

Using District 5520's Crisis Communication and Management Policy

Who Should Know? Rotary Club Presidents, Leaders, Chairs, and Members of the District Leadership Team, Committee Chairs and Committee Members

What Should be Shared? Provide a full copy of the plan to every Club Member and District Staff person.

What Should be Done Before a Crisis? Read the entire plan. Clubs as well as District Committees should hold dedicated training to discussing and understanding the plan. All new Club members and new District Committee Members should be educated of the plan. The Club President shall identify a primary information liaison who will communicate details to the Team and media representative.

If You Have a Question Before a Crisis? Ask your Club President, Assistant Governor, District Governor, or any individual on the Crisis Management Team.

What Should Be Done During a Crisis? Carefully re-read and follow this plan.

If You Still Have Questions During a Crisis? Do not guess or try to fix it yourself. Ask any individual on the Crisis Management Team for help.

If you Have a Suggestion After a Crisis? Share them with any individual on the Crisis Management Team.

Crisis Communication and Management Policy

Overview

Crisis communication and management in District 5520 is supervised by the District Governor's Crisis Communication and Management Team (hereinafter "Team") The composition of that Team and their contact information is provided at the end of this document.

District 5520's Youth Protection Policies cover participants in the District's Youth Programs (DYP) including Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE), Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA), Interact and Club-based programs. When a crisis involves a participant of DYP, the District Youth Protections Policies, located on the Appendices of the District's Policies and Procedures Manual and on the home page at www.rotary5520.org, become a vital part of this Crisis Communication and Management Plan.

Introduction

Tragedy and crisis can strike at any time. Many types of events 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, flood, or extreme weather event; 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 greatest possible 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 all action is taken swiftly and professionally.

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.

What Constitutes a Crisis?

A crisis for the purposes of implementing the Rotary District 5520 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 a fire, flood, or earthquake) or human caused (such as accidental or intentional mass casualty event). A crisis can include alleged criminal activity where the alleged victim or perpetrator is a Rotarian in a Rotary Club of the District.

If a Crisis Develops

1. You ***DO NOT*** have to handle this alone! Rotary has many procedures available to help you get through the crisis.
2. Remember, if youth participants are involved, the Youth Protections Policies must be followed.
3. The Rotary Club president or other Rotarian who becomes aware of a crisis shall immediately contact the District Governor or the Chair of the Team. *All DYP staff shall follow the detailed reporting procedures of their individual programs.*
4. The District Governor or Chair of the Team will convene a meeting. The active members of the Team are appointed by the Governor and listed at the end of this document. Depending on the situation, additional team members could be appointed and might include the Club President, a committee chair, an attorney, a counselor or social worker, and the Club Public Information chair.
5. Gather all the facts.

6. In situations requiring law enforcement or other emergency service involvement, the Team shall cooperate with law enforcement in all respects and receive guidance from the responsible law enforcement and emergency officials.
7. Provide timely briefings to all Rotary stakeholders.
8. District 5520 has designated Media Representatives, in both the Northern and Southern parts of the District, who have extensive experience working with the media and who will manage communication with all those individuals outside of the Team, club and affected parties. The club shall identify a primary information liaison who will communicate details to the Team and media representative.
9. Instruct all Club members to refer press inquiries to the designated Team Media Representative.
10. District 5520 respects the privacy of all Rotarians and Rotary program participants. Do not release the name of any individual involved or the details of the crisis. The Team may release the names of those involved at the appropriate time.
11. Prepare a statement that accurately states the facts, expresses Rotary's position, and conveys the appropriate tone (sympathy, apology, commitment, etc.). Update as needed.
12. Develop key messages to help the Media Representative convey Rotary's position consistently and accurately.
13. Contact the RI PR Division (847-866-3245 or 847-866-3237) immediately if you think the issue could spread beyond the local press and attract the attention of regional, national, or international media.
14. The District Governor or Chair of the Team will notify the RI Legal Department within the required timeframe.

When the Media Contact You

If your 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 comment to the media other than referring them to the appropriate Team Media Representative.
2. Immediately contact the District Governor or Chair of the Team, even if you are in doubt of the urgency or importance of the matter. Let those responsible make the decision as to urgency and importance.
3. Immediately refer to any media contact to the District Governor or Chair of the Team or, in an on-going situation, the Team Media Representative. If you need time to confirm or determine the appropriate contact information, tell the reporter you will call back promptly.
4. When required, return media calls promptly but refer them to the Team Media Representative, as ignoring media can contribute to unnecessary speculation. Inform all members of the club and related individuals that Rotary will respond appropriately and as soon as possible but that **all** communication regarding the crisis will be through the district Team Media Representative.

5. The District Governor and/or Media Representative 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 Media Representative 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 and where possible provide links to the coverage to the Team Media Representative. If Rotary is misrepresented, let the Team Media Representative know and they will convey the concern to the District Governor.
8. Remember that nothing said to the media is “off the record.”

A Final Word

Remember: Clubs, district committees and individuals are *NOT* to handle any crisis alone! District 5520 and Rotary International have Rotarians with specialized knowledge who can relieve you of the responsibility of facing the media when your attention is needed to deal with the actual crisis. The District Governor may decide what is the most appropriate course of action. Contact your District Governor or Crisis Management Chair as soon as a crisis develops.

2025 – 2026 Crisis Management Team and Contact Information

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