

## COVID CRISIS COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

---

Many companies that shuttered production or closed offices due to the COVID-19 pandemic are now busy getting their facilities ready for a phased-in restart. Are you prepared to respond quickly, clearly and positively to mitigate the potential damage to your company's reputation after your company re-opens operations? **The most dangerous crisis is the one for which your organization is unprepared.** So, to help you prepare, here is a quick crisis communications checklist:

---

- **Identify potential risk situations and their impact**
  - Issues / incidents that are likely
  - Issues / incidents that are possible
  - Audiences that will be most impacted
  - Severity of potential impact
  - Key concerns that will need to be address for each issue
  - Anticipate most difficult questions around each of these situations
  
- **Identify your crisis team and responsibilities**
  - Who will be on team? HR, Legal, Communications, CEO, others?
  - Create an internal quick-contact list of mobile phone numbers and email addresses for team
  - Pre-arrange how the crisis team will communicate and how often
  - Plan primary and secondary spokespeople appropriate for various situations (*who best knows the specific issue?*)
  
- **Develop a strategy that conveys authenticity, transparency and sensitivity around:**
  - Your company's overall goals
  - Your employees
  - Your stakeholders
  - Your channels – what channels exist and will be used for conversations with your employees and stakeholders?
  - Other ongoing messaging – consider other communications efforts to make sure they won't sabotage, conflict or show tone-deafness in light of the crisis
  
- **Create your communications materials**
  - Prepare a holding statement for initial use
  - Prepare fact sheets on your facilities (*size, employment number, products, customers, history, etc.*)
  - Create a living Q&A about what is known and unknown for consistency across the organization
  - Consider and create other documents/activities you may need:
    - Talking points for Zoom or other online video calls
    - Employee letters / emails
    - Discussion points for face-to-face meetings
    - Website content
    - Updated media statements

- Social media posts
  - Letters to community, other stakeholders
  - Press conference or media briefing materials
  - Consider what core corporate messages might be appropriately incorporated into these communications
- **Anticipate the news cycle**
- How might the situation play out in the media?
  - What is the worst-case scenario in terms of media coverage?
  - Will it flare up and then fizzle out quickly ... or go on for weeks?
  - What milestones or trigger events could extend its life in the news cycle?
  - Monitor coverage as well as online reader comments and social media comments to determine public perception
- **Consider media relations details**
- Designate a single point of contact for media inquiries
  - Communicate to all employees to that any media inquiries should be directed without comment to that single point of contact, especially all switchboard, reception and security / plant gate personnel
  - Identify specific media outlets, reporters and channels that best address the stakeholders that will care about the situation
  - Consider scope of the impact – does it affect only employees of a local plant or will it have statewide or national/international impact?
  - What existing relationships with key reporters might be accessible?
  - Consider timing of media deadlines in scheduling your activities
- **Review media training tips**
- Know what to say - Create and focus on approved key messages
  - Know how to say it – Calmly, confidently and authentically with empathy
  - Use appropriate non-verbal cues – gestures, body language and eye contact
  - Give short, concise and factual answers
  - Do not speculate, do not speak for others and do not answer hypothetical questions
  - Confirm next steps and when updated information may be available
  - Follow-up with media as promised, keep communications with them going
- **Remember to be pro-active, not reactive**
- Do not delay a response in hopes that you will have more answers later
  - Avoiding commenting often implies that you are hiding something
  - It is fine to say what you know and explain what you do not yet know
  - Media work around the clock 24/7/365, even if you don't, so their calls will likely come at the most inopportune times
  - If you don't control the narrative, someone else will ... and control will be difficult, if not impossible, to regain

**Contact:** [jbianchi@bianchipr.com](mailto:jbianchi@bianchipr.com) \* phone: 248.269.1122 \* [www.bianchipr.com](http://www.bianchipr.com)