



Crisis Communications for Outdoor Recreation and Education Programs

AORE Annual Conference, Nov 1-4, 2022

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Crisis Communications for Outdoor Recreation and Education Programs



The News Media and You

- When significant incident occurs, news media will be interested
- The media's aim is to tell a story compelling to consumers and advertisers
- Your aim is to share facts and protect organization
- These goals don't have to conflict, but they might
- Effectively working with news media critical to protecting your organization



Media Relations

- What news media seek following incident
 - What, where, when, who, background
- Working with news media
 - Select, train messengers
 - Tell your story
 - Avoid pitfalls
 - Media channels
 - Preparation
 - Short story
 - External specialists
- State-controlled media



News Media Will Want

- Following an incident, media will want to know:
 - What happened
 - Where it happened
 - When it happened
 - Who was involved
 - Background on your organization and safety record



Working with the News Media

- Assist with responsible reporting
 - The public has a right to know
 - Provide what, where, when, who
 - Promptly research answers as needed
 - Don't guess
 - Provide all outlets with access to same information
 - Correct factual mistakes promptly
 - Be prompt, cooperative, respectful, courteous



Working with the News Media

- Select messengers
 - Tightly restrict who can speak with media
 - Articulate, charismatic individuals best
- Train messengers
 - Conferences, trainings, written guidance
 - Larger organization: career media specialists



Working with the News Media

- Tell your story
 - Timing
 - For smaller incidents, respond to media inquiries
 - For large incidents, proactively give information
 - Frame the story
 - If you do not tell your side of the story, someone else will tell theirs
 - Develop message points
 - The answer to every question you are asked is one of your three key points.
 - Project caring and concern
 - Tell the truth

Sample Pre-Established Message Points

1. Our primary concern is for our participants.
2. Our Situation Response Plan worked as designed, and participants received medical care.
3. We are working with the authorities to determine the facts and cause.



Working with the News Media

- Avoid pitfalls
 - Avoid speculation, opinion, emotional responses
 - Don't let reporters guide your language
 - Do not repeat inaccurate information, even to dispute it
 - Do not assign responsibility for incident or criticize before getting legal guidance
 - Do not provide names of victims until family members are notified
 - Do not allow yourself to be provoked



Working with the News Media

- Media channels

Press Release



Social Media



Interviews

Interview Guidelines

Prepare in advance	No “no comment”	Stay on message
Have multiple ways to say messaging points	No off-the-record	Provide sound bites
Key points first	Stay calm	Summarize



Working with the News Media

- Prepare in advance

Regularly distribute media



Build long-term media relationships



Prepare messaging points
in advance

1 2 3

Prepare background info in advance



- Aim for a short, one-day story
- Employ external specialists as needed

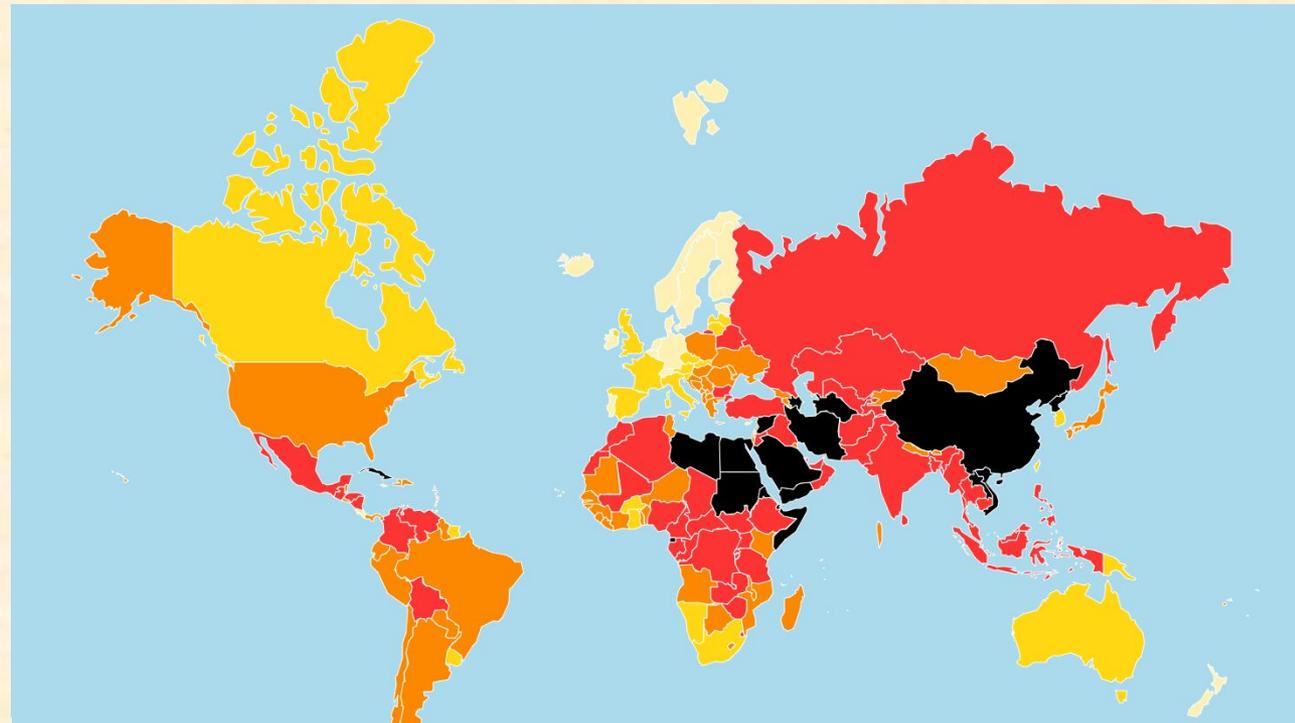


State-controlled Media

- State aims may be to promote state stability and positive perception
- Police report may reflect state priorities
- Media coverage reflects police report information
- Organization does not contact media representatives

**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

WORD PRESS
FREEDOM INDEX



Summary

- Role of news media vs. role of your organization
- What news media seek following incident
 - What, where, when, who, background
- Working with news media
 - Select, train messengers
 - Tell your story
 - Avoid pitfalls
 - Media channels
 - Preparation
 - Short story
 - External specialists
- State-controlled media



For More Information

Risk Management for Outdoor Programs: A Guide to Safety in Outdoor Education, Recreation and Adventure

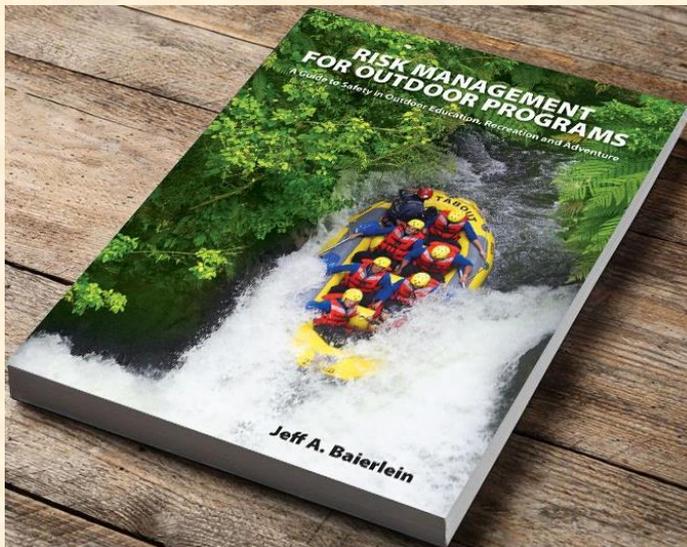
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Two months after an outdoor program ends, a 15 year old female participant complains that she was sexually harassed by one of the trip leaders, a 22-year old male. The student complained that the trip leader made inappropriate comments and touched her legs and back in ways that made her uncomfortable.

The student's parent is a well-known and rich person in the community. The parent has threatened to sue the program, is demanding a public apology and for the instructor to be fired, and has mounted a public campaign on social media and is reaching out to local TV and radio stations and newspapers to attack the organization.

The trip leader acknowledges making a crude joke at one point that may have been perceived as sexist and inappropriate. The trip leader denies any inappropriate touching of the female participant. He states that he may have patted her back in a friendly way once. He states he may have touched her leg, but not on purpose, when they were sitting next to each other with the whole group in a circle, when he was reaching for his water bottle.

The instructing partner of the trip leader is female, and she says she did not notice any inappropriate behavior by her male co-leader.

There is no history of any other complaints about the trip leader from other trips. This is the first year you have employed the trip leader. You interviewed the trip leader and checked professional references before hiring him.

One of the other female participants on the trip, when questioned by the program's staff, also said she felt a little uncomfortable around the male instructor, but this was maybe just because she was not used to camping and living so closely together with males who were not in her family.

No other participants had any problems with the male trip leader.

All of the program's field staff went through a training at the beginning of the season about working with children. The organization's employee handbook says it expects employees to behave professionally. The organization has no specific policy discussing sexual harassment.

Eight years ago, a field leader working for the organization complained about sexual harassment from her co-leader on the trip. That co-leader was fired, after an investigation.

