

Sample Messages, Press Release/Holding Statement

“Key messages” are the main points that all readers/listeners should know about the city, the response to the incident, and its ability to resume normal operations. These are employed in crises and disasters. Typically, three to four key messages will be developed for each major area of the crisis or disaster response.

A key message is the core content for all the city’s public information tools. A key message is not a fact or statistic, but rather a statement that succinctly communicates what the public needs to know about the city’s perspective on the incident.

Message Development Questions

- What are the facts? What happened?
- Who are your audiences? Who has been affected by this event? Who is upset or concerned? Who needs to be alerted to this situation?
- What are those audiences’ perceptions and information needs?
- What do the media want to know?
- How should you show empathy?
- What is your policy on this issue?
- What are you doing about this issue? How are you solving the problem?
- What can you do to keep this from happening again?
- What other agencies or third parties are involved? What are they saying?
- What should the public be doing?
- When will more information be available?

Preparing an Initial “Holding” Statement

The public information staff assigned to preparing materials should prepare an initial holding statement at the onset of the incident. Reporters will likely call before all the facts have been gathered. In such an instance, a simple statement acknowledging the situation shall be prepared. The short statement avoids “no comment” and acknowledges that the city recognizes the need to cooperate with the media and inform the public. This document will be the foundation for all future written communications. By following a few basic principles when writing the holding statement or news releases, the city will better meet the news media’s needs.

1. Tell the most important information in the lead paragraph.
2. Answer four of the five “Ws”--Who, What, Where, and When. Explain WHAT the incident is. Identify WHO is involved in the incident as well as the resources and equipment involved. Tell WHERE and WHEN the incident occurred. Explain WHAT action the city is taking to mitigate or respond to the incident. Do not explain WHY the event occurred unless complete information is available and has been approved. Attempting to explain the WHY without complete information is merely irresponsible speculation and can seriously undermine communication efforts.
3. Write remaining information in descending order of importance. If the media cuts off the bottom of your story, they will cut information that is least important to the public.
4. Explain technical points in simple language. A direct quote can add the human element to otherwise technical information and help explain a situation or event in layman’s terms. Tell the real story. Avoid using language that is overly bureaucratic.
5. Be concise. A good news release is judged by the quality of information it communicates, not by its length. Stop writing when you’ve said all you need to.

Workplace Violence at City Facility

Messages

- The violent act that occurred at the City of _____ city hall/facility/property has activated a comprehensive emergency response. City officials have diligently prepared for many types of incidents, including ones like this.
- The incident was contained within one facility, and although investigations and related follow-up activities will continue for several days or weeks, all other facilities are in full operation.
- The City's top priority is the safety and security of our citizens, businesses, visitors, and employees.

Sample Copy for "Holding" Press Release

The violent act that occurred at the City of _____ city hall/facility/property has activated a comprehensive emergency response. City officials have diligently prepared for incidents of this nature.

The incident was contained within one facility, and although investigations and related follow-up activities will continue for several days or weeks, all other city facilities are in full operation. The City's top priority is the safety and security of our citizens, businesses, visitors, and employees.

The following emergency personnel and agencies responded to this incident:

We know of the following fatalities/injuries. State and federal privacy laws limit our ability to provide any additional information:

The following facilities were affected:

Other information:
