

# Communication protocol for crisis situations

## 1. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

A crisis may be defined as any incident which draws unfavourable attention to NH Hotel Group and could be potentially damaging to its reputation. Such an incident might be a full-scale crisis or it may be a lesser problem which nevertheless attracts media or digital platforms (social networks, blogs) attention.

Bad news, disasters and scandals make sensational headlines and the media uses this type of story to entertain its audience and sell newspapers or magazines or, in the case of radio and television, gain listeners or viewers. In many cases, the media will be aware of the incident before the majority of NH staff.

How an organization handles a crisis situation can have a long-term positive or negative effect on its reputation, image, personnel, earnings, bookings/sales, and resources.

### 1.1. Objective

The objective of crisis management is to establish control of communication (to media, guests, and staff) quickly and effectively, put out the right messages and to restore order as swiftly and as smoothly as possible.

The tools are an effective strategy, a well briefed crisis management team, and a clear communication policy, preferably with a single spokesperson or information source.

Management of a crisis often demands coordination of many specialist skills and only thorough planning will ensure an organization's response is controlled and successful. Without the support of a detailed plan of action, companies may fail to respond effectively and efficiently.

The same plan will not be appropriate to each and every incident and is intended to inform rather than dictate the actions that must be taken during a crisis. The key to an effective response is to apply basic principles to each individual problem.

For example, if a hotel is in any way involved with a problem such as epidemic illness in a certain town, it is worth stopping and consider whether or not the matter is actually the hotel's own crisis or whether it is the problem of a third party, from which the hotel should be distancing itself.

In addition to the requirements of and responses to the media, NH Hotel Group must also consider the needs of relatives and friends of those involved. In some cases, these people may need to be assisted with the media onsite.

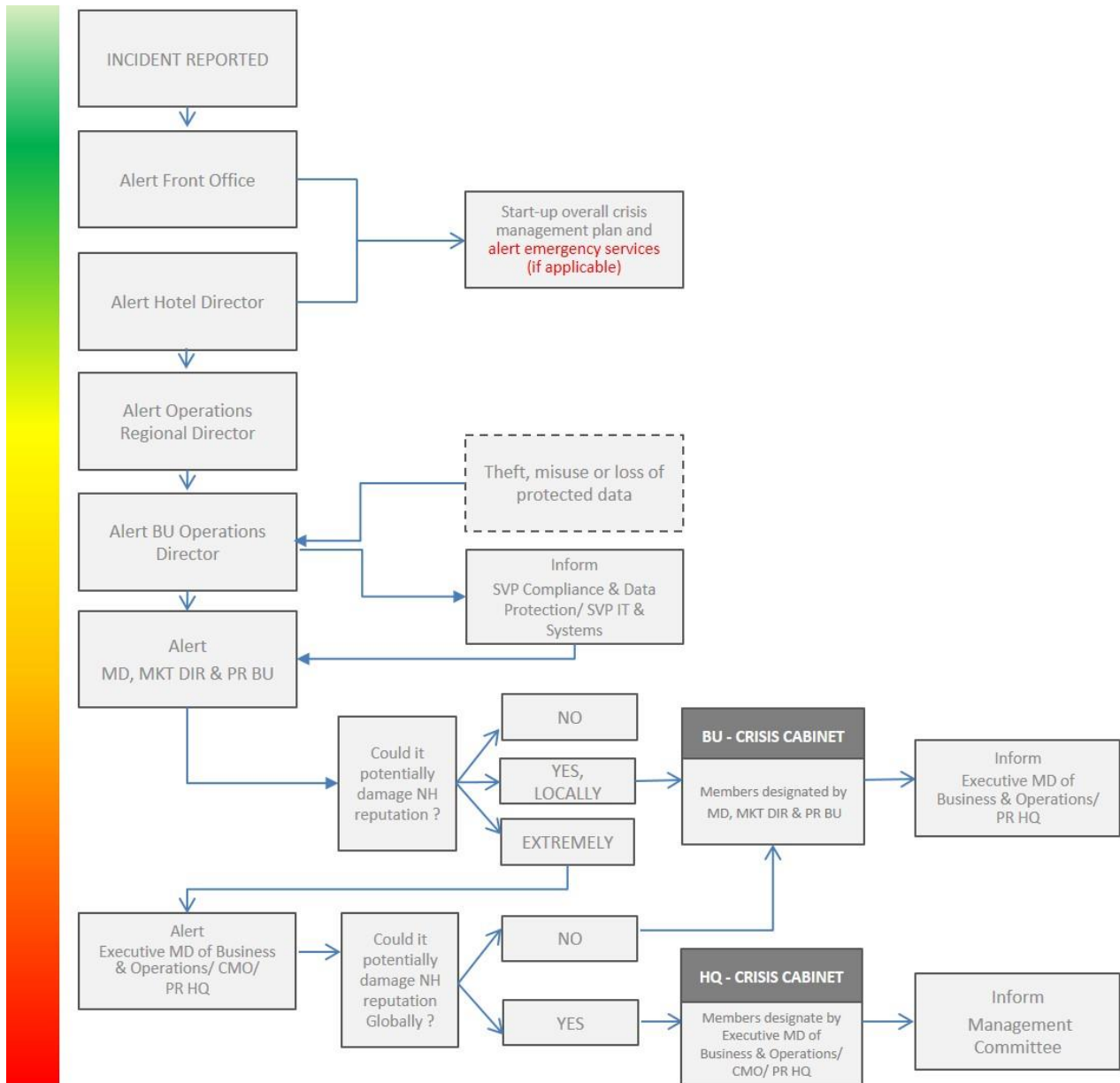
## 1.2. Crisis levels

There are four crisis levels based on parameters such as:

- Contingencies with an external or internal impact on the event
- The degree to which NH Hotel Group's level of operability is affected, as well as the involvement of key persons or areas within the Company.
- Foreseeable time of duration of the event and its consequences for NH Hotel Group's reputation

Levels	Description and Examples
<b>Low</b>	Lesser issues with impact on NH Hotel Group' business. These situations have the potential to generate adverse media coverage.
<b>Moderate</b>	These incidents may involve internal administrative difficulties such as computer failure; a serious breakdown in communication with a guest; a problem caused by a failure on the part of a major supplier; or a personnel-related issue such as a labour tribunal. These situations offer no signs of seriously harming the Company's reputation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No indications exist of any media repercussions being generated concerning NH Hotel Group</li> <li>• In the event that any coverage includes the NH Hotel Group brand, the risk to the company's reputation is slight</li> <li>• Local media exposure</li> <li>• Foreseen exposure in communications media: a few days (maximum 3 days)</li> <li>• There is no direct involvement of key persons or Company areas</li> </ul>
<b>High</b>	Non-life-threatening incidents. These problems could include serious booking problems; an important guest claim; dissemination of confidential information; robbery; or some form of scandal affecting guests or staff. These situations display all the conditions to cause tangible damage to the Company's reputation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media coverage includes NH Hotel Group</li> <li>• National media exposure</li> <li>• Predicted exposure in communications media: several days or even weeks</li> <li>• It can directly affect key persons or Company areas</li> </ul>
<b>Critical</b>	A major or critical incident could include an accident; fire; explosion; incident involving death or injury to guests or staff; suicide, act or threat of terrorism; or large scale food poisoning; bacteria contamination (Example: legionella on SPA) – anything which has the potential to put guests or staff at risk. These situations cause or will cause tangible, severe damage to the Company's reputation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media coverage that negatively focuses on NH Hotel Group and significantly affects the brand's reputation</li> <li>• National or international media exposure</li> <li>• Predicted exposure in communications media: weeks or months</li> <li>• It directly affects key persons or Company areas</li> </ul>

## 2. OVERALL CRISIS MANAGEMENT



## 2.1. Instructions to staff discovering an incident

You must notify the Front Office Department any incident in the hotel.

If it is a serious incident, such as a fire, an accident, any threatening behavior or illness, you must notify the Front Office Department **immediately**. They must notify the Hotel Director and the **emergency services (if applicable)**.

The Hotel Director will instruct you what to do next. You must regard the matter as confidential. Do not discuss with anyone else at all. The reason for this is that there may be subsequent legal action and uninformed speculation may prejudice the outcome. The matter must be also handled properly with the media. This rule protects you as well as the company.

The scene should be secured as soon as possible to ensure access is denied to the media or any other unauthorized personnel.

Concerning to theft, misuse or loss of protected data, always contact first to SVP Compliance & Data Protection and SVP IT & Systems, who will alert the next level as appropriate (HQ or BU).

## 2.2. Notification flowchart

From them, the Hotel Director and the successive responsible persons have to know when they have to report a possible crisis situation to the next and high level department.

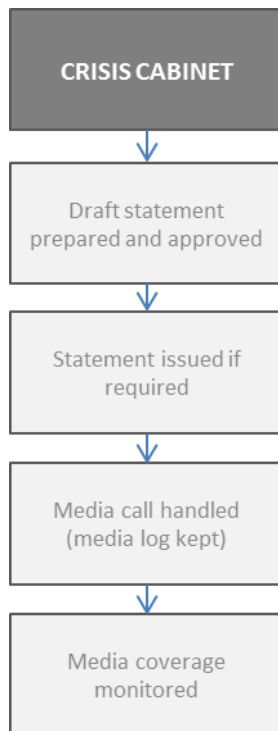
If any of the following questions can be answered affirmatively, we must notify the next level:

1. Does or could the contingency detected have public repercussions?
2. Could it have local, national or international media impact?
3. Will the contingency and its media exposure last longer than 24 hours?
4. Does or could the contingency have significant repercussions on business?

Corporate Communication Department will handle media and digital platforms (social networks, blogs) communications. There can only be one source of media information in a crisis.

Accurate information, verified by the person in charge at the scene of the incident, should be made available to the media, in the form of an approved statement to be prepared by public relations in conjunction with senior management, as soon as hard facts are to hand, and in any event, **within an hour (ASAP)** of the story becoming public. This may need to be handled in conjunction with the police or other emergency services. The authority of the **Crisis Cabinet** in charge of managing the crisis is absolute.

### 2.3. Crisis Cabinet Responsibilities



### 2.4. Statement

When facts of the incident are available, however limited, Communication Department CD will prepare a draft statement. Crisis Protocol TBD for each incident- CD. -> Crisis Cabinet

Media briefing pack

On-site activity

Media management

Media log: A log should be kept of all media contact made and action taken.

Media monitoring (including social media)

Secondary coverage

### 2.5. External organizations

External organizations, such as the police, fire brigade or health authorities may also be involved.

All of these organizations may issue their own statements. The company must keep these organizations up to date with their own statements and provide them, where appropriate, with help and information. At the same time, NH Hotel Group must monitor third party organizations' plans, statements and activities for any potential impact on the company.

Where possible, the company must try to influence these organizations to work with them and to provide full information about their own statements and activities.

## 2.6. Internal communications

Staff of the hotel involved also need to be briefed during a crisis. In some circumstances this information may need to be issued company wide. Information must be restricted to that released into the public domain.

It is imperative that members of staff do not speak to the media or any third party, however well briefed they may consider themselves to be.

## 3. GROUND RULES IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

No one, other than an authorized spokesperson, may speak to the media or any third party about the incident for the following reasons:

- To avoid speculation or inaccurate statements as to the cause of the incident
- To provide the media with a proper point of contact for accurate information and thus protect employees, and hotel guests, from being targeted by the media
- To protect employees and the company from possible legal action
- To co-operate fully with any official investigation (this could be compromised by unauthorized statements)
- To protect the company and employees from media reports which are inaccurate or misleading

### 3.1. Do's and don'ts in crisis management for authorized spokesperson

DO'S	DONT'S
Be human – express concern for those involved	Do not dwell on the problem, stress what is being done to deal with the situation/solve the problem
Keep it simple: be conscious of the fact that you always know more than the public	Never lie: if you don't know the answer, be honest about it and get back with the answer quickly
Ensure that key messages are communicated	Never get angry, never blame the journalist for a negative question, never walk away
Be aware of the audience: you are not talking to the interviewer, you are talking to the public;	Speculate on causes of the incident or place blame
Be calm, honest and as natural as possible	Speculate on the resumption of normal operations for the hotel until that is positively known
Avoid the term 'no comment' by explaining why certain information cannot be released	Speculate on the cost of the emergency operation
Off the record does not exist!	Permit unauthorized personnel to comment to the media

## 4. NH MEDIA PROTOCOL

### 4.1. Regular media procedure

#### What to do when a journalist calls?

1. Never connect a journalist directly to the spokesperson / manager of your NH hotel. Explain why you cannot connect directly: "NH Hotel Group is an international listed firm and therefore I should hold on to international procedures. Nonetheless I will make sure someone will get back to you a.s.a.p." (Don't start a discussion, repeat this answer if necessary, stick to the procedure but stay polite).
2. Don't answer questions but ask for:
  - Name of journalist
  - Name of media
  - Subject of interview (where possible, try to get the main questions)
  - Context of interview: are you the only one asked?
  - Deadline
  - All contact details
3. Thank the journalist for his interest in NH Hotel Group and tell him the appropriate person will get back to him shortly (within two hours, unless earlier deadlines or crisis related. Then act as quickly as possible, now it's your main priority!)
4. Call (do not e-mail!) the designed persons by the Crisis Cabinet immediately at their mobile phones:  
They decide on what steps to take. They prepare for the right answers, collect data if needed and call back the journalist within the set deadline.

### 4.2. Crisis media procedure

#### For crisis-related phone calls from the press

- Make sure you make your phone calls from a separate room!
- In crisis situations the crisis communications team can decide to install communication measures like: Emergency call center, press conferences, etc.

### 4.3. Live media procedure

#### What to do when a journalist enters your hotel?

#### Procedure for reception desk and hotel managers

1. Welcome the journalist /TV crew as a regular visitor
2. Don't answer questions but ask for:

- Name of journalist
  - Name of media (program)
  - Purpose of visit (not just 'an interview' but also the purpose of that interview!)
  - Ask how much time is needed, who he prefers to speak to and whether he requires to take any pictures / record / film the interview)
3. Seat the journalist in the lobby or other appropriate (separate) area, offer him a drink and tell him someone will be with him as soon as possible
  4. Be aware that everything you say may become part of an article or RTV-program
  5. Call the manager (or his deputy) of the hotel
  6. The hotel manager must contact the Communication Department of their BU or, if necessary, the Corporate Communication Department (Headquarters)
  7. The reception informs the journalist that the manager is in a meeting but will be with him in 15 minutes.
  8. Make sure he stays where he is and don't allow him to enter the hotel any further (remember he is not a guest). In case of a camera crew do not allow them to start filming and explain why: you didn't give any permission and the privacy of your guests is a priority and must be respected!
  9. In case nobody is available, decide on the next steps with the Operations Regional Director and/or Communication Department.

#### 4.4. One to one interviews

The company authorized spokesperson should, if possible, grant individual interviews to TV and radio reporters. These almost invariably come across more effectively than shouted questions and answers recorded in the hubbub of a press conference.

Media training prior to the incident will help maximize the positive aspects of such interviews. Key points for spokespeople to remember:

- Decide whether the interview is good for you (and if you are the right person for the interview!) or not: there's no obligation to participate, it's a regular management decision;
- Prepare, prepare, prepare: try to get a picture of the direction and the intention of the journalist, and think in advance of the key messages, you would like to communicate;
- Set your own agenda: try to stay in charge (focus: overkill kills!);
- Be aware of the audience: you are not talking to the interviewer, you are talking to the public;
- Keep it simple: be conscious of the fact that you always know more than the public;
- Never lie: if you don't know the answer, be honest about it and get back with the answer quickly;
- Off the record does not exist!



- Never get angry, never blame the journalist for a negative question, never walk away;
- The interview is not over when the notebook is closed, the interview is over when the journalist leaves the building!
- Be cautious but try not to be suspicious all the time: certainly not all, but some of your interests do match the interests of the journalist. Make use of that.