

# VPDS Crisis Communications May 2025

## Introduction

- Today is about crisis communications, not incident management – this isn't a replacement for your Emergency Action Plans, it's a support.
- About me:
  - 15 years with SOBC – directly worked on 6 (going on 7) Provincial Games, 4 National Games, 2 World Games – supported staff and Locals through a wide range of incidents, from bus accidents to personnel management.
  - Previously a journalist, reported for the Globe and Mail and community publications, frontline reporting on everything from drug busts to house fires to tragic death at the luge track in Whistler.
  - I have experience in both sides.
  - I am here for you!!! We are here for you!!!
- Purpose of today: sharing best practices, and also an education session for me on what other resources (etc) we can provide to help Locals feel supported and secure about this kind of work.
- Being prepared for Crisis Communications is part of Risk Management.
  - Crisis communications relates to internal and external communications during and following a crisis situation.
  - Risk management is a proactive approach to minimizing, avoiding, and managing risk scenarios.
- On the call today (or interested in the subject and watching in future) we have volunteers from a wonderful range of communities – Prince George, Dawson Creek, Prince Rupert, Powell River, Victoria, Vancouver, Richmond, Abbotsford, Coquitlam, Trail, Kimberley/Cranbrook – and a wonderful range of experiences and roles with SO and professionally.
  - Your insights and experiences are all immensely valuable and I appreciate you making time for this important topic.
  - Will ask you to share your own experiences and insights as well, as willing.
- Any questions/points to make sure to cover?

## Fundamentals

- **Has a crisis happened to you? If not – it will! Our goal is to help you feel prepared, and supported. We got this!!**
  - Know that stress plays a role.

- Geography does too.
- Preparation and conversations can overcome these hurdles.
- What is a crisis?
  - A significant threat to Special Olympics BC's reputation, or a disruption to organizational operations that has the potential to generate significant public scrutiny and erode or destroy trust in SOBC.
  - Hinders your ability to operate
  - Damages the organization's reputation
- A crisis can:
  - Emerge and grow over time, or occur suddenly without warning
  - Come from within the organization, or as a result of an external incident
  - Start online or offline, and quickly move between the two worlds
  - Be the result of intersecting issues that on their own are manageable
  - Develop from a real or apparent pattern of behaviour and missteps
- What are potential SOBC crisis scenarios?
  - Death or injury
  - Abuse
  - Travel incident – accident, lost athlete, etc.
  - Organizational operations – theft, financial, accreditation, charitable status, cybersecurity etc.
  - Volunteer issue taken to media – disagree with SOBC policy, not endorsed to support competitions, suspended etc.
  - Athlete issue taken to media – not endorsed to advance in competition, accommodations can't be met, etc.
  - External issue – criminal activity from a volunteer or athlete that took place outside an SOBC event, a partner engaged in bad dealings and is associated with us, board member issue, external comments from former members/staff, external protests occurring near an SOBC event, etc.
  - Environmental emergencies near SOBC programs or events – extreme heat or cold, wildfires etc.

### **How we respond (we = you and SOBC, we are all together)**

- Timely is key
- Within 30-60 mins: Assess – Is it a crisis?
  - Is there a current or potential threat to SOBC's reputation or operations?
  - Does the threat have the potential to generate significant public scrutiny?
  - Could the threat erode or destroy trust in the organization?
- 60-90 mins: Gather factual info as quickly as possible, DOCUMENTATION IS KEY (even/especially in slow-burn situations)
  - What happened?

- Where did it occur?
- When did it occur?
- Who is involved? (full names and roles where possible)
- Who else is affected?
- What caused it?
- Why are we concerned?
- What do we not know yet? When will we know more?
- On collecting and reviewing information:
  - We must be careful to distribute ONLY facts we are certain of. SOBC must not spread misinformation or hearsay.
  - That said, SOBC needs to hear from you ASAP. So don't wait until you have "Everything" to contact SOBC – share what you know
- What SOBC SLT will do – highlights from SLT crisis comms action plan
  - Gather available information.
  - Categorize the risk – low (monitor), medium (prepare & react), high (proactive activation).
  - Assess impact on stakeholders.
  - Determine communications approach, and activate when needed. We have pre-planned messaging we can activate and build on quickly.
  - Continue communicating with staff/Locals who are directly involved.
  - Review and adjust, as needed.
  - Monitor for misinformation and emerging trends
- Your role:
  - Continue monitoring, documenting, and updating SOBC SLT.
  - When necessary, work with SOBC & supplied messaging to execute local stakeholder communications.
  - Monitor for misinformation and emerging trends.
  - Your most vital role: information gathering – accurate, timely, complete (as much as possible within evolving situation, don't wait until everything is perfect, call with what you have)
    - 5Ws
  - Need messaging – Call SOBC!
  - Know that you are part of a wider organization with a lot of resources and experience – and we will be getting calls/social media about this too
  - Thoughts on a portable tool that would help you and your coaches/programs? i.e. not just the incident form
- A word on discretion (don't panic):
  - Emotions can run high – do your best to stay cool, and keep feelings out of it.
  - Stick to the facts. What do I know, 100 per cent for sure?

- All communications, written or verbal, should be conducted with discretion, professionalism, and awareness that there may be legal ramifications
  - “Be Switzerland” -Amie Dugan
- Why should we work on this?

## Discussion:

- Crisis examples
  - Ellie hit her head and had to get stitches
    - What happened (unclear for a while 😊)
    - Who was involved (who hit my kid?!)
    - What risk to SOBC? (reputational, missing an event?)
    - This week, prepared messaging, backup plans etc.
- Crisis communications resources
  - What do you have?
  - What else would help your Local?
  - Online and offline tools and preparations?
- Conclusion

## LC Manual: Incident Reports

No one wants to think that they will ever have to discipline an athlete or a volunteer, but it can happen. That's why it is so important to document ALL incidents.

Locals don't need to forward every incident report to the Provincial Office, but you do need to write things down, discuss incidents or behaviours with the individuals involved, and then file those reports. Only if behaviours escalate would it be necessary for the Provincial Office to step in.

Incident reports are used for specific problem occurrences that warrant documentation. Incident report forms must be used for any first aid related injury or treatment of a specific medical problem that is out of the ordinary, any behavior problem or any coach, parent/guardian/caregiver related incidents.

**The question is "What warrants documentation?" A general rule of thumb for documentation of incidents or accidents is...if in doubt fill it out!**

Special Olympics BC is asked all the time to assist with insurance claims and if the forms were not completed, it is very difficult for us to assist athletes or volunteers in

getting assistance for costs incurred. The forms are completed by the coaches to inform the Local that an incident has occurred that could have serious ramifications. The form should be filled out as soon after the incident/accident as possible. Copies should be sent to the Local Committee via the Program Coordinator. If the SOBC Provincial Office needs to step in, copies of the incident forms will be required.

Blank copies of the Behavior Incident Report Form & Medical Incident Report Form can be found under Forms on the Coaching Tools page on the SOBC Website