



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

GUIDEBOOK

**Step-by-step guides and templates for communities
and first-responders responsible for crisis communications
throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.**



An initiative of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Professional Municipal Administrators, and Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services.

Table of Contents

Message from Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador	3
Message from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador	4
Preamble	5
Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	7
About this Guidebook	8
Communicating in an Emergency	10
Emergency Communications Process	13
Communications Plan	17
Developing Key Messages	24
Questions and Answers Documents	27
Media Advisories	33
News Releases	36
Events, News Conferences and Public Information Sessions	40
Media Relations	46
How To Be an Effective Spokesperson	49
Utilizing Social Media	51

Message from Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador



On behalf of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL) and our partners, NLAFS and PMA, it is my pleasure to present this “Crisis Communications Guidebook”, step-by-step guide and templates for communities and first-responders responsible for crisis communications throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

This guidebook was made possible by a financial contribution from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs), and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. It was developed by a working group established by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and m5 Public Affairs.

Communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador have spent considerable time and effort over the last decade building and maintaining emergency management plans for the protection of residents, property and the environment. Since 2008 in particular, when the Emergency Services Act was created, the remaining communities turned their attention to having an approved emergency management plan by 2011, per the new legislation. The importance of having an emergency management plan goes without saying as countless examples exist throughout our province’s history that show planning ahead can save lives.

As we all know by now, part of the overall emergency management process includes communicating to residents, the general public and members of the media. Getting your message out to those audiences effectively is tremendously important. This guidebook is intended to help you create, and ultimately deliver, your message in a consistent, effective and coordinated way.

Over the next few years, we will continue working with our emergency management partners, including Fire and Emergency Services-Newfoundland and Labrador, to provide training on how to effectively plan your communications strategy. Knowing how to communicate during a crisis is extremely important. We anticipate this guidebook will make that process easier, when coupled with the appropriate training and insight. Today marks the first step in this process.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Churence Rogers". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Churence Rogers
MNL President

Preamble

With round the clock news coverage and social media informing our residents and stakeholders every day, news of an emergency response can quickly escalate into something we could never imagine. We must understand the benefits of communicating clearly to prevent chaos.

While effective emergency management planning has been a part of our community for decades, the legislative responsibility was brought about in 2012 by the Provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Various tools and supports, including the 12 Step Guide to Effective Emergency Planning and training from Fire and Emergency Services- Newfoundland and Labrador, have been developed and delivered to support planning efforts. This Crisis Communications Guidebook is the next support in a line of valuable resources already available. It is our hope that it will help you get your message out and instill public trust in your municipality, local service district, or emergency first response agency.

This guidebook will support your overall emergency response in a way you may have never considered before. Your overall goal must be to plan ahead, to know what to do to reduce fear, avoid panic and establish credibility before, during and after an emergency or crisis. Your residents depend on it more than you know!

Acknowledgements

The following individuals and organizations have made a significant contribution to the development of this guidebook:

- Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services (NLAFS) –
President Vince MacKenzie
- Professional Municipal Administrators (PMA) –
Executive Director Krista Planke
- Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs –
Former Director of Communications Hugh Donnan and current
Director of Communications Kevin Guest
- Fire and Emergency Services-Newfoundland and Labrador –
Former Communications Manager Kelly McGuire and current
Public Relations Specialist Bradley Power
- Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador –
Communications and Public Relations Coordinator Gail Woodfine and
Chief Executive Officer Craig Pollett

Introduction

Effective communications during and after an emergency is imperative

All communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are required to have an Emergency Management Plan for the protection of residents, property, and the environment. Communications planning is an important supplementary component of the overall emergency management and planning process. Spending some time considering how best to communicate to residents and stakeholders can lead to a better understanding of the situation and help send a clear message that your community or organization is doing all that it can – as quickly as it can – to remedy the situation.

Even under the most difficult circumstances, when an emergency means lives are at stake, the number of people directly affected is comparatively smaller than the number who will become aware of the crisis through the media, through word-of-mouth, or, in the best circumstance, through your spokesperson.

Public reaction to an incident will undoubtedly be guided by media reports and through public information. This means that public perception of your community's performance in an emergency is largely determined by how you communicate to residents, the community-at-large, and to the media. An emergency that is well handled on an operational level can be perceived to be mismanaged if your community or organization fails to communicate effectively during – and after – the emergency.

Effective communications is largely dependent on having well-defined communications procedures. The purpose of this document is to help you in this regard. These communications procedures must match up with the operational planning that occurs, and must consider how people will perceive and react to an emergency or disaster. The implications of key decisions must be considered carefully by key decision-makers, (i.e. Mayor, Councillors, Emergency Management Chairpersons, Fire Chiefs, Police Chiefs, and Ambulance Directors) and be incorporated into a communications plan.

This guidebook is designed to help you develop a communications plan that will be a critical component of your community's or organization's overall emergency management plan. Your communications plan, and the strategy you set by utilizing the templates provided herein, will assist in all aspects of your response to an emergency or crisis.

About this Guidebook

The purpose of this guidebook is to:

- Support the development of communications plans to support emergency management plans;
- Provide step-by-step guides to develop communications tactics (such as news releases, media advisories, etc.) that may be required to communicate information to residents and to support the emergency management team in organizing quickly to respond efficiently and effectively to an incident; and,
- Recommend ways to successfully communicate to residents and clients during times of emergency.

This guidebook outlines the methods that may be used for the execution of external (residents, media, etc.) and internal (staff, firefighters, etc.) communications before, during and after an emergency. It explains the different functions and tools that are at your disposal, and recommends commonly used resources that you can utilize to successfully deliver your message.

Each section of this guidebook is divided into two sections:

1. An overview explaining the process and purpose of planning; and,
2. Templates/explanatory notes for communications tools intended for use before, during and after an emergency.

Please note that this guidebook provides generalized support for developing communications plans and incorporating communications tactics and tools for any type of emergency, but in a very basic way. Therefore, a communications professional should be engaged to provide advice and guidance wherever possible.

section 1

**COMMUNICATING
IN AN EMERGENCY
OR CRISIS**

Communicating in an Emergency

Commitment

Your organization must be absolutely committed to communicating openly and honestly with the public and key stakeholders during an emergency. Your effectiveness depends on your ability to supply accurate information as quickly as possible during an emergency. The number one priority for your community's or organization's emergency response effort, whether it is its operational or communications response, is to protect the safety of your residents, clients, employees, and the traveling public. You must disclose pertinent information to these groups on a timely basis to respond to that priority.

In the event of an emergency, your priority is to inform residents, clients, employees, the traveling public, other levels of government, media and the general public in an effort to help all stakeholders understand the nature of the emergency and your general approach to managing the incident. In the event of an escalating emergency, it is important that you monitor public, government and media reaction. This will help determine the most appropriate response.

In order to communicate effectively during an emergency, you must be:

- Open and honest
- Factual
- Clear
- Caring
- Proactive
- Responsive
- Timely
- Consistent
- Co-operative
- Alert

Definition of an Emergency and Crisis

An emergency is a situation or a set of circumstances which, if not properly eliminated, controlled or contained results or could result in significant injury to people (including the community) and/or damage to either property or the environment. The definition of a crisis is much more subjective, but may include emergencies or incidents that cause major panic or fear, and examples have shown that reason can be cancelled out by emotion.

Key Communications Principles

The key approach to communications planning is to be proactive. Take the time to develop a communications plan for each of the risks you've identified through the emergency management planning process with Fire and Emergency Services-Newfoundland and Labrador and neighbouring communities and emergency first responders. Having a communications plan in place to support your emergency management plan will save significant time when a crisis strikes. Much like your emergency management plan, your actions must be well thought out and easy to implement making the emergency easier to manage in terms of perceptions and expectations.

section 2

**EMERGENCY
COMMUNICATIONS
PROCESS**

Emergency Communications Process

Emergency and Crisis Communications Planning

The emergency and crisis communications planning process includes specific communications activities that support your organization's philosophy and guides all responders in making effective communications an integral part of the overall emergency response.

Specific communications activities must be grouped into three categories:

- Actions before an emergency;
- Actions during an emergency; and
- Actions after an emergency.

Before an Emergency:

The quality and effectiveness of the communications response to an emergency situation are directly related to how well we are prepared, therefore we must:

- Plan and prepare in advance of an emergency [e.g. assign roles, such as determining your spokesperson and media liaison, list contact names, develop and organize communications tools (ie: communications plan, key messages, news releases, etc.)].
- Train and testing your plans through simulations, and communications skills training (such as attending the Crisis Communications course at the annual Fire and Emergency Service Training School).
- Review and update communications plans and other communications tools and documentation regular or as required.

During an Emergency:

The true test of your emergency response communications plan occurs when you are managing real events. During an emergency you must:

- Respond immediately to external inquiries using designated individuals to handle your communications needs (such as a Mayor or Fire Chief speaking with the media).
- Assemble a team. If you are a community or emergency fire responder with limited resources, drawing on the expertise of other stakeholders (Provincial Government, neighbouring community, etc.) is wise. The nature of the emergency, threat to public safety, predicted intensity of scrutiny and potential damage to your organization's reputation will all influence these decisions.
- Dispatch someone to the location of an emergency as soon as possible so you have eyes on the ground and not dependent on second-hand information. What you say to stakeholders must be reliable and accurate.

- Manage use of a spokesperson and flow of information to ensure consistent messages are always delivered.
- Establish effective working relationships with third parties who also have a responsibility to communicate to the public (e.g. Federal Government, Provincial Government, Fire and Emergency Services-NL, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Professional Municipal Administrators, Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services, police, other safety and regulatory agencies)
- Officially implement a communications plan that you've developed in advance to support your overall objectives.

After an Emergency:

Invariably, valuable lessons are learned during actual emergency response situations.

An integral part of continuous improvements involves the thorough analysis of incidents.

We know them commonly as debrief sessions. To that end, you must:

- Review and analyze the positive and negative aspects of the overall communications response.
- Implement a post-emergency communications plan to rebuild confidence in your organization, if necessary. As we know, communicating to our residents and clients doesn't end when the emergency is finished. There are often months of recovery, and communicating during this time is just as important.

STEP ONE

Develop a Plan

section 3

**COMMUNICATIONS
PLAN**

Communications Plan

How to Develop a Communications Plan

Developing a communications plan (a strategy) should identify:

- The nature of the emergency;
- The key stakeholders and audiences;
- The core messages (key messages) and advice to provide to residents and clients; and
- The communications tactics you will use, and tools to employ, to distribute your core messages.

The following communications plan template overview includes important questions and considerations that you must contemplate when developing a strategy to address an emergency or crisis.

Develop a plan for each potential risk within your community, in advance of an emergency or crisis. Consider how you want to get your message out, and then choose the tactics and tools that best suit your needs and will support your message. Whenever in doubt, engage a communications professional or communications firm to aid in the development of your initial communications plan.

How to Write a Communications Plan

Title: The title of your communications plan should include the specific risk the communications plan will address, such as “Flooding Communications Plan” or “Major Power Outage Communications Plan”.

Issue: In a short paragraph, explain the issue(s) that you are facing, such as whether you are addressing a flood, fire, or other emergency or incident. Use statement like “A flood occurred in the community of <<NAME>> and has caused a number of residents in the <<STREET NAME>> area to be displaced.”

Consulted with: This section should outline all those individuals you have consulted or spoken with regarding how to communicate to your audiences. It may also include a list of officials from within your community that have provided you information or insight.

Date drafted: As any emergency can change in a moment’s notice, so too can your communications plan. It is very important to note the date (as time) that your communications plan was drafted. This will ensure information is current and the most recent draft is used during the incident.

Communications Analysis

Public Environment:

This section should note what has been stated in the public domain on the issue. This would include an overview of comments by stakeholders, the general public, media, government and emergency responders. It should also clearly indicate the level of media coverage similar incidents have received, and provide samples (quotes) of comments made in the media. Other considerations may include whether news releases have been issued by stakeholder groups. You should also consider what discussions or meetings have been held with key stakeholder groups that may not have been reported on, but will still help inform your communications planning process.

Strategic Considerations:

This section of the communications plan is critical to ensuring a complete understanding by your emergency management planning team of any factors that may impact how the issue will be communicated and how your messaging will be received. Ask yourself:

- What considerations should be kept in mind in terms of the communications approach? Are there impediments like lack of phone coverage?
- Who will be affected by the emergency or incident?
- Are your stakeholders expected to react in a certain way?
- Will your current response (or future actions) related to the emergency or incident generate negative, neutral or positive feedback?
- Are there specific response measures that would address/impact the response? More people, messaging, etc.
- Are there messages already communicated to your community that should be considered to fully inform the communications approach? Were they accurate?
- Are there reports that have been completed on the issue (i.e. a flood risk analysis and related notifications to residents)?
- Is there third party support that can be utilized to help deliver your message (i.e. MNL, PMA, NLAFS)?

Target Audiences:

In this section, capture who you should be communicating with. Who needs to hear your message? These groups of people or organizations are either internal to the community, or external. For example, town staff would be an internal audience. Residents of the community would be an external audience. There are usually multiple audiences associated with a communications plan.

Communications Objectives::

What are the goals of any communications regarding the emergency or crisis? Is your goal to inform residents? To enhance public safety through advice on how to respond? To change opinions? To garner support? To mitigate criticism? To ensure a certain outcome?

Communications Strategy

Overall

Approach:

It is important to indicate in a sentence or two, the overall communications approach being recommended. Is the recommended approach (the way you deliver your messages) low key or very high profile? Will these communications be reactionary – your spokesperson only speaking to the issue if it is raised? Or will it be proactive in nature? It could be a mix. State how you will enact your plan.

Key Messages:

Key messages are one of the primary pieces of any communications plan. See the appropriate section of this guidebook to explain how to develop key messages. Insert your messages (what you want to say to your audiences) in this section of the communications plan when they're completed.

Actions/Tactics:

In this section, outline how you will get your message out. The following communications tactics can support you in this regard. Choose specific actions and tactics based on the needs of your individual community or organization.

1. News Release;
2. News Conference;
3. Letter to Residents;
4. Website Post;
5. Facebook/Twitter (Online) Post;
6. Media Interview;
7. Town Hall Meetings/Public Information Session;
8. Call Radio Shows (VOCM Open Line, CBC Radio Noon, etc.);
9. Letter to the Editor;
10. TV/Radio/Print Advertising;
11. Posters;
12. Door-to-Door Outreach, etc.

The rationale for utilizing any of the examples above should be clearly outlined. Ask yourself, why would I use this tactic? How will it help?

When planning, consider if a single approach is appropriate for all stakeholders and audiences. Sometimes you may need to utilize many communications tactics for a small number of audiences to ensure the message is received and understood. Sometimes only one is needed. Consider all possibilities.

Internal**Communications:**

In this section, you will outline how you will communicate to your internal audiences specifically, like staff, members of council, volunteers, etc. Be explicit on how you will communicate to these groups. For example, should your organization send an e-mail to all staff providing an update on the emergency response? How will you inform members of council or members of the fire department while they are on the road or responding to the situation? Ask yourself what your internal audiences need to know and when, and then explain what tactic you will use, (i.e. letter, e-mail, poster).

Follow-up**Activities:**

No matter how clearly you deliver your communications plan are or how many ways you've chosen to distribute your key messages, sometimes what you are saying gets construed or improperly communicated for one reason or another. This section should outline how you will follow-up to ensure your message was received properly. Consider whether you will monitor the media or draft another news release to clarify something, or whether you need to follow-up at all. These ideas will be hypothetical, but no less important to consider in advance.

Evaluation**Criteria:**

Once your communications plan has been implemented, keep in mind that you should evaluate your effectiveness and choose whether or not you will use some of the same tools and tactics in the future. Your evaluation criteria may be as simple as determining how many people in your community received your public letter, through a small show of hands at a meeting, or by asking for feedback online. Evaluating your communications efforts will make future efforts stronger and more effective. Keep in mind, people will have no issue in saying whether you're getting them information correctly. Take the input you receive via all methods (i.e.: work of mouth, e-mail, letter) and make your communications plan stronger in the future. Note here that you will in fact do that, and how.

Budget:

Most every communications plan will cost something to produce. Whether for printing paper or running an advertisement. This section should outline in detail the cost of your suggested communication strategy.

Communications Plan

Organization Name

Title: _____

Issue: _____

Consulted with: _____ Date drafted: _____

- Communications Analysis
 - o Public Environment
 - o Strategic Considerations
 - o Target Audiences
- Internal
- External
 - o Communications Objectives

- Communications Strategy
 - o Overall Approach
 - o Key Messages
 - o Actions/Tactics
 - o Internal Communications
 - o Follow-up Activities
 - o Evaluation Criteria
 - o Budget

Prepared by: _____

Approved by: _____

STEP TWO

Develop Messaging

section 4

KEY MESSAGES

Developing Key Messages

Ways to ensure you say the right thing under pressure

Key messages are the most important part of your communication plan. Key messages open the door to meaningful and informative communications with your audiences, because they bridge what your audience already knows and where you are trying to tell them. You have a story to tell, whether to educate, discuss, promote or advocate. Key messages tell the story in a clear and concise way.

Think about what you want people to know about your organization and the emergency or incident. What do you want them to say about it? What do you want them to do? Develop a few core messages that connect the dots between what you do and how it relates to your audience. Also, try to develop messages around a single idea as too much information can cause more confusion. Keep language simple and use analogies or personal stories to get your point across. Make your messages believable, too. Provide evidence, such as numbers to increase credibility.

Be consistent with delivery of your key messages. Each message you deliver should reflect your organization – that is, who you are. Highlight what is relevant to the issue and your audience, but be sure to include a consistent statement about your community or emergency response organization, too. This makes your messaging memorable and helps position you in the public and in the minds of your audience.

Develop talking key messages that include:

- a statement about the emergency or incident
- details about the response or solution, and
- something the community can do to bring about a solution.

At the very least, always write down the basic key messages, like who, what, where, when and why. Having your key messages on paper will ensure you never forget important information. Be prepared.

In short...

- Key messages should be short and clearly stated information points or recommendations
- Ensure you provide information that is valuable to all audiences
- Update key messages as new information becomes available

Key Message Document

(Template:)

KEY MESSAGES
Organization Name
Title
Date and Time

Key messages should comprise of only a few sentences each. They should be bulleted and flow together. They should be concise and always use plain language.

Key Message One: _____

Key Message Two: _____

Key Message Three: _____

section 5

**QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS**

Questions and Answers Documents

Answers to most likely asked questions

In an emergency or crisis, you can reasonably expect the media and public to demand quick answers to questions related to the crisis. Ask yourself the questions below and write down the answers to the best of your knowledge. The suggested answers must reflect your community's or organization's belief that it should be communicating positive messages to external audiences all the time.

What happened?

- Provide direct information on what can be observed or what is factually known (i.e. explosion, accident, flood, fire).
- Do not speculate about the cause or reason.
- Provide factual information and continually update it. By taking the initiative to work with the media and answer key questions, the more effective your messaging will be.

What was the cause?

- "An assessment or investigation is underway to determine the exact cause. It would be premature to speculate about the cause of the incident at this time."
- Details will be provided once they are confirmed.

What is the extent of the damage?

- "Damage estimates are not yet available. We are however, working within our own organization as well as with other emergency officials to determine the extent of the damage. As soon as we have more information, we will make it available."
- Remember to provide factual information on an ongoing basis. Try to share new information immediately, as soon as it has been confirmed.

What are you doing in response to the incident?

- Discuss the extent of your initial response and what else you are able to do. i.e.:
 - Council or organizational efforts
 - Local resident efforts
 - Prevention
 - Restoration/Recovery
 - Personnel
 - Equipment

- “We have activated our local emergency management plan. We have notified the appropriate local authorities (i.e. government officials) as well as the emergency response team (if appropriate).”
- Provide new information, once confirmed, on an ongoing basis. Advise the media of significant events, i.e.:
 - o “The flood or fire has been stopped.”
 - o “Access to the highway has been restored.”

How long will the recovery take? Don’t speculate!

- “We’re not sure yet...”
- Provide new information (once confirmed), on an ongoing basis.

How much will it cost?

- “Our first priority is to ensure the safety of the public, local residents and our emergency management officials. We will deal with costs later.”

What are you doing to prevent this from happening again?

- “We are assessing the situation and will have more to say in the future.”
- State if an investigation is ongoing or whether assessments are being conducted, (i.e. engineering study, cost estimate, mitigation analysis).
- “If the investigation or assessment determines we should do something we’re not already doing or prevent this kind of incident from happening again, we will do so.”

When will the damage be repaired?

- “We are trying to assess the extent of the incident. We will take the necessary steps to minimize or eliminate the damage.”

Who will pay for the damage? Are you liable? Do you accept responsibility?

- Some emergencies or incidents may not prompt this question. However, in order to provide guidance for those responding to issues of liability, compensation and responsibility, the following comments are suggested:
- “Our major focus is to address the emergency... It would be premature to discuss the liability issues until our organization has had a chance to review the situation.”
- “We do, however accept full responsibility for responding to the incident.”
- And if pressed... “I am not a lawyer so I’m not in a position to comment on issues of liability or compensation. This is a discussion that needs to occur with all partners at the tables. I can tell you, however, what we are doing to respond to the emergency.”

Other questions...

- The key to an effective Question and Answer document is to thoroughly explore the possible questions media or the public may ask of you and then script your answers before you deliver them. That way you will not forget anything important in a potentially stressful situation. There are very few potential questions that are off limits in an emergency situation, so be prepared.

In short...

- Anticipate any and all questions that could be asked
- Ensure answers are clear and concise
- Update answers as new information becomes available

Question and Answer Document

(Template:)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Organization Name

Title

Date and Time

Q: _____

A: _____

Q: _____

A: _____

STEP THREE

Development of Communications Tools

section 6

**MEDIA
ADVISORIES**

Media Advisories

Inform the media in an advisory and save yourself time in the long run

A media advisory is typically a one-page, short notice contained information the media need to know for various reasons. For example, you may use a media advisory when notifying the media about specific plans for a spokesperson to perform interviews, to announce an event, or to highlight an upcoming public information session.

A media advisory should contain five primary pieces of information:

- **What:** one sentence saying what you are informing the media about, such as whether you're announcing a meeting, interview opportunity, or event;
- **Where and When:** the date, time, and location of your meeting, event, etc.;
- **Why:** This should be short, one-to-two paragraphs, about why you are holding this meeting or event; and finally
- **Who:** be sure at the end to include your name and contact information so the reporter can call or email you to ask for more details.

Once the media advisory is drafted and approved, it should be sent to the media with ample notice of an event or briefing. It would also be wise to follow-up with local media representatives to ensure they received your media advisory as reporters and their e-mail addresses often change. If it was received successfully, you are well on your way to having media coverage (pending media availability) for the meeting, event or public information session you will be hosting.

In short...

- Be thorough and clear when providing information
- Double check times and dates
- Follow-up with the media

Media Advisory

(Template:)

MEDIA ADVISORY **Organization Name** **Date**

The Mayor/Chief <<Insert name and title of individual, spokesperson or host>> of the Town/Department of <<Insert community or organization name>>, will address the media in response to recent flooding in the community on Monday, December 1, at 9:00 a.m. at the <<Insert location of event>>, located on <<Insert civic address or physical location>>.

-30-

Media contact:

<<Name of your Spokesperson>>

<<Phone number>>

<<E-mail>>

section 7

**NEWS
RELEASES**

News Releases

A news release is simply a written statement to the media. It can announce a range of news items, including scheduled events, status updates, etc. during times of emergency or crisis. Reporters are more likely to consider spreading your message (or reporting on your incident) if they first receive a news release. It is a fundamental tool of any communications plan and contains all the key information someone would need to understand what is happening during a crisis.

There are three sections to any effective news release. (1) A headline, (2) the body (detailed information and content), and (3) contact information for media follow-up.

The following sections outline how best to compile a news release:

Headline

Choose a headline that is brief, clear and to the point: a very short version of the news release's key point. Examples include: "Flooding Causes Road Closures throughout the Town" or "Major Landslide Cuts off Community." The headline should be one sentence in length.

Body of Release

Your news release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story. Tell your story. Most radio stations and news outlets are very busy, and don't have time to research your community or the specific situation you are experiencing, so much of what you write for your news release will be what the reporters use in their write up for publication. Whatever you want them to say, this is where you put it.

- Start with the date and community in which the news release originates.
- The lead, or first sentence, should grab the reader and say concisely what is happening. For example, if the headline is "Flood Causes Road Closures through the Town," the first sentence might be something like, "A recent flood in the community of <<NAME>> has caused the closure of <<XX>> roads in and around the community. The traveling public is advised to use extreme caution." It expands the headline enough to fill in some of the details, and brings the reader further into the issue at hand. The next one to two sentences should then expand upon the lead.
- The news release body copy should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and overuse of fancy language and jargon. Strive for simplicity.
- The first paragraph (two to three sentences) should sum up the news release, and the additional content must elaborate it. In a fast-paced world, neither reports, nor residents, would read the entire news release if the start of the article didn't generate interest.

Remember...

Deal with actual facts — events, services, people, goals, plans, projects. Try to provide maximum use of concrete facts. This is news.

Consider this...

A simple method for writing the body of an effective news release is to make a list of following clarifications: Who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Consider these questions when putting pen to paper:

- Who/what is your news release about, who/what may be impacted, and how?
- What is the actual news? Cut to the chase.
- When did the emergency or incident occur?
- How long will the situation last?
- Are residents at risk, and how?
- What should they do to protect themselves?
- How can they help emergency responders in keeping the community safe?
- Are there areas of the community that residents should stay clear of?
- What are some simple tips to follow to ensure everyone is safe moving forward?
- Who can residents call if they have a problem or issue that needs to be addressed?
- Where will updates be posted, or where can more information be attained?

News Release

(Template:)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Organization Name

Date and Time

HEADLINE

Paragraph One - Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Sed gravida lobortis diam eu congue. Nulla iaculis nibh non velit vestibulum, non efficitur mi posuere. Aenean dignissim a lacus et aliquam. Aliquam tortor nulla, tempor sed mauris quis, sodales malesuada nisl. Maecenas purus urna, bibendum et pretium nec, feugiat in elit.

Paragraph Two - Aliquam ac hendrerit augue, non luctus orci. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Phasellus sem mauris, eleifend eu nunc sed, rutrum iaculis dolor. Etiam quam elit, rhoncus eget dignissim sit amet, consectetur id nunc. Proin fermentum auctor augue sed sollicitudin.

Paragraph Three - Sed vehicula arcu lacus, sit amet maximus nulla euismod eget. Nunc efficitur vestibulum metus sit amet hendrerit. Phasellus quis nisl eget neque euismod auctor at sit amet nulla. Donec dictum nisl pretium metus sollicitudin, sit amet porttitor nulla tincidunt. Fusce vitae diam sit amet risus hendrerit maximus nec sit amet nulla.

<<Insert information such as website addresses or telephone numbers where additional information can be found and note specific way updates can be attained as the emergency advances.>>

-30-

Media contact:

<<Name of your Spokesperson>>

<<Phone number>>

<<E-mail>>

section 8

**EVENTS,
NEWS CONFERENCES
AND PUBLIC
INFORMATION
SESSIONS**

Events, News Conferences and Public Information Sessions

When planning an event, news conference or public information session, one of the first decisions you have to make, other than choosing your date, is your location. The venue you choose should tie in with the crisis and serve as a platform to interact with your target audiences.

After selecting the date, you need to determine the time of day it will occur. Be strategic. For maximum coverage ensure the event is early enough in the day so media outlets have time to prepare it for the evening news. The evening news has the highest coverage and is the greatest opportunity for you to get your message out. In addition, know the print schedule for your local newspaper. They have deadlines that must be met if you want to have your message or story included.

Refer to this checklist when planning an event, news conference or public information session:

- Determine your venue.
- Determine who will speak, the order and what they will say.
- Determine who to invite. Start with those directly impacted by the emergency or crisis, then include the media and other partners, and the general public.
- Distribute invitations or notices.
- Determine whether an emcee is required.
- Determine the audio and visual requirements. Big rooms may require microphones, etc.
- Coordinate a podium, or set up a head table.
- Ensure water is available for all speakers.
- Determine whether your speakers need key messages or a question and answer document.
- Have hard copies of any news releases or information sheets your speakers will be speaking about.
Make sure there is ample seating for guests, as well as a specific area for media to stage. Remember, cameras need a line of sight.
- Ensure effective access for persons with disabilities.

When an event, news conference or public information session is finished, media may require interviews with key individuals. It is wise to have a separate area where media can perform interviews. This space should be quiet and well lit, as daylight through windows does not work well with cameras. Essentially, ask the media what they need in advance.

Other advice...

- Ensure participants speak clearly and their information is concise.
- Have someone take minutes or make notes. Questions might come up that will require follow-up.
- Events should not be scheduled late at night. You want to be as accessible as possible, and families with young children are often unavailable late in the evening.
- Record those in attendance for follow-up purposes. Provide a sign-in sheet at the entrance and encourage people to sign it.

STEP FOUR
Get Your
Message Out

Emergency Partners Communications Contact List

For any communication method you could imagine developing as part of your communications plan, you will obviously need to know how to get it to the masses. You will need to know who key contacts are within partner municipalities or emergency response agencies, as well as key influencers in your community, and members of the media.

Therefore, develop a contact list. Use the following format to compile a list of important names and numbers from within your community. A provincial list has been developed (contained below) for your information. It is updated regularly and available by contacting Fire and Emergency Services-NL at AreYouReadyNL@gov.nl.ca or by calling 709-729-0857.

Please note: Updated communications contact lists will be sent to all those that request one, and will be distributed quarterly throughout the year, or when an emergency dictates the need to have it updated more frequently, for your use.

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT
Fire and Emergency Services-NL 25 Hallett Crescent, St. John's, NL	Bradley Power, Public Relations Specialist 709-729-0857, 709-690-1810 bradleypower@gov.nl.ca
Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador 460 Torbay Road, St. John's, NL	Gail Woodfine, Public Relations and Marketing 709-753-6820 gwoodfine@municipalnl.ca
Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs West Block, Confederation Building, St John's, NL	Kevin Guest, Director of Communications 709-729-1983 kevinjguest@gov.nl.ca
Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services Grand Falls-Windsor, NL	Vince MacKenzie, President 709-489-0431 firechief@grandfallswindsor.com
Professional Municipal Administrators 460 Torbay Road, St. John's, NL	Krista Planke, Executive Director 709-726-6405 nlama@nlama.ca

Media Contact List

The following contact list is meant to serve as a guide for distributing official information to media outlets for public consumption. It is recommended that communities and emergency first responders reach out to members of the media in advance of an incident to establish rapport and direct lines of contact.

MEDIA OUTLET	CONTACT
NTV https://www.facebook.com/NTVNewsNL https://twitter.com/NTVNewsNL	News Director 709-722-5015 mdwyer@ntv.ca
VOCM https://www.facebook.com/VOCMN https://twitter.com/VOCMNEWS	News Director 709-726-5590 feedback@vocm.com
CBC Radio/Television https://www.facebook.com/cbcnl https://twitter.com/CBCNL	Assignment Editor 709-576-5225 radionews@cbc.ca
The Telegram https://www.facebook.com/StJohnsTelegram https://twitter.com/StJohnsTelegram	Assignment Editor 709-364-6300 telegram@thetelegram.com
The Western Star https://www.facebook.com/thewesternstar https://twitter.com/western_star	Assignment Editor 709-634-4348 newsroom@thewesternstar.com

section 9

**MEDIA
RELATIONS**

Media Relations

Utilizing the media can be the best way to communicate with your residents or clients. It is important that you recognize the following six principles of effective media relations before stepping up to the microphone and/or performing an interview with the media:

BE ACCESSIBLE - Use a spokesperson that is knowledgeable, someone who is in the loop, and they should participate in media training in advance if at all possible.

BE PROMPT – Always return a reporter’s phone call quickly, even if just to acknowledge their call and say you will get back to them.

BE HONEST – Always be upfront and truthful. Remember that you will be “on record” and anything you say could be verified by others, or questioned, in the future.

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE – Keep up to date on what’s happening in the community specific to the emergency or incident. If you are uninformed, the reporter will likely not look for you to perform future interviews. Ensuring an information flow for the audience is their most important goal and you must satisfy their need for accurate and timely updates, otherwise they will find someone else to provide them.

BE HELPFUL – Be sure to provide background information and insights to the media. Always follow-up with anything you’ve promised to provide.

BE RELIABLE – When you make a commitment, be sure to follow through.

Always remember that the media have a job to do, too. When they request information from you, there is no doubt it is for a specific purpose. Often times you may overlook parts of a request and therefore an entire “story” may not get told. The following information sheet will help you organize media inquiries during times of emergency or crisis.

Media Inquiry Form

Organization Name

MEDIA COORDINATOR INFORMATION

Name: _____

Position: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

REQUEST DETAILS

Date: _____ Time: _____

Media Outlet: Radio Television Print Other

Name of Reporter: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Issue / Concern / Purpose of Inquiry: _____

REQUIRED ACTIONS - CHECKLIST:

- Follow-up required
- Referred to
- Conducted interview:
 - Date:
 - Time:
 - Location:

BACKGROUND MATERIAL REQUIRED FOR SPOKESPERSON:

- Key Messages
- Question and Answer Document
- Maps, etc.

section 10

**TIPS FOR
SPOKESPEOPLE**

How To Be an Effective Spokesperson

Practice, practice, practice...

No matter how well-developed your key messages may be, getting info to residents and clients successfully hinges on the spokesperson. Delivering your message requires poise and credibility, or else the message can fall flat. The more interviews you do, the better you will get at speaking on camera and in front of audiences.

Following this advice:

- Choose spokespeople who can be available to the media at all times.
- Remember that you are the expert and be confident that what you have to say is important.
- Personalize your message. Begin statements by saying, “As a Mayor...”, “As a Fire Chief...”
- Never say, “No Comment.” You lose an opportunity to say something. Bring it back to your message by saying, “I don’t know the answer to that question, but I do know...” or, “What I’m really here to talk about today is...”
- Don’t look at the camera when being interviewed, address the interviewer.
- Dress appropriately. Remember that in the face of an emergency, people look to the spokesperson for stability and to be official.
- For longer radio or television shows, be prepared to share at least three stories that reflect your key messages.
- Translate large numbers to smaller ones. For example instead of 33 per cent, say one third.
- Don’t use jargon say the full name of your organization and spell out any acronyms you use internally.
- Use visual aids if possible: posters, photos, a pair of boots, anything to emphasize your message.
- When the interviewer gives you a chance to add something, be sure you say where to go to get more info a website, phone number or office.

Important Tips

- Convey empathy and caring.
- Be honest and open.
- Know the situation.
- Participate in media training in advance.

section 11

SOCIAL MEDIA

Utilizing Social Media

What is social media?

Social media refers to online technologies and practices used to share opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships. Some of the most commonly used social media tools are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

As our province changes and becomes more technology dependent, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are increasingly used to convey information during emergencies or crises to send warnings and to conduct situational awareness. Many communities and organizations have already established a social media presence, primarily on Facebook and Twitter, because they have recognized how these tools can deliver a message to residents and the general public very quickly and effectively.

Using social media to deliver information or advice during an emergency or crisis is becoming more popular and is seen as an essential communications tactic for any communications plan.

The Benefits of Using Social Media Tools

- Increase access to audiences
- Improve engagement with residents, partners and stakeholders
- Increase the speed of public feedback and input
- Reach specific audiences on specific issues
- Reduce dependence on traditional media like newspapers
- Counter inaccurate media coverage

The following information is provided to support your use of social media. For those new to the social media world, links to Frequently Asked Questions for Facebook and Twitter are also contained below to provide you a better understanding of these tools before utilization.

Why Use Facebook in Emergencies

- Facebook allows you to provide swift updates containing information and updates to the public in an effective and timely way.
- Facebook provides a forum for discussion so questions and answers can be quickly updated in order to prevent rumours from spreading.
- On Facebook, information can be spread on a large scale and can be shared by 'friends' or 'members' to widen its reach further.

Why Use Twitter in Emergencies

- Immediacy, in that Twitter gets information out to the public very quickly.
- Twitter allows the ability to inform the public and spread understanding. This increases the feeling of safety.
- Twitter has a wide reach, allowing crisis communication to all internal and external audiences.
- Twitter also provides the ability to gain feedback and receive direct communication during emergencies.
- Twitter has the capacity to conduct rumour management and correction of misinformation.
- It is easy to use and therefore allows easy access to all key information, for both emergency first responders and the general public.

Links to Frequently Asked Questions

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/help/>
- Twitter - <https://support.twitter.com/articles/13920-new-user-faqs#>



An initiative of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Professional Municipal Administrators, and Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services.