

Safety Corner

Crisis Management

Earthquakes, floods, major fires, and major accidents occurred world wide have reminded us that we, as engineers and safety professionals, must be in constant alert of what can go wrong and plan for appropriate actions to manage the risks of disastrous events.

Every crisis situation is unique and must be managed accordingly. A crisis or disaster, man-made or natural, however caused, can strike a corporation at any time and threaten to harm the corporation and its stakeholders. In the event of a serious incident, such as a train collision, an infrastructure collapse, a big fire in a commercial development, an external event such as a widespread political or socio-economic instability affecting Hong Kong, or a natural disaster such as a land slide or an earthquake, it is important that a corporation responds in a calculated and coordinated manner, and the recovery is seen as proactive. This process is known as Crisis Management, which is the systematic attempt to both avoid organizational crises and to manage crises that do occur.

Although crises and disasters may be unpredictable, they are not unexpected. There needs to be a well-drilled crisis management plan in place to ensure positive, focused, decisive and effective response to crises should they arise. A sound crisis management plan should consider all phases of activities in managing both the reality and perception of crises. In the Preparedness Phase, a crisis management plan should outline activities that can identify the threats and vulnerabilities to a corporation, establish metrics to define what scenarios constitute a crisis and consequently trigger the necessary response mechanisms, and plan for response and recovery actions should a crisis occur. In the Response Phase, a crisis management plan should clearly define the role and responsibility of all those involved in the handling of crises. Clear and concise communication during the Response Phase is particularly important to ensure actions are executed properly to safeguard human lives and property, and help prevent the escalation of a crisis. Recovery Phase is essential to put the corporation back on business in a coordinated manner after a crisis.

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