

# Making the Case for a Campus Crisis Response Checklist Or, Do things right the first time because it's costly to respond correctly the second or third time.

Written by: *Joe DesPlaines,*  
*DMI Business Continuity & Crisis Response Consultant*

Recently I have become a vocal cheerleader for the creation of a "Crisis Response Checklist," a list of all the tasks that should be performed in the first 2 – 4 hours immediately following a critical event.

I define "Crisis Response Checklist," or *CRC* (who doesn't love another acronym?) as a listing of the important tasks that need to be completed in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Some of these tasks are simple and direct, like "call 911," while other tasks may be a little more complex, such as "make the decision to evacuate or shelter." However, these steps are critically important to successfully beginning the crisis management and crisis recovery process.

While we would all like to think that we will remain calm and in control following a crisis, the reality is that this is a very stressful time, when participants report shallow respiration, racing heart rates and an inability to comprehend and execute complicated directives, which usually renders traditional College Business Continuity and Emergency Response Plans useless during the immediate post-crisis time. The *CRC* contains basic commonsense tasks, organized in a logical manner, that need to be addressed in order to diffuse and stabilize the situation, begin to transition from chaos to control, and create a bridge to the Business Continuity Plan.

Following are some of the issues to consider when creating a *CRC*:

- News reporting and research indicates that the environment immediately following a crisis event is usually chaotic and feels out of control to those involved. At such a stressful time, a *CRC* written in sentence fragments and in large font will provide a user-friendly guide to the response.
- In creating the checklist, we should get "in the weeds" to identify the most basic issues to be addressed. As a result, initial tasks might include:
  1. Call 911 (Never assume someone else has done this).
  2. Check for people who need medical attention and notify 911 dispatchers.
  3. Check to make sure the building is structurally sound and safe.
- Involve Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from departments across the College, who can assist with identifying immediate tasks for the *CRC*. The involvement of College SMEs will give them ownership of and investment in the *CRC*, which can ensure a greater chance of successful checklist implementation.
- It will also be advantageous to invite local public safety to contribute to the *CRC*. They are your local crisis management experts and have specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience.

- Reviewing and rehearsing the *CRC*, possibly in a tabletop exercise, will build familiarity and confidence in its effectiveness.
- Someone must own the *CRC* and be responsible for regularly reviewing and updating the content. It is especially important to identify and add any lessons learned from current crisis events. As an example, the *CRC* owner could look at the February 3, 2023, Norfolk & Southern rail accident in Ohio to determine any HAZMAT response tasks to add to the College *CRC*.
- Stephanie Craig, a crisis messaging expert with [KITH](#) has a great quote, “You only get to spend good will once.” Doing the right things promptly following the campus crisis event generates good will and projects a positive image.
- Research indicates that in a crisis, most people will rely on directions for what they should do. The *CRC* provides this guidance in a user-friendly manner.

The driving belief for creating a *CRC* is simple – if we do the right things in the immediate hours following a crisis, it assures that the entire response will be successful! And, it will be significantly less expensive, in dollars and emotion, than doing the right things the second, third or tenth time!

If you have an interest in discussing a *CRC* or creating a *CRC* for your college, please reach out to one of the DMI Consultants, who have the expertise to assist you with this project.