



# TIP SHEET 20

## Crisis Management

The best time to prepare for a crisis is when there isn't one. A crisis management plan prescribes actions that will be taken because of external, environmental, climatic, equipment failure or other potential business threats that will impact the ability of the site to provide their customers with safe products. These threats, depending upon the site's product, location and other factors may include fire, flood, power failure, storm damage, acts of terrorism, etc.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	APPLICABLE CODE ELEMENT(S)
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- OUTLINE THE STEPS TO DEVELOPING A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN
- IDENTIFY WHO SHOULD BE ON A CRISIS TEAM
- DEFINE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM
- CONDUCT A TEST OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 2.1.5 CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANNING

## KEY TERMS

- CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The process by which a site manages an event, such as a flood, fire, etc., that adversely affects the site's ability to provide continuity of supply of safe, quality food, and requires the implementation of a crisis management plan.

## PROCESS STEPS

1. Establish the crisis management team
  - a. The team should be well rounded and consist of senior leadership responsible for making business decisions as well as other necessary team members such as the site's legal team, individuals responsible for food safety, purchasing, marketing, and/or sales. Depending on the set up of the organization or the crisis, the crisis team may consist of external members such as legal representation, food safety experts, epidemiologists, consultants, etc.



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- b. The team should have defined roles and responsibilities. This includes the internal and any external members of the crisis team.
  - c. Training should be conducted for all team members to ensure that they understand their roles and responsibilities in a crisis.
  - d. A crisis alert contact list that includes members of the internal crisis team as well as external stakeholders such as customers, regulatory, legal, or other outside contractors that may be used to counsel the crisis team.
2. Create the plan
- a. Develop action plans based off the threats that could occur to the site. Flooding, tornados, fire are all examples.
  - b. The plan should document:
    - i. The process that the site will take to address the immediate threat and control the crisis. For example, if having a lack of potable water could be an issue, then the site may need to plan ahead to determine a source for potable water during a crisis.
    - ii. The detailed controls the site will implement to assure that food safety is not compromised and that if the integrity of any product is compromised, how the product will be isolated, controlled and not be introduced into the market.
    - iii. The criteria for when controls will be implemented (e.g., numbers of hours with no power, rise in product temperature prior to moving to alternative storage locations, etc.) and how criteria will be monitored during the business threat condition.
    - iv. The criteria for product review and disposition of product to determine what is recoverable, salvageable and what should be destroyed.
    - v. The methods for recovery, salvage and product destruction.
    - vi. Details of the crisis communication plan:
      - 1. Determine a spokesperson and direct all external inquiries to that person. External stakeholders include regulatory, press, retailers, etc.
      - 2. Base all communications on the facts.
      - 3. Determine the necessary information to communicate and the methods for communicating to external stakeholders.
      - 4. Be cautious but don't be defensive in your communication.
      - 5. Instruct employees on the nature of the crisis and provide them with instructions regarding their responsibilities and duties. Employees should be instructed to direct all outside inquires to the person responsible of the communications team.



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3. Test the plan
  - a. All elements of the crisis management plan are to be tested at least annually. Depending on the known frequency or severity of risk, the plan may be tested more often.
    - i. For example, if the site is in an area that has a high threat of tornados, the plan may be tested before each season.
  - b. Start with a mock incident, such as a power outage, and follow the plan as developed. Include the product that would be affected in this mock incident.
  - c. Be sure to test all elements including how the product was monitored and actions taken based off monitoring results, and final decisions and disposition of the product.
  - d. This is a good time to check contact information of internal and external stakeholders on the crisis alert contact list.
    - i. Be careful when contacting your stakeholder group, especially customers as the testing of the plan often gets mixed up with an actual crisis. During this exercise, you are only confirming the contact information.
  - e. Include the actions of the communication team such as how internal and external stakeholders would be informed, mock press release, etc.
  - f. It is extremely important that throughout this process that communication is clear that this is a mock exercise.
4. Modify and update as needed
  - a. Areas within the plan that have been identified as not meeting the stated plan are to be updated as necessary.
    - i. Identify the area within the plan that was not met
    - ii. Determine why the plan did not go as outlined
    - iii. Create a plan to modify or adjust the plan
    - iv. Include follow up such as retraining, modifying the plan, etc.
  - b. It is best to document these follow ups to identify trends and action items.

### RELEVANT RESOURCES

- Food Marketing Institute - Crisis Communications Manual  
<https://www.fmi.org/industry-topics/crisis-continuity>
- FDA - Food Defense & Emergency Response for Retail Food  
<https://www.fda.gov/food/guidanceregulation/retailfoodprotection/fooddefenseemergencyresponseretail/default.htm>
- Chapman, Ph.D., Benjamin, Audrey Kreske, Ph.D., and Doug Powell, Ph.D. "Crisis Management: How to Handle Outbreak Events" Food Safety Magazine. June/July 2012. <https://www.foodsafetymagazine.com/magazine-archive1/junejuly-2012/crisis-management-how-to-handle-outbreak-events/>. Accessed August 16, 2018.
- Loria, Keith. "How to Prepare a Quick Response to a Food Safety Crisis." Food Quality & Safety. February 11, 2018. <https://www.foodqualityandsafety.com/article/prepare-quick-response-food-safety-crisis/>. Accessed August 16, 2018.