

# COP113

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION & MEDIA LIAISON POLICY

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## 1. POLICY INTRODUCTION

National Ambulance provides public emergency medical services to the Northern Emirates, and acts as the lead medical agency in event of major incidents. Furthermore, it provides emergency medical services to a variety of individual customers in Abu Dhabi and nationally (excluding Dubai). It is therefore expected that major incidents (or MCIs) and disasters that National Ambulance (NA) must respond to will occur in the course of normal business.

Preparation to respond to such major incidents requires operational capability and readiness, however, there is also an expectation that parties involved in major incidents such as NA readily provide information to the public and other interested parties, over and above mandatory incident compliance reporting to regulators.

Voluntary communication during major incidents benefits NA's interests by:

- Limiting the opportunity for inaccurate information about NA, incident victims, or the incident to spread,
- Providing greater control over the company's reputation,
- Enabling other government agencies to coordinate both physical and media response
- Supporting Board functions and staff morale.

National Ambulance recognises and accepts the public expectation to carry out its duties in a transparent way, and provide timely, factual and accurate information on major adverse community incidents that it responds to. The aim of this policy is to set out details of communication during such incidents.

The NA management components that this policy relates to are: Leadership and Commitment, Organisational Roles and Responsibilities, Risk Evaluation and Management.

## 2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all National Ambulance activities and employees, including staff delegated emergency roles during major incidents and staff working at events or mass gatherings.

This policy directly applies to ongoing or recently concluded:

- Major incidents (mass casualty incidents - defined as any incident where the location, number, severity or type of live casualties involved requires extraordinary resources) escalated to Serious, Major or Catastrophic as per OPP123 – Major Incident and Disaster Response Policy and Procedure
- Sentinel events that disrupt business continuity unrelated to emergency medical response services
- Other incidents as decided by the CEO

As this policy addresses communication in catastrophic incidents, reference to 'crisis' and 'crisis communication' is made, however, this nomenclature does not limit the scope only to the most destructive category of incidents.

### 3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The positions listed below have the following roles and responsibilities relating to crisis communications. Staff may be reassigned from normal roles to specific functions during a major incident or crisis, and details of this hierarchy is provided in NA 'OPP123 – Major Incident and Disaster Response Policy and Procedure', Section 3.

#### Chief Executive Officer

- Overall lead and authorised person for communication on behalf of NA to external parties, including media, during a major incident
- Verbal and written communication with media, government entities and other third-parties regarding disasters and NA response, including interviews
- Approval of company comments/ statements prepared in English that will be translated into Arabic, including photographs and video
- Approval and instruction to issue internal communication to staff about major incidents
- Providing the Board with copies of press releases or public statements about major incidents
- Ensure legal review of statements if appropriate prior to issue

#### Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or his delegate

- Act in place of the CEO during a disaster when the CEO is not contactable
- In close liaison with the CEO and COO and act as the focal point for internal communication Assist preparation and review of media statements for accuracy
- In close liaison with HR and Corporate Services Manager for internal communication on major incidents to ensure all staff are informed in parallel or in advance of the public (Staff updates by SMS, email...etc)

#### Chief Operations Officer/ Silver (Tactical) Commander

- Provide accurate and up-to-date information on major incidents to the CEO, CAO or his delegate
- Assist preparation and review of media statements for accuracy
- Ensure staff responding to incidents do not communicate directly with media

#### Stakeholders Relation Manager or QHSE and Business Continuity Manager or Delegate

- In close liaison with the CEO, act as the focal point for communication and liaison with NCEMA and/ or other government agencies who prefer verbal communication in Arabic

#### Media & Communication Specialist

- Rapidly draft public statements appropriate to the nature and scale of major incidents
- Prepare public statements in formats suitable for the most appropriate media channels
- Be the single liaison with the Ministry of Interior's Security Media in providing them with the information and facts in the instance of mass causality incidents.
- Assist collation of additional information on incidents to brief and assist the CEO and DCEO communicating with external parties
- Monitor media channels for information about a major incident involving NA, and publications or reaction to NA's statements in traditional and social media
- Prepare template Communication Plans for most likely major incident types
- Maintain an up-to-date directory with contact details of media and public relations staff in NA's regulators (Department of Health-Abu Dhabi, Ministry of Health and Prevention) and key government agencies, for example NCEMA and Ministry of Interior's Security Media, and make this available to the CEO
- Translate or ensure quality of translation of statements from English to Arabic
- Maintain records of major incident enquiries, complaints, and NA public comments including the communication channel, content, audience, date/time, and responses
- Review and update this policy annually, or as required in response to major incidents or changes

#### All Staff

- Refer all requests for information from individuals, government or media to the Senior Communication and Media & Specialist, or Silver Commander/ Chief Operations Officer
- Readily comply with requests for information about major incidents from Supervisors, or any other staff position name in this policy
- Must not publish or share photos or comments on social media about incidents that identify individuals or show disrespect to victims and their families
- Must not publicly criticise or cause disrespect to any person or organisation involved in an incident, whether such comments are factual or not

## 4. POLICY

### 4.1. Overview & Guiding Principles

National Ambulance will proactively prepare accurate, factual and timely information on major incidents intended for public release, and will publish this information where appropriate. The guiding principles for public comments will be:

- Honesty
- Transparency, facts & relevance
- Respect (victims, families and staff)
- Timeliness

The key to a successful crisis communication strategy in the digital world in general is being honest, direct and open - inviting the target audience to 'make up its own mind', instead of defensive, impersonal comments designed to combat criticism and protect against litigation. However, care must be taken to ensure any information released does not hinder emergency responders or further endanger public safety.

New digital communication channels should be used in parallel with traditional formats, and speed of issue is essential.

#### **4.2. Enquiries from the Media, Government Agency Media Offices or the Public**

Requests for information from individual members of the community, the media or Government public relations departments will be treated equally in accordance with the same guiding principles. All requests for information must be responded to promptly.

Where a journalist or a Government entity's media and communication office requests information from NA (formally or informally), NA's Senior Communication and Media Specialist will initially field the enquiry, and either respond immediately with a written statement pre-approved by the CEO, or draft a response for CEO approval, and then refer the enquiry and response to the CEO to enable him to reply directly and quickly to the enquirer.

In the event of company related incidents, all media enquiries must be referred to Senior Communication and Media Specialist. Information must be collated by the Senior Communication and Media Specialist who will draft a public statement, get CEO's approval and release to the media. Internal communication about the incident will be handled by the CAO in coordination with HR and Corporate Services Manager.

In the event of an Emirate's level Major Incidents (Level 4), all media enquiries must be referred to the Senior Communication and Media Specialist who will refer them to the Strategic Stakeholders Manager or QHSE and Business Continuity Manager who will direct them to NCEMA Executive Committee of the Emirate. Information, including facts and figures, must be collated by the Strategic Stakeholders Manager and/ or QHSE and Business Continuity Manager, get CEO's approval and share with the committee

In the event of Federal level Major Incidents (Level 3), depending on the disaster itself, media enquiries must be referred to either the Ministry of Interior's Security Media or the Ministry of Health and

Prevention depending on the type of enquiry/ incident. If the incident or enquiry fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of interior, information must be collated by the Senior Communication and Media Specialist who will collate the information (facts and figures) from Operations, draft a public statement, get CEO's approval and share with Security Media who will be the focal point with media. If the incident falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Prevention, all media enquiries must be referred to the Senior Communication and Media Specialist who will refer them to the CEO who will direct them to the Ministry. CEO will be the single liaison with the Ministry of Health and Prevention.

In the event of National level Major Incidents (Level 1 & 2), all media enquiries must be referred to the Senior Communication and Media Specialist who will refer them to the CEO who will direct them to NCEMA's National Media Cell. CEO will be the single liaison with the NCEMA's National Media Cell.

NA will obtain the connection of the enquirer to the incident and their basic contact details (first and last name, residential address, mobile phone number, nationality). Written responses to individuals will be subject to the same preparation and approval process as media statements.

#### 4.3. Preparing Public Statements

National Ambulance will always be transparent and provide facts.

The communication team should step back from the situation and consider how the event or crisis may affect our patients, clients and other stakeholders.

If mistakes were made, National Ambulance must admit to them, take ownership and apologise. NA must quickly solve the mistakes or make good for the mistakes.

Once resolved, the team need to go to evaluation mode and move on. It is essential to get the message out first, to control content and accuracy (refer figure below).

✓ <b>BE FIRST</b>	<b>Get message out first to control content and accuracy</b>
✓ <b>BE RIGHT</b>	<b>Say and do the right thing</b>
✓ <b>BE CREDIBLE</b>	<b>Be open, honest, and speak with one consistent voice</b>

(In the event of major incidents such as mass causality incidents, crisis and major emergency situations where National Ambulance takes part in national emergency response, all communication with media should go through the Ministry of Interior's Security Media. Senior Communication and Media Specialist's role in this situation is to collate information, draft statements if required, get them approved by the CEO

and share them with MoI's Security Media who in their role will be the authorized source of information and focal point of contact with media)

Below is an overview of tactics for dealing with different forms of media in other events of crisis:

Below (table 1) is an overview of tactics for dealing with different forms of media in the event of a crisis:

The impact of NA public statements will be monitored in traditional and social media, and follow-up statements will reflect any adjustment in tone, content, audience or timing.

Where considered appropriate, legal review of prepared public statements will be sought prior to issue, at the discretion of the CEO.

**Table 1: Recommended Media Strategy and Tactics**

Media Channel	Strategy	Tactics
<b>Television &amp; Radio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify likely media outlets that will report on major incidents.</li> <li>– Monitor what is being broadcast.</li> <li>– Prepare key messages.</li> <li>– Prioritise broadcasts appropriate to your key stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Brief spokespeople on the situation and coach them to give the key messages.</li> <li>– If you do not have full details of the situation, prepare a holding statement to explain as much as you do know. Supply spokespeople for interviews.</li> <li>– Supply approved images and video where relevant.</li> </ul>
<b>Newspapers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Monitor news stories to establish the media's response.</li> <li>– Prepare key messages and establish which publications and journalists to target; prioritise if necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prepare a news release.</li> <li>– Hold a press conference or media briefing.</li> <li>– Respond to media enquiries quickly.</li> <li>– Address key questions on your own website and social media channels so journalists have a source of information.</li> <li>– Respect the deadlines to which journalists work.</li> </ul>
<b>Social Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Monitor social media channels closely to ensure issues do not escalate and to ensure any misinformation is addressed.</li> <li>– Prepare relevant information to respond to public enquiries and issue statements or comment on NA's official social media channels.</li> <li>– Use social media to communicate directly with individual stakeholders where appropriate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create posts that respond to issues, with a link to the official statement.</li> <li>– Respond to enquiries quickly.</li> <li>– Use Twitter as a channel to keep the public informed with up-to-date information.</li> <li>– Address key questions/ specific public conversation on social media channels and know when to take conversations offline.</li> <li>– Photography and Video- communicate - use photos or live streaming videos displaying efforts in dealing with the crisis (if needed).</li> <li>– Utilise influencers/ bloggers as a key media by inviting them to media briefings (if needed).</li> </ul>



#### 4.4. Template Communication Plans

To enable fast and consistent public content, NA will prepare outline-level communication plan templates for incident categories that are considered likely to impact business continuity or are classified as MCI's, escalated as per OPP123 to Serious, Major or Catastrophic Incidents.

These incident types will be identified through risk assessments related to business continuity (including IT business continuity), QHSE, and major event planning. These template communication plans should then be completed with the specific details of a given incident.

Facts must be always be provided. Speculation must be avoided. The information, including the order it should be communicated in, is as follow:

1. Acknowledgement of incident's occurrence (date, time, location.
2. Confirmation and type of NA involvement (provision of emergency response, number of crews, premises/staff/services impacted by an adverse event such as fire)
3. Acknowledgment of death or injuries
4. Expression of corporate sentiment here or as part of other elements. For example, "we regret ..., we admit ..., we apologise for ..., we express our sorrow at ..., we resolve to ..., we are committed to ...")
5. Current status
6. Planned next actions

Refer to Appendix A for an example of a blank "Communication Plan Template".

#### 4.5. Staff & Visitor Emergency Communication

Certain critical situations necessitate immediate communication with staff, whether or not they are on duty or at their usual workplace. In such circumstances, staff will be notified by use of company-wide web-based messaging (Whatsapp) and text message (sms), with updates posted on social media.

Access and use of these NA staff emergency message distribution list will be controlled and reserved for emergencies only (not corporate announcements or routine communications).

Staff who are expecting visitors to Head Office or Warehouse will have further responsibility to contact their visitors via phone, messaging service, or remote corporate email to advise them not to go to the impacted location.

#### 4.6. Loss of NA Head Office or Warehouse

Certain circumstances may necessitate emergency communication to all staff, for example loss of Head Office:

- Fire at NA Head Office
- Major fire in Mussafah closing access roads around to NA Warehouse
- Other unspecified security incident at NA workplaces

In the unlikely event of such an incident at Head Office or the Warehouse which renders either facility unsafe for use, the following communication procedure will apply:

1. A member of the Executive Team or Operations Director/ MCI Gold Commander will notify staff not to report for duty or attend the impacted location
2. An approved message will be drafted and issued to all staff using the global staff mobile phone lists, by Whatsapp and sms. The message may be based on the following text:  
*“(Location) has been affected by an emergency incident. Staff are instructed not to attend (location) until further notice. Further updates will be issued by Whatsapp, sms and posted on NA social media channels. National Ambulance Management”*

#### 4.7. Media & External Contact Register

NA will maintain a register of emergency contacts (name, positions, organisation, mobile phone, office direct phone, email) to enable direct and rapid contact with internal and key external stakeholders and the media, including:

- **Media** – local English and Arabic newspapers, local English and Arabic radio and TV stations;
- **Government** - Department of Health- Abu Dhabi (as per Department of Health- Abu Dhabi official notifications), Ministry of Health and Prevention for federal health related incidents, Ministry of Interior including Security Media for federal security and emergency response matters, Police in each emirate, Civil Defence in each emirate, NCEMA, Ministry of Health;
- **Major hospitals;**
- **Board members;**
- **Clients and key suppliers** that are likely to be affected by major incidents.

This register will be prepared and maintained by the Senior Communication and Media Specialist and Stakeholder Relations Manager, and issued to the CEO.

#### 4.8. Post-Crisis Evaluation

When the incident is under control and in resolution phase, or closed, the MCI team must review the incident communications response, identify positive points and opportunities for improvement. These

opportunities for improvement must be reflected in adjustments to this or other policies and procedures. Where appropriate educate staff in key learnings from the incident and advise the board where necessary.

## 5. REFERENCES

International, federal or local legislation and circulars relevant to this Policy. Full detail on this legislation can be found in QHP109 Legal Register.

Code, Name of Legislation	Jurisdiction
HAAD/AEMR/SD/1.1, Standard for Adverse Events Management and Reporting, February 2012	Department of Health, Abu Dhabi
HAAD/MEPM/SD/1.0, Standard for Medical Emergency Preparedness at Mass Gathering, February 2013	Department of Health, Abu Dhabi
HAAD/ HHPS/SD/1.0, Standards for Major Incident and Disaster Preparedness in Healthcare, May 2012	Department of Health, Abu Dhabi
NCEMA - AE/SCNS/NCEMA 7000:2015, Business Continuity Management Standard (Specifications)	National Emergency Crises and Disaster Management Authority NCEMA

## 6. RELATED POLICIES AND FORMS,

List related policies and procedures to the created/updated policy.

Policy & Procedure /Form
OPP123 Major Incident and Disaster Response Policy and Procedure
OPP114 - Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Incidents
QHP103- Quality Health Safety & Environment (QHSE) & Business Continuity (BC) Management System Manual
QHP201- Risk Management Policy And Procedure

## 7. FEEDBACK

Any feedback or suggestions for improvement to this Policy, Processes or Procedures can be submitted to [qhse@nationalambulance.ae](mailto:qhse@nationalambulance.ae)

## 8. DOCUMENT CONFIGURATIONS CONTROL

### Change Brief

This policy is subject to NA's document control policy. Reviews will be carried out on a periodic basis aligned with NA's management system reviews and at least on an annual basis, or otherwise as required in response to major external or internal changes or incidents.

This document ownership for editing is identified as:

- Senior Communication and Media Specialist

This controlled document is managed by [Audit and Risk Management Committee].

## 8.1. Change Brief

Version No.	Date	Changes
1.0	December 2015	– New document
2.0	December 2016	– Added business continuity aspects; – Reorganised sections and edited for consistency with other policies; – Improved copy-text; – Formatting changes;
3	December 2019	– Made Punctuation in bullet points/ lists consistent – Updated position of Senior Communication and Media Specialist – Replaced Deputy CEO role with CAO – Placed internal communications aspect under the responsibility of CAO and HR Manager and Corporate Services Manager – Updated/ replaced names of Ministry of Health and HAAD with Ministry of Health and Prevention and Department of Health- Abu Dhabi – Added MCI and MoI Security Media aspect – Added guiding principles for media enquiries/ statements based on levels of MCIs (Level 4,3, 1 and 2) – Added roles for Business Continuity Manager and Strategic Stakeholders Manager under MCI level 4 – Added related NA policies – Changed document ownership from Operations to Corporate (Admin) – Change the code from OPP110 to COP113

## Review & Approval:

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Chief Executive Officer

## ANNEX A - Media & External Communication Plan Template

<b>INCIDENT INTERNAL NAME</b>	(eg – Sheikh Khalifa Hospital Fire)		
Date of Plan Preparation:		Time:	
Prepared by:		Position Title:	
Approved by:		Position Title:	
Legal review required?	Yes / No	Legal review completed?	Yes / No
<b>PUBLICATION CHANNELS</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Statement to Government Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Statement to Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Press Release/ Statement to Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio/TV Interview	<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Internal Circular	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Further details of publication:			
<b>INCIDENT DETAILS</b>			
Incident Date/Time:		Confirmed by COO/ Silver Commander:	Yes / No
Incident Location:		Confirmed by COO/ Silver Commander:	Yes / No
Incident Description & Basic Facts:		Confirmed by COO/ Silver Commander:	Yes / No
<b>KEY POINTS TO COMMUNICATE</b>			
<b>1. Acknowledgement of incident</b>			
Date/ Time			
Location			
<b>2. NA Involvement</b>			
Emergency medical response?	Yes / No	Number of crews/ambulances?	
NA is the subject of adverse event (fire, bomb, cyber attack):	Yes / No	Details of adverse event:	
Other comments:			

3. Acknowledgement of Death or Injuries			
Number of staff injuries:		Total casualties to date:	
Number of staff death:		Total deaths to date:	
<b>4. Sentiment/ Reaction</b> [*specific words to use]	<input type="checkbox"/> We regret ....	<input type="checkbox"/> We acknowledge our mistake ...	<input type="checkbox"/> We apologise for ...
	<input type="checkbox"/> We express our sorrow at ...	<input type="checkbox"/> We are committed to...	<input type="checkbox"/> .....
<b>5. Current Status</b>			
<b>6. Next Steps by NA</b>			
<b>7. Specific Approved Statement</b> [*mandatory for written Media Release, must be based on above information]			