

Safety Corner

Communication Strategy during Safety Crisis

Complex engineering systems incorporate multiple safety barriers to prevent catastrophic accidents. However, accidents can still occur, as we have seen from the large-scale nuclear accidents at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station after it was struck by earthquakes and tsunami in March 2011.

When the management of an engineering system faces a safety crisis, it must provide the right response quickly to ensure business continuity, in term of engineering control and communication to the public. The lack of a swift and effective response to a crisis can result in considerable loss of revenues, reputation as well as substantial impact on damage containment and costs.

Thus, effective communication with stakeholders during a crisis is paramount to business continuity. The aim of crisis communication in this context is to assist management to ensure effective information flows under circumstances driven by the crisis, disaster or event. The following strategies should be considered when developing a crisis communication plan:

- Fact sheet or crisis information pack should be readily available to the senior management and spokesperson
- A quick press release at the onset of a crisis with concise facts to ease public panic
- A streamlined communication processes with information provided at regular intervals following an initial release of information
- Engage all stakeholders, show empathy for the people involved
- Be readily accessible to the news media
- Remove dependencies on paper based processes and support electronic multi-channel communication media such as Twitter
- Always give the facts and strike down rumors with facts. Clarity of actions and words is important; technical jargons should be substantiated with simple language and graphics
- Acknowledging the unknown and uncertainly, state what is being done to address the information gap
- Maintain good track record in communication and give out facts reliably and consistently
- Maintain information security, and ensure there is an audit trail
- Never lie or mislead the public.

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