Best Practices for Crisis Communications

When things go bad, it’s essential to communicate clearly and accurately.

Crisis Management and Communications
Understand the “big picture.” Has SEMS been activated? If so, who is the lead agency?

- Prime concerns are public safety & health followed by property protection.
- Speaker should be a person with the knowledge and authority to respond.
- Do not speculate – deal only in facts. If you don’t know, say so.

Determine your Objectives
What do you want to accomplish through your communications?

- Advise public of the status of the situation.
- What is being done to address the situation?
- Is there a projected time frame on situation mitigation?
- If evacuating, where can they go and what resources are available to them? Express compassion.

Determine your Strategy
Coordinate messages with other agencies/entities.

- Act promptly but be positive your information is correct.
- Defer to experts in their given fields (sheriff, fire, CHP, others).
- Be mindful of legal implications in statements.
- Utilize website & social media in addition to traditional news outlets.

Respond to Changing Scenarios
Monitor feedback from the public and media outlets.

- Respond to rumors and misinformation especially on social media.
- Provide set times for updates but add emergent info as needed.
- Never become angry or impatient. Stay in control.

Post-Event & Future Drills
Do a post-event analysis.

- What did we do well?
- What could we have done better?
- What can be learned from other agencies?