



# **Crisis Response Plan**

for

## **Rapid Transit Rafting**

**Estes Park, Colorado**

**Tom Jaster, owner**

**Traci Pearson • May 3, 1999**

## **Purpose of the Crisis Response Plan**

The purpose of this Crisis Response Plan is, ultimately, to protect the reputation and operations of Rapid Transit Rafting (RTR) of Estes Park, Colorado. Specifically, this plan provides RTR with written procedures to follow and resources to use in case of an accident or crisis.

A serious accident or crisis is, by nature, rare and unexpected and can throw your company's operations into turmoil. Decisions must be made quickly with information not normally at hand. The actions and communications made during a crisis are critical to the company's reputation and operations.

With this crisis response plan, Rapid Transit Rafting can better prepare for and react to an accident or crisis. This plan hopefully never will be needed.

### ***Definitions of Crises***

#### **Crisis:**

*Crises* are unplanned events that directly or potentially threaten:

- RTR's reputation;
- the health, safety or welfare of employees;
- the health, safety or welfare of customers;
- the health, safety or welfare of other outfitters, guides and their clients;
- the health, safety or welfare of citizens in communities in and through which you operate.

Events that fall into this category include accidents, medical emergencies, equipment malfunctions, floods, and other types of unexpected incidents.

#### **Minor Crisis:**

A *minor crisis* is one in which there is little or no property damage; causes minor injuries or none at all; results in minimal, if any, disruption of operations; and is quickly brought under control. Media inquiry is possible with events in this category but likely to be minimal.

#### **Major Crisis:**

A *major crisis* may involve significant injury or loss of life, prolonged disruption of normal operations, or substantial property damage—or hold potential for any of these. Media inquiry is likely to occur with events in this category, especially if emergency response has been called in for assistance.

### ***Communication Objective***

In the event of an incident at any of RTR's sites of operation or in the course of normal operations, make every effort to communicate as appropriate—promptly and accurately—to employees; customers and other involved parties; the Colorado River Outfitters Association (CROA); surrounding communities; law enforcement and other relevant agencies; and the news media.

When a crisis occurs, it is necessary for RTR's owner or manager to gather facts and data quickly, including the nature of your response to the crisis. The following communication efforts will strive to alleviate employees' and customers' concerns, minimize speculation by the media, and ensure that your position is presented.

It should be noted, though, that many incidents occur that are relatively minor in nature and consequently are not covered by the media. Nevertheless, it is essential to gather facts about the incidents and have them available to communicate, if necessary, to appropriate audiences.

The nature of that communication is outlined in the following plan.

## **Seasonal Preparation**

### ***Identification of Spokespersons***

At the beginning of the season, RTR should set up its own internal crisis communications team. Staff should be designated to do the following tasks:

Family member point person – This person is to stay with the individual/family; go to the hospital, etc. In the event more than one individual/family is involved, there should be another point person, up to the total number of individuals or families affected. The outfitter should also offer up front to cover any expenses relating to putting up family members, travel expenses, etc., if necessary.

Employee point person – This person is to deal with the staff and keep them apprised of what has happened.

Media contact/Spokesperson - For a minor crisis, the company manager is the appropriate spokesperson. For a major crisis, either Jaster or the manager can be the primary spokesperson. Jaster shall be available for press conference appearances and interviews. The spokesperson(s) is responsible for contacting the appropriate government/regulatory bodies, sheriff's office, and for responding to any media calls or questions. Jaster and the manager should be the only people who speak to the media or public regarding the incident so that all communication is consistent.

Jaster shall designate a staff person on every trip to be the person responsible for calling the home office to implement the crisis communications plan and reach the crisis communications team.

### ***Other Procedures***

- Review crisis communications plan with employees. Hand out copies and accident report forms (see the attached *Incident Information Sheet*).
- Make certain Jaster, the manager, drivers and trip leaders always have a copy of the crisis communications plan, including a list of emergency medical and law enforcement phone numbers.
- Always have waivers signed.

- Make certain that all customers are informed of safety procedures and tips before embarking on any trip.
- Make certain to inquire about any potential or existing health problems that guests may have or problems that could put them at risk on any raft trip. In the event you feel uncomfortable about an existing condition and the participant still wishes to go, note the condition, that the individual was advised not to go, and have the individual initial it on the waiver, along with one witness or staff member.

## Media Response

- Media calls should be referred to the local governing authority for specific details of the incident as follows:

Poudre River: USDA Forest Service

Colorado River: BLM

Arkansas River: Steve Reese, Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, (719) 539-7289

Jaster or RTR's manager can also speak to the media, but should only release information or facts as known, not assumed. When in doubt, tell the media you still don't have all the facts at hand and you'll call them back as soon as you do. Then *do so*.

- Make certain that Holly Johnson or another CROA Executive Committee member is informed about the incident and any pertinent details in the event they receive media calls. (See *CROA Contact* list on page 8 and attached *CROA Emergency/Accident Notification* sheet.) Consult them for appropriate responses to a situation. If Jaster or the manager feels RTR has been wronged by a reporter or media coverage in any way, call Holly (or the most senior CROA committee member available) to discuss appropriate follow-up.
- Track pending or actual media coverage, when possible. Holly or other CROA committee members will also try to do so, but any assistance is helpful.
- Keep in mind that your priority is to ensure the safety and comfort of customers. To the media, say what you know and explain that further information will be released as facts are confirmed. **Never say "No comment."** This can be perceived as an admission of guilt. If you do not have enough information to respond, simply state that you've been informed there's been an accident but that you do not have any facts on hand. Tell the reporter you will call them back as soon as you do. Take down their name and phone number and be sure to call them back or ask Holly Johnson to respond for you.

## Guidelines for Spokespersons

- **DO NOT SPECULATE.** Always stick to the facts. A more in-depth investigation is required to determine cause.
- **Focus on two or three key messages to communicate and repeat them during the interview.** (See *Key Messages for the News Media During a Crisis* on page 6.) Keep

answers short and to the points. TV reporters want “soundbites” of no more than 10 to 15 seconds. Keep coming back to your key messages throughout the interview.

- **Speak in simple, common terms.** Avoid jargon.
- **Remain calm.** Do not be intimidated into answering questions prematurely. You may tell a reporter that you need to clarify an important matter before you can answer questions.
- **Do not use negative language.** Do not let reporters put words in your mouth.
- **Consider human safety first.** When human safety or other serious concerns are involved, deal with those considerations first. You can admit concern without admitting culpability.
- **Do not answer questions you do not understand.** Ask for clarification. Occasionally, this can be used to buy time to think.
- **Do not release names of victims until the family has been notified.**
- **Ignore cameras and microphones.** Face the reporter. Don’t look away or up at the sky. During videotaped interviews, it’s all right to stop your statement and start over.
- **Make only “on the record” statements.** There are no “off the record” statements.
- **Do not say “No Comment.”** If you don’t know an answer, say so, then go back to your key messages.
- **Do not allow your staff to talk to the media.** Only designated media spokespersons should disseminate information.

### **Format for Briefing Spokesperson for Interviews & New Briefings**

Spokespersons should make certain they go over certain information, if possible, before an interview or news briefing:

- Date, time and location of the interview
- Name of the reporter
- Name of the publication, wire service broadcast station, etc.
- Knowledge of past experience with the reporter or publication, if available. This is to help understand the degree of caution needed in this interview and to prepare for the specific reporter’s approach. (Consult with Holly Johnson on this if possible.)
- Subject/issues/questions to be covered as requested by reporter
- Your position or recommended response and the data needed to discuss these subjects
- **Top three to five messages RTR wants to make in the interview (not necessarily based on the reporter’s suggested topics).** (See *Key Messages for the News Media During a Crisis* on page 6.)
- Background information and statistics that would be useful in preparing for the interview (such as the company’s past safety record)

- Proposed length of interview

If possible, this background material should be in writing so it can be carefully read. Only under exceptional circumstances should you rely on an oral briefing. In critical situations, it is also useful to prepare a thorough set of questions and answers to define the company's positions and to be used in rehearsing.

## **News Release**

During an emergency, it may be determined that a news release should be distributed to the media. If possible, this task should be left up to the law enforcement agency or Holly Johnson at CROA.

## **Key Messages for the News Media During a Crisis**

- Our primary concern is for the safety of our employees and guests.
- Our standards for safety and first aid training meet or exceed standards required by the State of Colorado.
- Our raft guides receive special river rescue training.
- Our raft guides receive training far above the minimums required by the states.
- Our safety record has been exemplary.

## **Audiences During a Crisis**

To effectively communicate your message, it's essential to understand who your audience is and how you want your audience to react.

There are two key types of audiences during an emergency:

1. People directly affected by the emergency.
2. People whose attitudes about the company might be influenced by information about the emergency.

These two types of audiences are broken into six categories. Your objectives in dealing with each of these audiences should be as listed below:

- **Employees and Customers (including victims families)** – You want your employees and customers to know that their safety is the number-one priority during an emergency. Employees and customers need information regarding the emergency as soon as possible. This must be accomplished in a manner that assures them that the company has their best interests at heart and that it can effectively handle emergencies.
- **Community Residents** – You want to quell any unnecessary fears. You want the surrounding communities to know you take quick, effective steps to protect their welfare. This can be best accomplished by responding quickly to community concerns and needs for information.

- **CROA and other outfitters** – This group needs to be kept informed in case of an emergency as well as be accessible as a resource if necessary.
- **Government Officials** – This group includes representatives of licensing and permit agencies. Key members of this group need to be kept apprised of the emergency situation.
- **News Media** – You want the news media to know your company is credible, concerned, and effective at dealing with emergencies and that you understand and will meet the unique needs of each type of media. The media will get information about an incident any possible way; you want to make sure they get the *right* information from you, not incorrect information from another source.
- **Vendors and Contractors** – You want these audiences to know that your employees are well-trained and reliable, that your equipment is safe and reliable, that the health and welfare of your employees and customers are your top priority, and that your company takes quick, effective steps to protect them.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

RTR's ownership and management is responsible for the following: identifying, confirming, investigating crises; developing strategies for managing crises; and developing strategies for recovering from crisis incidents. You should:

- Provide a representative at any Emergency Operations Center (EOC) if one is set up
- Control the release of information to employees, surrounding communities, and the news media
- Maintain contact with CROA and media representatives
- Establish and maintain a news conference center, if necessary

Only one spokesperson will be required for adequate crisis communications response. Holly Johnson at CROA will help with community and media PR.

The responsibilities for RTR's spokesperson are as follows:

### ***When an Accident Occurs***

- Ensure the safety of victim(s) and other guests:
  - Survey the scene; make sure it's safe to perform rescue and/or first aid.
  - Send someone to go for help (call **911**).
  - Perform rescue if necessary.
  - Apply basic first aid.
- Implement crisis communication plan. Notify the RTR crisis communication team of the incident.

- Call CROA contacts (below). Try Holly Johnson first, then Tom Kleinschnitz (1999 CROA Chair). Work down the phone list until you contact one of the executive committee members. That person will then contact the other members (particularly Holly Johnson and Tom Kleinschnitz). Make sure they know how to get hold of Tom Jaster and the RTR manager and main office.
- Add local contacts (i.e., hospital, government agency) as necessary to your phone list for staff to have on hand.
- Tell staff *not* to talk to media. Have them refer media contacts to Jaster or RTR's manager, the local governing authority, and/or CROA.

### CROA Contact Information

Contact Person	Phone (work)	Fax	Home Phone	E-mail
Holly Johnson	(303) 404-2780	(303) 404-2768	(303) 828-4811	holly@jcomm.com
	weekends, if not home: (970) 476-1411	Cell phone: (303) 946-8051		
Tom Kleinschnitz, Chairman	(970) 245-5428	(970) 241-5633		ab@raft-colorado.com
John Rice, Vice Chair	(303) 277-9900	(303) 277-9919		john@clearcreekrrafting.com
Kevin Foley, Treas.	(970) 453-0661	(970) 453-4946		raft@colorado.net
Dave Leja-Meyer, Sec.	(719) 395-2158	(719) 395-4033		meja@noahsark.com
Dave Costlow (Chair, 1998)	(970) 493-4005	(970) 493-3150	(970) 484-8423	

### Crisis Contact Information

Contact	Name	Phone Number	Fax
Poudre Valley Hospital		(970) 495-7000	
Larimer County Sheriff's Office		(970) 881-2197	
Forest Service Office – Fort Collins		(970) 498-1100	
Kremmling Memorial Hospital		(970) 724-3442	
Grand County Sheriff's Office – Hot Sulphur Springs		(970) 725-3343	
BLM – Kremmling		(970) 724-3437	

Memorial Hospital of Colorado Springs		(800) 826-4889	
St. Thomas More Hospital – Cañon City		(719) 269-2000	
Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center – Salida		(719) 539-6661	
St. Vincent General Hospital – Leadville		(719) 486-0230	
Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area	Steve Reese	(719) 539-7289	
Lake County Sheriff's Office		(719)	
Chafee County Sheriff's Office		(719)	
Fremont County Sheriff's Office		(719)	
State Parks in Littleton	Ron Dunlap or Aaron Fero	(303) 791-1954	
Rancho Del Rio		(970) 653-4431	
Conoco Station: "Ted's Place"		(970)	
other key contacts at other outfitting companies who might be able to help out			
key RTR employees			
key community people, expert resources, people who could help out			

**Notification of a Crisis**

Notification is an extremely important process in managing crises and sending the right messages to all audiences. When notification goes well, it makes the rest of the crisis communications job more streamlined and effective than when it doesn't.

**Notification Process in Brief**

- Notification is initiated from the area where a crisis has occurred or been identified.

- The person who discovers the crisis or incident calls RTR's main office.
- The office attendant notifies the manager and Jaster, who evaluate the crisis.
- In case of a major crisis, Jaster goes to the scene and keeps in touch with the office staff.

### **Communications Procedures for Handling a Minor Crisis**

1. The lead driver or trip leader, after the immediate incident needs have been handled (such as calling the police in the case of vehicle accident), calls the rafting office.
2. The person answering the phone in the rafting office records the basic facts, location and chronology of the incident. (Use the attached *Incident Information Sheet*.)
3. The person in the rafting office (if not the manager or Jaster), notifies both the manager and Jaster and relays the information from the driver or trip leader.
4. Jaster and the manager (or the manager alone if Jaster is unavailable) decide whether more information is necessary and the whether manager should travel to the incident site.
5. The manager calls the driver or trip leader and gathers more details about the incident (type of incident, when and where it occurred, emergency response personnel on site, number of people involved, any injuries, conditions at the time of the incident, what is being done to mitigate or resolve the incident, and who needs to be contacted and how to reach them).
6. If Jaster and/or the manager determine that the incident is likely to generate media inquiries, the media should be notified immediately. The person handling the phones at the office should direct all media inquiries to the manager.
7. Jaster and the manager discuss and agree on key messages and media responses.
8. The manager serves as prime contact for media. (Jaster should distance himself from a minor incident. This serves to downplay the importance of the event and prevent the perceptions of the media and public from being exaggerated.)
9. The manager fields media inquiries and makes follow-up calls to media if necessary.

### **Communications Procedure for Handling a Major Crisis**

1. The office personnel receive notification from the lead driver or trip leader and compiles the basic facts and chronology of the event. (Use the attached *Incident Information Sheet*.)
2. Both the manager and Jaster are notified.
3. Jaster will travel to the site of the crisis to obtain first hand information
  - type of incident,
  - when and where it occurred,
  - emergency response personnel on site,
  - number of people involved,

- any injuries,
  - conditions at the time of the incident,
  - what is being done to mitigate or resolve the incident,
  - and who needs to be contacted and how to reach them.
4. Jaster calls the manager with the details of the incident. He should continue to provide updates to the manager every 15 minutes or as circumstances change.
  5. Office personnel should direct all media inquiries to the manager.
  6. Jaster and the manager discuss and agree on key messages and media responses.
  7. Jaster serves as prime contact for media. (As soon as possible, Jaster or the manager should be sure to call Holly Johnson or a senior contact at CROA and fax them a copy of the attached *CROA Emergency/ Accident Notification* sheet.)
  8. The manager continues to receive updated information from Jaster. Both update statements to the media as necessary.
  9. Jaster and Holly Johnson confer on whether a press release is needed.
  10. The manager handles follow-up media and employee inquiries.
  11. Together, Jaster and the manager discuss the communications aspects of the incident and the lessons learned. This crisis response plan is modified accordingly. (Holly Johnson should be included in this discussion if possible.)

### ***Other Recommendations from CROA***

- Call for help from authorities if necessary to help control situation.
- Contact family/next of kin as soon as possible after an accident.
- Try to get customers cleared away from the accident. Solicit support from your office and/or other outfitters. (The sooner you do this, the less access to them the media will have.)

## Incident Information Sheet

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial Report \_\_\_\_\_ Update \_\_\_\_\_

Location of incident or accident (location on river or road):

Describe the incident (accident, illness, equipment breakdown, disturbance, etc.):

Time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the initial response to the accident (what employees did):

Describe which emergency response teams are responding and when (ambulance, law enforcement, Flight for Life, tow truck, etc.):

Estimate the number of employees/guests affected or injured, the nature of injuries and where they are being examined/treated:

Describe what is being done to mitigate the emergency:

## Colorado River Outfitters Association Emergency/Accident Notification

Received From: _____	Date: _____	Time: _____
Outfitter: _____	Phone: _____	
Board Member: _____	Phone: _____	
Law/Rescue Agency: _____	Phone: _____	

### INCIDENT REPORT

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Outfitter: \_\_\_\_\_

River: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Class: I    II    III    IV    V    CFS/Flow: \_\_\_\_\_

Trip Type:    Commercial \_\_\_\_\_    Private \_\_\_\_\_    Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Boat Type:    Oar \_\_\_\_\_    Paddle \_\_\_\_\_    Self-Bailer \_\_\_\_\_

# of Passengers:    Trip Total: \_\_\_\_\_    Per Boat: \_\_\_\_\_

Injuries	Illnesses	Fatalities
#: _____	#: _____	#: _____
Type: _____ _____	Type: _____ _____	Type: _____ _____

Current PAX Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Guide Information/Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Accident: \_\_\_\_\_

Rescue/Evacuation Necessary?    YES / NO    Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Outside Agencies Involved: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Status of Incident    \_\_\_\_\_ Successful rescue completed    \_\_\_\_\_ Search/Rescue still underway

Form prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_