



**Single Year-Long Project**  
**School Safety and Crisis Communication**  
May 2008  
**SUMMARY INFORMATION**

## **BACKGROUND**

Because schools are often the center of a community, they become the center of media attention during a crisis. How school leaders respond in the first 24 hours will often set the pace for the duration of the incident.

One critical aspect of crisis management is communication. Without a clear set of guidelines to serve as a foundation for communication efforts, the crisis can spin a life of its own and, in doing so, can complicate the crisis rather than resolve it.

WSPRA undertook a multi-faceted year-long series of activities focused on school safety and crisis communication. Their executive director participated on the Committee for School Safety and Citizen Preparedness. This committee is comprised of representatives from Homeland Security; Department of Public Instruction; the Center for School, Youth, and Citizen Preparedness; Department of Health and Family Services; Wisconsin Technical College System; Wisconsin School Safety Coordinator Association; Project ADAM; and several school representatives. Committee activities are coordinated by the Director of the Center for School, Youth & Citizen Preparedness, Homeland Security School and Youth Initiatives.

As a member of the committee, the role of WSPRA is to represent public relations and communication in school safety and crisis issues. Throughout the year, many initiatives evolved to proclaim the message.

## **Objectives**

Objectives of WSPRA's School Safety and Crisis Communication activities were:

- To create an awareness of the need to include communication plans as part of crisis plans
- To provide background information regarding communication, especially during a crisis
- To provide guidelines and information to districts as they deal with media
  
- To create communication formats and examples for districts to adopt or adapt to their specific needs when facing a crisis
- To provide additional resources dealing with crisis communication

## **TARGET AUDIENCES**

- District administrators
- Building principals and central office administrators
- School board members
- Emergency personnel
- School police liaisons
- Fire and police personnel

## **PROJECT ELEMENTS**

**Safety Workshop presentations**

In conjunction with the Committee for School Safety and Citizen Preparedness, WSPRA participated in five statewide School Safety Workshops in October. The goal was designed to heighten the awareness of the importance of communication in crisis management. Five teams of presenters covered the safety workshops to raise awareness of communication as a foundation for every crisis response and participated in tabletop exercises to give districts an opportunity to practice their safety plans.

The contents of the presentation addressed:

- Primary goals of crisis communication
- Spokesperson
- Key messages
- Media
- Audiences
- Record keeping
- Debriefing
- Recovery

### [Crisis Communication Workshop](#)

WSPRA held a one-day workshop targeting the topic of school crisis communication. Featured keynote speakers were Rick Kaufman, APR, and Mary Pat Pfeil with assistance from Roseann St. Aubin, Communication Coordinator of Milwaukee Public Schools.

Workshop topics included:

- An overview of crisis management
- Communication with multiple audiences
- Press conferences
- Parent meetings
- Communication during lock-down procedures
- Recovery during the aftermath of a crisis

Workshop attendees had the opportunity to receive critical information, engage in a number of scenarios with the presenters, and participate in a mock press conference. All conference participants received a copy of WSPRA's *Crisis Communication Tool Kit*.

### [Crisis Communication Tool Kit](#)

Members of the WSPRA Board of Directors contributed a variety of articles, templates, and samples for the *Crisis Communication Tool Kit*. These individual pieces were organized and formatted into the final Tool Kit. Contents of the handbook include:

#### [Introduction](#)

- Crisis and Crisis Preparedness
- The Basics of Crisis Communication
- Developing and Using Key Messages
- Role Functions
- Portable Tools

#### [Media Response](#)

- Developing Effective Media Relations
- The Basics of Talking to the Media
- Media Interview Preparation

#### [Communication Response](#)

- Immediate
- The First Day
- Long-term
- Helping Parents Communicate
- Communication for Recovery

#### [Samples and Templates](#)

- Letters
- Templates
- Scripts
- District Handbook Samples
- Media Advisories
- Organizational Structure: Incident Command

#### [Additional Resources](#)

#### [Crisis Communication Webcast](#)

WSPRA developed a Webcast presentation sponsored by the Committee for School Safety and Citizen Preparedness and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The webcast was designed to be offered to the same audiences that had been invited to the Safety Workshops in October and the Crisis Communication Workshop in February. For this reason, WSPRA provided a new focus for the webcast: *How to Handle an Incident so it Does Not Become a Crisis*.

#### [Special edition of the WSPRAgram](#)

The WSPRA board developed a special edition of the *WSPRAgram* summarizing information from WSPRA's Crisis Communication Workshop. The text for the *WSPRAgram* was prepared by Mary Ellen Marnholtz.

#### [Article in Teaching Today](#)

WSPRA was requested by the editor of *Teaching Today* to submit an article summarizing the results of the Crisis Communication Workshop. According to the Teaching Today Web site,

*“Teaching Today* is a publication that addresses current national, state and local developments in education, as well as highlights from programs and curriculum of Wisconsin schools.”

**WSPRA Web site: [www.wspra.org](http://www.wspra.org)**