, etc.) and develop key messages to help the spokesperson convey Rotary's position consistently and accurately. The spokesperson will update the statement as needed.
10. The District Governor will seek further assistance from RI regarding media inquiries as needed.

8. When Media Contacts You First

If a Rotary club president, event or activity chair or some other Rotarian is contacted by the media, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Follow the protocols set out above. Do not issue a statement or make any comment to the media other than referring them to the appropriate Rotary spokesperson.
2. Immediately contact the District Governor or designate, even if in doubt of the urgency or importance of the matter. Let those responsible make the decisions as to urgency and importance.
3. Immediately refer any media contact to the District Governor, or in an on-going situation, designated District Spokesperson. If you need time to confirm or determine the District Governor or Spokesperson's contact information, tell the reporter you will call back promptly.
4. Respond to all media inquiries promptly, but unless specifically authorized to communicate with the media, they should be referred to the designated Rotary spokesperson. Ignoring media can contribute to unnecessary speculation, but it is the responsibility of the District Spokesperson to communicate the facts and positions of Rotary to the media. If you are not the District Spokesperson, relay the contact information to the Spokesperson.
5. The District Governor and/or Spokesperson will be completely honest and truthful, will not say anything he/she is unsure of and will not cover up or make excuses.

6. The District Governor or Spokesperson will represent Rotary. When they speak, they ARE Rotary. No personal observations or speculations will be issued.
7. Monitor the media's local coverage of the issue for accuracy and tone. If Rotary is misrepresented, let the Spokesperson know who will convey the concern to the District Governor for action, if needed.
8. Remember that nothing said to the media is "off the record".

9. What happens if the crisis is Club specific, but the ramifications could impact on the District or Rotary in general?

1. The Club President should determine whether the crisis or dispute goes beyond the Club and cannot be handled using the official procedures for arbitration and mediation as outlined in Article 16 of the Standard Rotary Club Constitution. District Governors do not have the authority to make decisions for the Club or to be a "judge" in Club disputes.
2. The Club President should notify the District Governor immediately if there are wider implications of the dispute or crisis.
3. The District Governor will negotiate with the Club President on who should be the spokesperson during the crisis.
4. The Club President and spokesperson should work with the District Crisis Management Team.
5. All Club members should be briefed on the crisis and requested not to talk to the media and to direct all enquiries through the Club spokesperson or the spokesperson of the District Crisis Management Team.
6. The District Crisis Management Team, through the District Governor, will be available to provide advice and support to the Club President and spokesperson.
7. Gather all facts and keep an accurate record of all events and all communications

10. Allegations against a Rotarian not related to Rotary

1. When it is brought to the attention of the club that a Rotarian has allegedly committed conduct not related to Rotary (whether charged with a criminal offence or not) which has the potential to bring Rotary into question or disrepute, the Rotary club president or other Rotarian who becomes aware of a crisis shall immediately contact and consult with the District Governor.

2. As a rule, whilst everyone likes gossip, members of Rotary should remember the Four Way Test and adhere to the principles of natural justice. In that regard the following principles apply:
 - a) Do not discuss with other members until such time as you have spoken with the individual in question.
 - b) Obtain their position with respect to the alleged conduct. Do not discuss the matter with anyone further in the club than is necessary.
 - c) If the alleged conduct has already been disseminated amongst members of the club generally, then the individual may want the opportunity to put his or her side or response to the allegations to the club, although in doing so not to be defamatory about the person who made the original allegations.
 - d) Rotary should avoid becoming embroiled in defamation claims for circulating defamatory material. This could be dealt with on an individual by individual basis, as some people may not want the allegations spread further.
 - e) If the person been charged with a criminal offence you may not immediately seek to do so, but you could ask the member to standdown from any leadership roles until such time as the matter is resolved, but you may wish to keep the individual as a member on the basis that under Australian law you are innocent until proven guilty.
 - f) If the person is ultimately, following a trial or by virtue of a guilty plea, convicted of the offence, the board could decide to have them removed from the club altogether. In exercising this power, the club board would take into regard the nature of the offence and the impact to the reputation of the Rotary club and Rotary more widely.

11. What do other Rotary members do if contacted by the media.

- Assure the person you are speaking to that you will pass the enquiries on to an informed spokesperson who will contact them as soon as possible.
- Try not to be drawn into conversation about the crisis.
- Don't give personal opinions on information presented to you by the media.
- Contact the Club President about the matter.

12. What to do when speaking to the media

- Find out:
 - Who is calling
 - What media outlet or organisation they represent
 - Their direct contact details
 - What they want to know
 - When is their deadline
- Focus on the key messages given by the District Crisis Management Team.
- Limit the key communication to 2 or 3 statements.
- Be completely honest and sure of what you are saying.
- Release as much information as you can in a statement rather than making “off the cuff statements”.
- If you don’t want something reported, don’t say it!
- Acknowledge any concerns.
- Explain that you are investigating causes and doing what you can to address the situation.
- Remain pleasant and as accommodating as possible.
- Be organised before you communicate with the media.
- Speak in short, simple sentences. Each statement has the potential to be a headline tomorrow.
- Strengthen your main message with a short personal and relevant story.
- Emphasise Rotary is cooperating fully if there is an enquiry.
- Demonstrate positive voice tone and body language. Show emotions such as sympathy, concern, understanding or regret-whatever emotion is appropriate.
- At the end, thank the journalist and offer to be available for any follow up.
- Monitor the media coverage of the crisis. If facts are misrepresented, inform the media through a polite call or letter to the Editor.

13. What not to do when speaking to the media

- Never respond with “No comment”. If you can’t answer a particular question then explain why. For example: Sorry, but that matter is now part of an official investigation.
- Never refuse to speak to the Press
- Don’t ignore or delay the media-it can contribute to negative speculation.
- Don’t panic.
- Don’t make any “off the record” comments. The interview is not over until the journalist leaves or hangs up.
- Don’t speculate or give opinions-stick to the key facts.
- Avoid mentioning or responding to rumours.
- Avoid Rotary jargon and acronyms.
- Don’t repeat the negative part of a question. Change to a positive.

Example

Question: Did the Club fail to provide adequate checks on the host parents of the exchange student?

Response: The safety of our exchange students is of the highest priority.

- Never cover up or make excuses.
- Avoid coming across as defensive, nervous or hostile

14. What happens at the end of a crisis?

- Additional follow up matters will be directed and monitored by the District Governor.
- Within 1 month of the completion of the crisis the District Governor will meet with the District Crisis Management Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the management of the crisis and to make changes to any procedures in the Crisis Management Policy that prove necessary.

15. Updating the Crisis Management Plan

It is important to review the crisis management plan regularly. The plan shall be updated as follows:

- Annually prior to the start of the new Rotary year by *{insert date}*.
- Following any changes to leadership or other youth protection policies.
- As a result of recommendations from a debriefing following a resolved crisis, a crisis simulation, or a narrowly avoided crisis.

16. A Final Word

Remember: Clubs, district committees and individuals are NOT to handle any crisis alone! District 9510 and Rotary International have first responders who can relieve you of the worry of facing the media when your attention is needed dealing with the actual crisis. The District Governor may decide what is the most appropriate course of action. Contact your DG as soon as a crisis develops.