

California Wing Crisis Communications Plan



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12 July 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Crisis Communication Plan (CCP), required to be prepared and updated annually by Civil Air Patrol regulation (CAPR 190-1), applies to the California Wing Headquarters. This plan supports the National Civil Air Patrol Public Affairs Crisis Policy and the Civil Air Patrol Public Affairs regulation (CARP 190-1) as published by National CAP Public Affairs. This plan was prepared by Capt. Chris Storey, Director of Public Affairs, and approved by Col. Ken Parris, Wing Commander.

This plan does not override normal command functions and decisions of incident command staff or wing command staff. However, command staff should be familiar with the contents of this plan and use it as a guide when responding to a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making process of Wing command staff.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Crisis Communication Plan is to:

- Ensure the flow of accurate and timely information to Wing leadership, Wing staff, the media, and the public during a crisis involving the California Wing of the Civil Air Patrol.
- Provide the media with a reasonable level of access per Civil Air Patrol regulations and policy.
- Assist Wing Public Affairs Staff in developing unified messages during a crisis.
- Minimize damage to the reputation of the California Wing, its members, and the Civil Air Patrol.
- Provide accurate and honest information to the media and the public to counteract inaccurate criticism.

3. DEFINITION

For the purpose of this plan, a crisis is as any situation deemed by Wing staff as having a significant impact (or threat of significant impact) on the California Wing, the Civil Air Patrol as an organization, or on its members. Examples of a crisis may include incidents at Civil Air Patrol activities involving serious injury or death of a Civil Air Patrol member, or serious injury or death of a member of the public (where Civil Air Patrol is, or is believed to be, the cause or is involved). A crisis may also include police investigations or other situations that require a public response.

This plan is not intended to change the way emergencies are initially reported. All applicable Civil Air Patrol regulations will be followed in the initial and subsequent reports. It is the goal of this crisis communications plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that leaders and spokespersons are familiar with those procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis.

Each crisis or emergency will require a unique public information response. The extent of the response will depend on the nature of the crisis.

4. ASSUMPTIONS

It is usually the wrong decision to withhold comment during a crisis. Doing this allows other entities to portray Civil Air Patrol in ways that may be inaccurate and unflattering. Rather, carefully crafted comments provided early in the crisis and updated regularly, best position Civil Air Patrol as professional and responsible regardless of the specific crisis.

Often, the only information the public receives about an emergency is through the media. Therefore, media relations are an essential component of any crisis communications plan. Timing is critical, and a response must be issued as soon as possible, with follow-up bulletins as required.

With the advent of Internet technology, rumors can spread quickly via email, blogs, and online forums. Therefore, it is critical that responses be issued as quickly as possible via various channels of online communication, both formal (i.e., the wing website, e-mail distribution lists, news releases to local media, squadron level briefings, and etc.) and informally.

A crisis could be big news and is likely to result in more public exposure for the wing than dozens of “good news” stories.

5. CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

a.) Purpose

The Wing Crisis Communications team (CCT) exists to advise the commander and craft appropriate public (both internal and external publics) messages during a crisis. The Wing Commander makes final decisions on the content of the messages after advice from the CCT.

It is the Wing Commander’s expectation that crises be resolved and worked at the Group and Squadron levels. The Wing CCT and its members are available as consultants to Group and Squadron CCT’s as needed or requested.

National Headquarters will be immediately advised of the Wing CCT activation through normal channels, and/or through the National Operations Center (NOC). Regular status updates of the crisis management process will be provided by the CCT to National Headquarters.

b.) Composition

The Wing CCT consists of key Wing command personnel. The composition of the CCT may vary depending on the type and scope of the crisis. California Wing members identified as part

of the standing CCT will be involved and consulted during all crisis responses. Additional CCT members as identified will be consulted and participate as members of the Wing CCT as required by the specific crisis.

- Wing Commander*
- Wing Vice Commander*
- Wing Chief of Staff*
- Wing Public Affairs Director/PAO*
- Wing Legal Officer*
- Wing Safety Officer
- Wing Emergency Services Director
- Wing Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Officer or Wing Chaplain
- Other staff positions relevant to the specific crisis event or having experience with similar crisis occurrences

* Part of CAWG standing CCT

c.) Contact Information

Specific roster and contact information for all members of the Wing CCT is not included with this CCP. The current wing command staff directory, online Wing Management Utilities (WMU), or the e-Services system may be consulted for names and contact information of CCT members.

d.) Spokesperson

The Wing Commander and Wing PAO are designated as spokespeople for the California Wing and will be expected to work with local media. Other Wing members (including members of the CCT) will give information about the crisis to the media only when authorized by the Wing Commander or PAO. Otherwise, members should respectfully refer media representatives to the crisis center or designated spokesperson for information.

When the crisis primarily affects a subordinate unit, the Wing Commander and PAO are available to assist subordinate units and can serve as a local spokesperson as needed.

e.) Multiple Crisis Communication Teams

Should a crisis have a high severity, or affect a large geographic area, CCT's may be activated at multiple levels (i.e., Wing, Group, and Squadron). The PAO at each level should coordinate with higher headquarters when a CCT has been activated. When the determination is made as to which level of the organization is the PRIMARY source for media information and contact, all other CCTs should provide support and be prepared to reinforce the same messages if contacted by the media.

6. CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

a.) Assumptions

It is expected that the CCT will work virtually through e-mail, telephone, and conference calls. In the event a physical crisis communications/media center needs to be established, the Wing

CCT is expected to use their best judgment as to its location, size, and staffing. The Wing PAO will be consulted prior to activating a crisis communications center (virtual or physical).

b.) Primary Crisis Communications Center

The California Wing Headquarters, located at a secure Air National Guard facility, has been identified as the primary physical Wing crisis communications center. Physical access to this facility can be obtained through normal California Wing channels. The Van Nuys Airport is located nearby if air transportation for out-of-area Wing command staff is necessary.

**California Wing Headquarters
261st Combat Communications Squadron
California Air National Guard Facility
15900 Victory Blvd
Van Nuys, California
Telephone: (818) 989-8100
(Thomas Brothers map page 531-F7)**

c.) Alternate Crisis Communications Center

In the event the primary facility is unavailable, or unsuitable for the specific crisis, the CCT will identify an alternate facility. Preference should be given to using real property under the control of, and identified as part of, the California Wing Civil Air Patrol. The Wing CCT shall consider Group Headquarters facilities of any CAWG Group as first choice for the alternate location of the Crisis Communications Center. The CCT shall consult with the local/host command staff to determine availability, access procedures, available telecommunications infrastructure, or any other special needs prior to activating the alternate location. The CCT will consider the need for providing and controlling media access when choosing an alternate location.

7. CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES

a.) Reference Materials

The Wing Public Affairs (PA) staff is assigned the task of maintaining reference materials to assist in the management of a crisis. As a minimum, the Wing PA staff will maintain the following reference materials. Method of collection, assembly, and distribution will be up to the Wing PA Staff. Reference materials may be maintained in electronic format for ease of revision and distribution.

- CAWG Crisis Communications Plan
- Each CAWG Group Crisis Communications Plan (when developed/approved at each group level)
- Roster of the CCT team *
- Contact information for all relevant Wing staff *
- Contact information for Civil Air Patrol National HQ and PA staff
- Media contact list (may substitute/use currently available online sources)
- Civil Air Patrol fact sheets, including locally produced fact sheets
- Positive statistics about Civil Air Patrol (obtained from CAP Watch, E-services, and national headquarters)

* Use of CAWG published command staff directories, online WMU system, and e-Services meets this requirement

b.) Electronic Resources

Use of e-mail and Web resources can be important to the way Civil Air Patrol tells its stories during crises. External information provided to the media should be placed on the California Wing website (and appropriate subordinate unit websites as required) concurrently with its release to the media. The CCT will provide internal information to members of the California Wing about the crisis using email and other internal communications channels as appropriate. The Wing Commander or designee will approve all internal communications before being released.

8. PHASES OF CRISIS RESPONSE

a.) Immediate Response Phase

- The Wing Commander and the Wing PAO (in consultation with the CCT) will determine if an official statement should be prepared and released. If warranted, the CCT will develop answers to specific questions that may be asked by the media and the media release statement.
- In some cases, it may be appropriate for Civil Air Patrol to make an initial announcement of an accident or incident. In others, it may be better to “wait and see if the media notices.” Regardless, if representatives of the media inquire about an event or occurrence, Civil Air Patrol should make a prompt response.
- Talking points should be developed by the CCT. Talking points are short simple messages that tell our story, emphasizing positive points. The Wing Commander or Wing PAO shall approve all talking points prior to dissemination to Civil Air Patrol members authorized to speak to the media. Annex A and B are sample talking points for two possible crisis scenarios (Fatalities or serious injuries sustained by Civil Air Patrol members, and Civil Air Patrol members accused of sexual misconduct).
- In a major crisis, the media may contact Civil Air Patrol staff directly at the Squadron or Group levels. Is it typically more effective for Civil Air Patrol if multiple authorized spokespeople are available to speak with the media using the same talking points and message, as opposed to a single member being the only person to grant media interviews. As such, in a major crisis generating broad media attention, there should be authorized spokespeople at the Wing, Group, and Squadron levels. These additional spokespersons shall be designated and approved by the CCT.

b.) Ongoing Management Phase

In an ongoing crisis, the CCT will:

- Provide (via the news media and on the web) the public and constituents with basic information about the crisis.
- Provide (via electronic mail or other means) the membership with basic information about the crisis. Ensure that copies of all updates are concurrently sent to National HQ PA staff.
- Instruct the public on how to obtain further advice or information.

c.) Recovery Phase

- The CCT will issue media updates for as long as necessary, then scale back activities as warranted. Media updates will be posted online.
- Upon termination of the crisis, the Wing PAO will schedule a meeting of all CCT members to review actions taken and lessons learned. These will be included in an after-action report forwarded to the Wing Commander and other appropriate Command Staff, and higher headquarters Public Affairs.

d.) Common CCT Tasks

- Obtain basic information (type of crisis/emergency, time of crisis/emergency, initial actions taken, areas, and number of people involved, injuries, or fatalities, extent of damage, etc.) and prepare an official news release.
- The PAO will brief staff and other area commanders who may have to answer questions from local media.
- Verify and log all sources of information.
- Clear news releases with the Wing Commander (or designee) as quickly as possible before releasing them to the media.
- Log and document all media inquiries.
- Log and document all outgoing internal and external information products)

9. PLAN MAINTENANCE

a.) Updates

The Crisis Communications Plan will be reviewed and updated each January. Additional mid-cycle updates or revisions may be made at any point.

The CCT should interact periodically to discuss the plan and any proposed or required updates. The Wing Commander or Wing PAO will convene these meetings. These meetings may be conducted in person or via alternate means (i.e., conference call or e-mail) as necessary. Results of the meetings should be documented and filed with the plan.

b.) Training

Wing CCT members shall be briefed annually on the contents, scope, and purpose of the Wing Crisis Communications Plan. This briefing may be conducted in-person, via an on-line presentation, or by any means necessary. A log of CCT members receiving annual plan briefings shall be maintained with the record of plan review/updates.



KENNETH W. PARRIS, Colonel, CAP
Commander, CAWG

Plan Distribution:

CAP/PA

PACR PAO

Crisis Communications Team (CCT) members

CAWG Group Commanders

CAWG Group PAO's

CAWG Command Staff

Wing Headquarters file

Annex A

CAP Leadership/MIO/PAO Talking Points

Fatalities or serious injuries sustained by CAP members

Adapt these general talking points as appropriate to the specific accident or incident. In many cases, the primary comments in bold will be all that needs to be said. Add the rest of the information only if asked.

1. Our hearts go out to the families of the members involved, and to all of the CAP members in ____ (where the members are from) ____ who work hard to serve their state and country with a professional level of skill, even though they are volunteers.

2. CAP has an outstanding Flying Safety Record -- about one third of the number of accidents in the general aviation community per 100,000 hours flown.

Additional information - only if asked to elaborate:

- When you consider that Civil Air Patrol's missions are typically flown only 1,000 feet above ground level, leaving little time to react in an emergency, Civil Air Patrol's low accident rate is even more significant. Though CAP flies in a high-risk environment, one of the reasons our accident rate is so low is because we have successfully used operational risk management (ORM) - a technique developed by the Air Force safety community and eagerly adopted by CAP - to identify and reduce risk at all levels.
- The National Transportation Safety Board's accident rates for general aviation over the past three years as compared to Civil Air Patrol's are as follows:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NTSB</u>	<u>CAP</u>
2004	6.49	5.23
2005	7.20	2.8
2006	6.64	1.84

- Every one of our pilots takes a flight safety check at least annually, and they are evaluated on their ability to fly mission profiles biennially.
- We have a safety education program whereby both aircrew and non-aircrew are briefed on safety issues during monthly safety meetings.
- In addition, every Civil Air Patrol wing is given an evaluation on its ability to perform search and rescue/disaster relief missions biennially.

3. CAP aircrews are absolute professionals and highly trained in all aspects of aerial search and rescue, including mountain flying techniques.

Additional information - only if asked to elaborate:

- Aerial search and rescue is clearly a demanding mission, given the requirement to fly typically only 1,000 feet above the ground. However, our aircrew members fully understand the dangers associated with Search and Rescue missions and train hard to minimize them, but they consider their duties critical. Over the years, the Civil Air Patrol has been credited with saving 75 lives on average every year.

4. Civil Air Patrol maintains its aircraft rigorously to standards that meet or exceed FAA standards. The maintenance is timely, thorough and carried out by FAA-certified mechanics CAP-wide. Bottom line -- CAP maintenance policies are stricter than or as strict as general aviation standards in America, with greater emphasis placed on regular aircraft inspections throughout the fleet.

5. There is no way I could speculate on what may have caused this to happen. I am sure it will be the subject of an official investigation.

Notes:

- Do NOT be trapped into discussing possible or hypothetical causes or explanations for what happened. Rather, go back to point #1 -- the investigation WILL happen, and meanwhile, our big concern is for the families and fellow members of the people killed/injured.
- Do not feel that you must rush an answer. If you have to pause 10 seconds after the question is asked to formulate your answer, no problem. Remember that TV stations, in particular, will probably only use 10 or 15 seconds worth of your actual words, anyway.

Annex B

CAP Leadership/MIO/PAO Talking Points

CAP members accused of sexual misconduct

Adapt these general talking points as appropriate to the specific accident or incident. In many cases, the primary comments in bold will be all that needs to be said. Add the rest of the information only if asked.

1. The status of the accused is:

- No longer a member of the Civil Air Patrol
- Has been suspended pending the outcome of any investigation ** if investigation in progress **
- Other (was never a CAP member, is a member of an outside organization, or etc.)

2. No complaint has been filed with any CAP adult member, local authorities, or with any cadet family member. ** assuming this is true **

3. Civil Air Patrol will cooperate fully with local law enforcement officials to determine the validity of any complaints. ** assuming a formal complaint has been filed or an investigation is being conducted **

4. The Civil Air Patrol Cadet Protection Program ensures that more than one adult member is always present on activities with our youth members, and in particular, our rules prohibit private "one-on-one" interaction between individual youth and adult members.

5. The Civil Air Patrol values its youth members and provides mandatory training to all members over 18 years of age on what we consider acceptable or unacceptable conducts towards our youth members.

Notes:

- During a media interview, always find ways to come back to the above listed points and your key messages
- If the reporter asks you about your feelings or emotions, dodge the question. "My feelings and emotions are that I am glad that CAP has procedures in place to prevent inappropriate contact from taking place."
- Avoid repeating back the words the reporter uses in asking the question. For example, a reporter might ask, "would you say that CAP was lucky that there were no problems with this person?" If you repeat, "was lucky" either to say CAP WAS lucky, or to say, "No, I wouldn't say CAP was lucky," you are allowing the reporter to put words in your mouth that may then be quoted.
- Avoid answering hypothetical questions.