When a crisis breaks - follow these 5 steps

Before a crisis breaks it's important to create a crisis communications plan to guide your efforts during a crisis situation.

When in a crisis situation, activate these five steps to successfully manage communications and control internal and external dialog around the crisis.

1. **Convene your crisis team:**
   - When a crisis breaks it's important to quickly pull your designated crisis team together and to enact your crisis communication protocols
   - Establish an incident command center at a municipality building or at a field command center, if the situation dictates, that includes city leadership, the communications team, department heads and legal counsel

2. **Assess the crisis:**
   - Begin to monitor all media and social media chatter about the crisis incident - on your municipality channels and others
   - Appoint crisis team members to check in with municipality, local, state and national contacts, as dictated by the crisis situation, to gain a full picture of the gravity of the situation
   - Assemble the full crisis team to present an internal briefing on information learned. The goal is to:
     - Determine the current stage of the crisis
     - Discuss expected developments
     - Assess high-level future impact

3. **Determine messaging strategy:**
   - Develop a list of all internal and external audiences that need to be communicated to:
     - Designate team member responsible for communications to each
     - Indicate best mode of communication for each
     - Develop timeline and flow (message cascade)
   - Establish internal and external key messages based on the facts known
• Agree upon a media strategy and outreach process. Options include:
  o Press conference
  o Individual media interviews
  o Proactive media statement
  o Reactive media statement
• Review messaging, anticipate line of questioning that is likely to occur. Share questions with all spokespeople to prepare for any possible press appearances

4. **Execute messaging strategy:**
• Organize and execute messaging strategy to stakeholders as determined in step three
  o Press conference/media interviews:
    • Designate a location for media to convene for availability
    • Distribute statements or materials to media
    • Ensure you designate a point of contact for future communications
  o Proactive/reactive media statements:
    • Distribute media statements proactively or reactively, as determined in step three
    • Create a running list of media requests, follow up questions and statements distributed
    • Note all requests for interviews, even if you do not grant an interview at that time
  o Coordinate follow-up questions and answers with crisis communications team and distribute to media, as appropriate

5. **Regularly reassess and regroup:**
• After the initial messaging strategy runs its course - return to step one
  o Reconvene the crisis communications team to discuss:
    • The state of the crisis
    • Anticipated events moving forward
    • Media and social media coverage
    • Community chatter about the incident
    • Outline additional communication needs or 'waves' for the future
  o Assess current messaging strategy and determine if changes are needed for internal and external audiences
  o Execute updated media and communications strategy