

Tips for Working with the Media When an Emergency or Crisis Occurs

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Even with planning, procedures, diligence, supervision and care, many types of emergencies or crisis can occur on an agritourism operation. If an incident happens on your farm, you will likely be rushed into action to immediately handle the emergency. Then as the adrenalin wears off you may be shaken and feel a variety of strong emotions. You will likely not be thinking clearly and may want to shut yourself away from the world. Unfortunately, that is likely not an option. In some cases, the media may be calling or knocking on your door seeking a statement or information. You will need to act quickly yet purposefully to share your message with them. Here are some tips to help you prepare for such a situation.

NOW – Before a Crisis Occurs

- Plan ahead! Think through and prepare an action plan NOW, while you are thinking clearly, so you will be ready if an emergency should occur – remember, you will not be thinking clearly in the midst of a crisis.
- Your plan should include a press release that can be adapted to the current situation as well as names and contact information of attorney, insurance representative, friendly media and additional resources such as these tips to working with the media when an emergency occurs.
- Identify a central contact or spokesperson for the media. This person should be articulate, sincere, diplomatic, caring and concerned.
- Put your action plan in an easily accessible and memorable place so you will find it quickly.

Then - If an Emergency or Crisis Occurs

- Breathe.
- Understand that the media is looking for a story – that is their job. Your job is to inform the media of your message – good news or bad.
- Find your action plan and brief your spokesperson.

- Inform the media that a press release is being developed and will be issued at a specific date and time.
- Edit your draft press release. If possible, have it reviewed by your attorney, insurance representative and/or trusted advisors.

Your message...

- Shoot straight. Be truthful.
- Only report what is accurate and appropriate to share – do not speculate, do not share personal information about any guest, team member or their family involved in an incident, recognize that information shared may be used in litigation.
- Relate that you take the issue/problem/incident seriously.
- Do not be afraid to show genuine sympathy, remorse and concern (not anger!)
- Talk about corrective actions when appropriate.
- Try to stay positive.

Interviews

- Do not give live interviews.
- If there are friendly reporters who have visited your operation previously, contact them and invite them to interview you.
- Request reporters send you questions in advance of the interview and prepare to answer them.
- Be prepared to answer other questions that are likely to come up.
- Stay calm.
- Answer with short sentences and concise thoughts. Keep repeating your message and do not stray from that message.
- Shake the hands of those who come to cover the story and thank them for being your friend and for helping you.