



Bulletin

Mechanical Contractor's Guide to Crisis Management

Development of a plan to train the project management team to respond and effectively minimize the impact of a jobsite crisis.

OVERVIEW

The project management team at a mechanical contracting company deals with a myriad of problems and issues daily, from a vendor shipping incomplete orders to dealing with out-of-sequence work and deciding how to keep the job flowing smoothly. The purpose of this bulletin is to encourage the development of a plan to address crises that lead to serious injury/fatality, such as crane accidents, falls, natural disasters or other such incidents.

The same project management team that deals with the day-to-day job-site problems will also necessarily be the first to react to a crisis. It is vital that the team is trained in reacting to the crisis to prevent additional death, injury or property damage, as well as limit damage from incomplete or inaccurate media coverage, and deal professionally and compassionately with the affected individuals.

Time is critical in a crisis. The company already has a plan to evacuate the jobsite and assemble for accountability. There is also a plan to summon and guide emergency medical system

personnel to any injured parties. In a binder on the jobsite, project management should have a list of hazardous chemicals to secure to limit further damage. If sub-contractors are directly involved with the crisis, their management will have to be among the first contacted. As for your company, notify immediately upper management and the loss control department. Plan to make other calls later to the human resources department, payroll, information systems, etc. as required.

PREPARE A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

When a crisis affects either a company or a jobsite, company officers and jobsite management personnel will be faced with multiple issues and demands. A plan that has been established, communicated and practiced can assist the company in managing the crisis. Here are some tips for an effective crisis management plan:

1. **Separate the responsibilities of crisis management from crisis communication.** Assign one person to manage the on-site issues, another person to be the liaison with first responders (police, fire, etc.) and public officials (OSHA, EPA, etc.), and another person to notify family of injured personnel and to accompany any injured workers to a medical facility.
2. **Assign a media spokesperson.** In the event of injuries or deaths, the spokesperson should be the highest ranking company official possible. Those responsible for managing the crisis should report to the media spokesperson to ensure that information about the crisis is accurate and timely. And be sure to assign a back-up.
3. **Assign a person to monitor social media networks.** Direct that person to correct any false or misleading information immediately.
4. **Put the plan in writing, update it annually, and communicate roles and responsibilities to all parties.** Consider staging a mock disaster drill at least annually to practice roles and to be prepared.

SEQUENCE OF RESPONSE

Crises, like accidents, are not always predictable; by definition, they are inopportune. There must be a selected group of individuals on each jobsite who are trained to handle emergencies. The primary burden will fall on the project manager and general foreman, but they will need the support of many others to effectively manage a crisis.

Initially, the project manager will likely be the senior company representative. If the project manager is not on site, this duty will fall to the general foreman.

The primary immediate concern is to secure the area. Take the steps that are already in your established crisis plan and identify any individuals who are injured or deceased. This could be someone with whom you have worked for years, and/or also could be a friend. Regardless of personal emotions, very critical steps must be taken immediately:

1. **Designate a responsible person to accompany the EMS transport of the deceased and injured.** These people must be familiar with hospitals and effective in relaying information back to the company.
2. **The project manager or project executive should notify family members/next of kin concerning the deceased or injured.** This is a particularly difficult task, and requires training beyond the scope of this bulletin.
3. **Local and/or federal authorities may have to be notified.** There will be case-by-case decisions to be taken on this point. For example, a large oil spill or a chemical leak must be reported. In extreme cases, the surrounding local community may need to be evacuated.
4. **The spokesman or project manager should keep the work force informed.** Release personnel when you can, reminding them not to speak with the media. Keep sufficient work force members on hand to perform tasks as needed. The loss control department shall communicate with medical facilities on the status of the hospitalized and injured. Loss control will update the workforce and management.

5. **After all authorized investigations are complete, start the clean-up procedures** to ensure the work-site can return to normal operations at the earliest opportunity.
6. **As necessary, the main office will have to assist with information gathering**, historical records, payroll assistance for the injured or deceased, and possibly preparation of checks as required. Information services might have to assist the recovery of electronically stored material and telephone assistance.
3. **All information should come to the crisis management team for evaluation.** The media will need to know: Who? What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How? Because of the inherent confusion in a crisis, there may be conflicting reports and inconclusive testimony from witnesses. Only information deemed accurate will be passed on to the spokesperson.
4. **To the greatest extent possible, try to be in a position to communicate with the media within 30 minutes.** If not, give the media a time frame within which you will be able to address them. Have an agenda ready before the interview process starts. Be succinct, specific and get to the point right away. Do not offer conclusions unless you are sure of them.
5. **Keep the press informed with current information.** Keep the information objective by refusing to speculate on answers. Information from the jobsite, hospital, and some historical information about the company will need to be assembled and disseminated
6. **Never, ever lie to the media.** Be accurate. If you make a mistake, stop and correct yourself.
7. **PRnewswire.com is a possible way to control Internet news** where the company can post its own story.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

In the event of a crisis, the media will invariably be involved. A “no comment” strategy rarely is a good idea. The media will usually find someone else to talk with, and then the company loses complete control over the story. A good media communications plan that can convey the facts about the incident and explain how the company is taking positive steps to address the crisis will almost always be a better strategy. Consider the following:

1. **Issue strict orders that neither company employees nor sub-contractors are to speak to the press.** All questions from third-party sources must be directed to the designated spokesperson.
2. **If a job-site crisis has occurred, prepare an area for the media.** The media’s job is to find information and prepare their story. The better the company can accommodate them and disseminate objective, accurate, timely information, the more influence you will have on the character of the reporting. The spokesperson should be trained in dealing with the press. (see Crisis Management and Presentation by Janine Reid. Copyrighted © 2000 by Janine L. Reid Group, Inc.).

RETURNING TO NORMAL OPERATIONS

After the crisis has subsided, it is critical to identify the cause and establish training throughout the company to prevent a similar

occurrence in the future. If there was a fatality or serious injury, care must be taken to restore morale on the jobsite. Outside assistance in the form of counseling may be required.

If the crisis incident involved sub-contractors or vendors, company management must evaluate contractual and business relationships to provide continuity in business affiliations.

Legal consultation may be necessary to protect the company's interest throughout the crisis.

SUMMARY

Although the mechanical contracting industry has placed its highest priority on safe work practices on the jobsite, the potential exists for significant crisis incidents. Develop a company plan to deal with the immediate situation to prevent further harm, care for the injured or deceased, warn the local community, and deal with the publicity. By effectively limiting the impact of such a crisis, you could save your company's future.



Bulletin

Bulletin No.
[Click **here** and type number]
File:
[Click **here** and type chapter]