

10 steps to crisis media management

1. **Evaluate the potential for media interest.** Incidents occur on vessels every day and most receive no media attention. Warning signs that an incident might attract attention include:
 - a. The situation is visible to a social media savvy audience (e.g. a listing vessel or flames).
 - b. There are significant impacts beyond the vessel itself (e.g. pollution, damage to infrastructure or serious injuries).
 - c. Your story fits into a larger ongoing issue (e.g. environmental concerns in the Arctic or the Mediterranean refugee crisis).
 - d. Passengers are involved either on your vessel or on another vessel
 - e. The situation is in some way ridiculous or amusing (e.g. officer of the watch was on Facebook during collision).
2. **Prepare a brief statement** acknowledging that an incident has occurred; if possible provide assurances that the crew and vessel are safe and indicate that additional information will be provided as it becomes available. The statement should be ready within one-hour and will establish your company as a primary source of information for the incident.
3. **Begin media and social media monitoring.** Effective crisis communication must be a conversation rather than a speech and if you don't know what the other side is saying it's impossible to contribute effectively. Your communication must constantly respond to the evolving perceptions of the situation.
4. **Engage with journalists and the public.** If the incident is "interesting," and particularly if deaths, injuries or spills have occurred journalists will start calling every phone number they can find for your company. You should aim to answer and log each of these calls. You shouldn't give any information that wasn't in your statement, but by having someone answer the calls you will demonstrate that you're being transparent. Consider using a responder close to the incident to connect with local journalists. Many local journalists are used to being ignored and by making contact you will create an ally.
5. **Notify your stakeholders**, especially charterers and employees. If a story is going to break your key stakeholders should hear about it from you first; this increases trust and fosters a sense that you're all in it together. A good approach is to send a copy of the statement, with a suitable cover email, to your stakeholders about five minutes before you release it to the outside world.
6. **Prepare an updated statement** and put it on your website (if levels of interest warrant such). This statement should provide more detail and should focus on the steps being taken to address the situation. The more you position yourself as the active party the less likely you are to face demands that you do more – take credit for what you are doing.
7. **Identify key players involved in the incident** (e.g. the Coastguard, salvors, and oil spill responders) and make contact with their communications teams. From this point forward

you should aim to collaborate on all statements – nothing erodes public confidence faster than contradictory statements from the parties involved. A lead press office should be identified – usually this is either the ship owner or the relevant maritime authority.

8. **Put a human face on your company** by making a spokesperson available. People instinctively trust and respect humans more than faceless corporate media releases. Depending on the situation a full press conference may be appropriate, but in most situations a couple well selected interviews will work better, or in very specific cases you might post a video on your website (be careful as this approach often looks overly controlled).
9. **Repeat steps 3 to 6 as often and for as long as is required.** Journalists will always find somewhere to get “updates” on the story and it is important that they get such from you so you can ensure accuracy and retain influence over how the story is presented.
10. **Analyse any reputational damage** suffered and implement a plan for repair. A comprehensive report following any significant incident will help to guide a company’s next steps and will demonstrate to charterers and others that you are continuing to take all elements of the situation seriously.

